The Political Development of the Natal Indian Community in the Approach of the South African War (1899 – 1902), *circa* 1860 – 1902

Laura J. Noyce

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Masters of Arts,
University of Cape Town,
2000

Acknowledgements

I was privileged to have had Bill Nasson as my supervisor. His professionalism, approachability and friendship, made the experience of researching and writing up my dissertation a most worthwhile and enjoyable one.

I would also like to thank Dr. Surendra Bhana, Paul Tichmann, Mark Cohen and Mr S.S. Singh for the interest they took in my work and the advice they offered.

Finally I am most grateful to my parents for their support and encouragement. As always, they were there for me through out this project.

The financial assistance of National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the National Research Foundation.

Abstract

The Natal Indians' political path, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, was an interactive process amongst the Indians, the Governments of Natal, India and Britain as well as Natal colonists.

The Indian community consisted of indentured and free Indians. The indentured Indians had been brought to Natal from the 1860s onwards to work as contract labourers. The free Indian population included ex-indentured Indians and 'passenger' Indians. The 'passenger' Indians came independently and they started to arrive in Natal in the 1870s. The indentured and free Indians did not form a unified community as they were separated socially and financially as well as in terms of their independence. The indentured labourers' rights within the colony were defined in part by the colonial structures but were also controlled by their employers.

The free Indians' political actions were generally a reaction to the anti-Indian agitation that developed in the colony. The Indians were in a unique position where they were members of the British Empire but also an unwanted foreign, non-white group. White Natalians feared the actual and potential economic competition from Indians and they were anxious about the growing Indian population. Many whites believed Indians could pose a threat to their political and economic domination. Free Indians had to be cautious with how they presented their political concerns. At times, they emphasised the so-called social distinctions between themselves and indentured Indians in an attempt to be received as an elite, 'desirable' group, whilst on other occasions they presented themselves as a more homogenous group which did not support discrimination. Gandhi arrived in Natal in 1893 and played an integral role in defining and motivating free Indian political activity. He initiated and organised the free Indians' support for the South African War, 1899 - 1903. The Indians' contribution to the war was an attempt to prove their loyalty to the colony and the Empire which they hoped would be reciprocated with better political treatment.

The Indians struggled to have their offer to serve in the war accepted mainly because the British intended to restrict any non-white participation. Yet when the need for additional help became urgent, the Indians were called upon and at this stage indentured Indians were also sent up to the front by their employers to work as stretcher bearers. These indentured Indians were incorporated into the Indian Ambulance Corps which was led by Gandhi. Other free Indians also contributed to the war by supporting general war collections as well as by caring for the stretcher bearers' families and Indian refugees from the Transvaal. Some Indians who were situated in the war zones were directly effected by the war, however, many Indians remained fairly removed from the events of the war. The work performed by the Indian Stretcher Bearer Corps was given very little recognition and after the war, Indians were generally incorporated into the growing racial discrimination of the Union of South Africa and their efforts in the war had little effect. However, the bravery and sacrifices of those involved deserves acknowledgment, and recognition should be given to Indians' attempts to have an impact on their own political future.

CONTENTS

Introduction

J. J. Doke has stated that 'it is not often that men persist so doggedly in pressing their help upon unwilling people when help means, to those who offer, danger, suffering perhaps death.'[1] He is referring to the efforts that the Natal Indians made in getting their offer to serve in the South African War, 1899 - 1902, accepted.

This study of Natal Indian involvement in the South African War is both an attempt to participate in the growing discussion regarding black involvement in the war, as well as to use the war as a focal point for an analysis of the political position of various sectors of the Natal Indian society at the turn of the twentieth century. This will entail looking at which Indians involved themselves in activities related to the war, what tasks they were able to perform and what factors motivated or forced their participation. The Indians could generally be described as an oppressed group but one should not overlook their attempts to counter their oppression, nor should one ignore the socio-political complexities within their own community. In certain respects, this research has adopted a microhistory approach, by choosing the war as a point at which to 'reduce the scale of observation' and to increase the intensity of analysis of specific actions.[2] Nevertheless, it has not assumed strict micronarrative methodology in that the thesis outlines the development of political trends that impacted on Indians' experiences and progress in the colony and then hones in on the war to see how these trends were either acted out or deviated from during the war effort. The racial hierarchy into which immigrant Indians entered had been fashioned under the influences of the Natal Government and colonists, as well as the British authorities. As rightless immigrants, the Indians were largely dependent on how the colony chose to receive and perceive them. The development of whites' attitudes towards the different groups of Indians in Natal became increasingly discriminatory towards the end of the century, and these attitudes were manifested in the proposed and implemented legislation that was aimed at ordering the life of particular sectors of the Indian community. The study examines how the different sectors of Indian society were able to, and chose to respond to their situations, and then

[1] Doke, J.J. *M.K. Gandhi, An Indian Patriot in South Africa.* (New Delhi, 1994), p. 54.
[2] Levi, G. 'On Microhistory', Burke, P. (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical* Writing, (Cambridge, 1991), p. 95.

aims to assess if their actions were opposed or supported by the relevant colonial structures and parties.

On the whole, this thesis is chronological and looks at the progress of the political interaction amongst firstly, Natal colonists and authorities, secondly, British and Indian authorities and thirdly, Natal Indians. At the same time, the responses of these three broad groups towards Indians' treatment in Natal prior to the war is dealt with in separate chapters. This is intended to acknowledge that in the process of implementing anti-Indian laws, each group played a role in advancing or defending these laws or at least responded to the decision-making process. This approach has the shortcoming of not exposing the interactive process as clearly as a purely integrated style would have done, but it does allow the developing stance of each group to be highlighted.

Indians were first introduced to Natal on a mass scale from the 1860s onwards as indentured labourers. They came on contracts and on the termination of their contracts, many labourers chose to settle in the colony. They were termed free Indians and this group was added to by independent Indian immigrants known as 'passenger' Indians. The factors that would impact on Indians' reception in the colony had been partly developed prior to the Indians' arrival. The background chapter offers a brief introduction as to how the white Natalians established themselves, and how the economic changes brought about by the sugar industry necessitated the introduction of indentured labour. In the nineteenth century Natal was a young colony, and combined with the whites' concern of being greatly outnumbered by the black population, they were not yet economically powerful enough to be able to decisively assert their dominance. This insecurity meant racial tensions became prevalent in the colony and Indians were often incorporated into this prejudice rather than being seen as British subjects.

Natalians' responses to Indians became increasingly agitated towards the end of the century, however, there were differences in how the free and indentured Indians were received. Initially colonial tensions regarding Indians pertained to the indentured Indians. Some colonials who were not to benefit directly from the labour scheme resented the fact that another non-white group was being introduced to Natal when whites were already greatly outnumbered by Africans. They also disagreed with the large financial input from state coffers into a private venture. The early 'passenger'

Indians, who came independently to Natal, were generally not regarded with disfavour when they first started to arrive and some even enjoyed a period of relative equality. The majority of ex-indentured Indians continued to provide the colony with labour or else they ran smallholdings which did not interfere with white commercial activities. However, the Indian population grew at a rapid rate and this became a central factor in anti-Indian agitation. This population growth was a result of an increase in the indentured labour supplies, an emerging ex-indentured population and, from the 1870s onwards, the arrival of 'passenger Indians'. Despite the concerns of the growing population, the employers of indentured labour were not prepared to consider ending the system. Initially, they petitioned through government agencies to be able to manipulate the system more to their advantage. The free Indian population then became the focus of attack, especially from the white trading and labouring class. The independent Indian immigrants were often successful traders, and even though they comprised only a small percentage of the Indian population, they were perceived as a major threat to white trading activities. These fears were extended to the whole free Indian population which came to be seen as competition by white labourers and traders. Apart from the economic competition that free Indians were seen to offer, their presence as an independent foreign group was seen as a political threat. Whites were worried about a reaction from the African population, if Indians were offered rights of which blacks had been deprived. They also expressed concerns about eventually being outvoted at the polls, even though the number of Indians able to vote was very few. The Natal Government, especially after it had achieved Responsible Government in 1893, was pressurised to pass discriminatory legislation and the main areas of attack became Indian immigration, Indian trading rights and the Indian franchise.

The Imperial authorities were obliged to respond to Natal Indians' treatment. The colonial Indian Government had to consider the demands of the British Government and whether the indentured system was advantageous to India. The British Government needed to choose between looking after the rights of its Indian subjects and adhering to the demands of colonials who were able to develop Natal as an economic resource for the Empire. When Natal gained Responsible Government, this impacted on the British Government's ability to defend the Indians' rights. There are clear discriminatory trends that can be highlighted in the colonial response to Indians from the white Natalians, the

British authorities and the British Indian authorities but divisions, inconsistencies and variations occurred over time and a well-defined picture does not always emerge

The situations that indentured and free Indians found themselves in differed greatly. In examining how Indians fared within Natal, one must take into account the context in which they found themselves and incorporate this understanding into the assessment of their attempts to assert themselves politically. With no representation in the Natal political structures, indentured Indians were dependent on their employers' goodwill and the limited protective structures that the colonial authorities established. The free Indians' experience was also impacted upon by the laws and structures in Natal. Yet through their independence and the financial and educational advantages of some, they were better able to appeal to the colonial government against increasing discrimination as well as to the British and British Indian Governments and concerned citizens in both countries. Frene Ginwala claims that the international dimension that exerted pressure on Natal, and in lesser measure on the Transvaal, allowed Indians to follow a path different from that of Africans, permitting them to develop as an oppressed but nonetheless comparatively less underprivileged group.[3] Indians were aware of their link to the British Empire and it was the main reference point of many when trying to defend their rights. However, whites in Natal increasingly chose to see Indians as inferior and emphasised their non-white status.

Gandhi arrived in Natal in 1893. The more affluent sectors of the Indian community had started to organise themselves politically by then, but Gandhi played a major role in advancing early Indian political development in Natal as well as in the Transvaal. Yet, one must allow space to discuss how pivotal was Gandhi's role against the notion that the free Indians had already defined their political priorities. A clear impression does not necessarily emerge as to whether the actions of the Natal Indian Congress, the political organisation established by the free Indian community, reflected the broad concerns of free Indians, or if they were constructed primarily by Gandhi. Gandhi's political convictions also displayed ambiguous elements, possibly due to his ideas still being in a formative phase. He seemed to have some empathy for the free Indians' class-based attitudes, but also showed concern for the plight of the indentured Indians and at times promoted the need for mutual co-operation. At the same time,

[3] Ginwala, F. N. 'Class, Consciousness and Control, Indian South Africans 1860-1946' (Ph.D. thesis, Oxford University, 1974), p. 54.

historians have recently dispelled any notion of the Natal Indian community as being uncomplicated and homogenous. There are examples of efforts on the part of the free Indians to support the indentured Indians as well as to marginalise them. The free Indians mainly campaigned against the legislation that would impact on free Indians but they also objected to colonial attempts to restrict indentured Indians from becoming free Indians.

Gandhi certainly played a vital role in promoting Indians' involvement in the war. The war effort was openly linked to free Indians' political concerns of gaining better treatment in the colony. Consequently, it is important to look at the efforts that the Indian leadership made to get its offer to serve the British accepted. The issues of how to view colonial rule, whether to defend the indentured Indians' cause and how to campaign for their own rights, were central to the free Indians' political decisions just prior to the war, and were incorporated into their decision-making discussions regarding their response to the war. One has to try to outline Gandhi's views on these issues within the context of the general opinions of the free Indians, and then consider how closely aligned their feelings were, as well as which ideas took precedence when they were transformed into action. Thereafter, one should consider if the Indians' war efforts made any impression on the colonials and the colonial and Imperial authorities.

Natal Indians' various contributions to the South African War, 1899 - 1902 have been given comparatively little recognition in the general writings on the war.[4] Even in much of the writing that focuses on Natal Indians' history, the war contribution is often bypassed or only given brief attention. This, in part, reflects the overall lack of discussion of black involvement in a great many of the war texts. Yet, in recent years, this has started to be redressed and there has already been a major revision of the war picture with particular historians highlighting the significant role that various black groups played. For example Peter Warwick in his *Black People and the South African War, 1899 - 1902*[5] and his chapter 'Black People and the War' in *The South African War: the Anglo-Boer War, 1899 - 1902*[6] deals with general black participation in the war and makes some specific references to the Natal Indians' service. Bill Nasson, in *Abraham Esau's War: A Black*

[4]Thomas Pakenham only pays brief reference to the Indians in *The Boer War*. (London, 1992) as is the case much earlier with Hobson, J.A. *The War in South Africa, It's Causes and Effects.* (London, 1900).
[5] Warwick, P. *Black People and the South African War, 1899 - 1902.* (Cambridge, 1983)
[6] Warwick, P. "Black People and the War', Warwick, P. (ed.), *The South African War, the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902.* (London, 1980)

South African War in the Cape, 1899 - 1902[7], provides a valuable and extensive discussion of some of the war experiences of coloureds in the Cape. However, the fact that the Indians' involvement has been given limited attention or been largely overlooked in Natal Indian history research also suggests that the Indians' work should not necessarily be over-emphasised. Their involvement in the war was brief and their communal sacrifice was less than that of many other societies involved in the war. It also represented but one of several, possibly more important, Indian political campaigns during the period when modern South Africa was establishing itself and its racial policies. Nevertheless, the war was a well considered political demonstration of free Indians' commitment to the British Empire. It was an effort to prove that they were worthy of being seen as British subjects and this makes their endeavors to serve an engaging subject.

Despite having highlighted the point that Indians' war involvement has received limited coverage, there are a number of texts that discuss the Natal Indians' contribution to the war and how the free Indians struggled to have their offer of war work accepted. Needless to say, Gandhi himself, in his various publications described their war work and considered how successful it had been. One has to take into account that his writing on any particular event involving the Indian community was linked to his broader political objectives and that he might place more emphasis than some on their relative achievements. Yet, as the leader of the Indian Ambulance Corps, his reflections are of great importance. Pyarelal writes about the efforts of Gandhi to have their service accepted and the work of the Indian Ambulance Corps in detail, as part of his extensive discussion on Gandhi in *Mahatma Gandi, Vol. II: The Discovery of Satyagraha.*[8] This text has become a valuable reference point and whilst it is an acknowledgement of Gandhi's achievements, it also shows the reluctance of the British authorities to accept the Indians' offer and the lack of positive repercussions for their work. This critical perspective is less evident in Tichmann's article, 'We are sons of the Empire after all: The Indian Ambulance Corps during the South African War, 1899 - 1902'[9]. This piece, which pays homage to the Indians' participation, was published in 1996, making it of

[7] Nasson, B. *Abraham Esau's War: A Black South African War in the Cape, 1899 - 1902.* (Cambridge, 1991)
[8] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II: The Discovery of Satyagraha On the Threshold.* (Bombay, 1980)
[9] Tichmann, P. 'We are sons of the Empire after all: The Indian Ambulance Corps during the South African War, 1899 - 1902', *Soldiers of the Queen*, 87, 1996.

timely importance to the centenary and to the process of reassessing black involvement in the war. It also brings some new details to this study but in its attempts to honour the Indians, it does not stress sufficiently the difficulties that the Indians faced in being included in the war, nor does it show how little their service really achieved. A recent seminar paper of Vahed's, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902' offers insight into how the indentured labourers'[10] came to be involved in the war and the complex relationship between the indentureds and the free Indians. This article also elaborates on the experience of refugee Indians. Chandramohan in "Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out'?: the South African War, Empire and India'[11] makes interesting comparisons between the objectives and experiences of Indians from India and those from Natal who served in the war, concluding that Indians from both places had similar frustrations in having their willingness to offer a valuable service to the war accepted.

This thesis has made extensive use of secondary sources. This was due in part to the broad and diverse subject matter that needed to be drawn together, and also because extensive research has been done on specific aspects of Natal Indian and colonial history. In addition, many of the primary sources that were used, such as legislative discussions, speeches, letters, and other documents all to be found in already published sources. Yet the Bhana Collection, for example, provided interesting primary sources on free Indians' responses to proposed legislation. With regard to the Indian war experiences, there was more scope to include primary reports which add detail to the discussion of the war experience. The correspondence between Gandhi and the colonial authorities who were organising medical support for the war, exposes Gandhi's diligent and committed approach as well as some of the difficulties experienced by the Indian stretcher bearers. Further sources offer insights into the experiences of other Indians who were affected by the war in various ways. Finally, the letters that passed between Gandhi and colonial authorities after the Indians' war service add to an understanding of how Gandhi, as well as other Natal Indian leaders, tried to gain recognition for their volunteer work.

[10] Vahed, G. Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 - 1902', unpublished seminar paper, (University of Durban-Westville, 1999)
[11] Chandramohan, B. "Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out'?: the South African War, Lowry, D. (ed.), *The South African War reappraised.* (Manchester, 2000)

1

Arrival of Indians in the Colony and their Reception

Background to the Economic and Political Environment into which Immigrant Indians would Enter

Establishment of Natal

After two British interventions in Natal in 1838 and 1842, the British Government decided to annex Natal in 1843.[1] However, the formal annexation of Natal to the Cape was not proclaimed until August 1845.[2] Natal was a district of the Cape Colony and fell under the authorities in Cape Town as well as the Secretary of State in London.[3] The Colony had a governor or lieutenant-governor who reported directly to London.[4] The Charter of Natal, promulgated by Letters Patent 15 July 1856, gave Natal the status of being a separate colony with a limited form of representative government.[5] The government departments included the Executive Council, the Legislative Council, the Colonial Office, the Judicial Establishment, the Resident Magistrates' Department, the Magistrates of Native Locations and the Field Cornets.[6] The members of the Executive Council were officials selected by the Imperial authorities. There were sixteen members of the Legislative Council, with twelve of these being elected by the colonials and the remaining four coming from the Executive Council.[7] The franchise was available to males over 21, who owned immovable property valued at £50 or more or else those who annually rented property worth £10.[8]

When Natal became a British colony, it was decided that slavery was not to be allowed and that the laws should be colour-blind.[9] The latter agreement reflected the official British policy towards their colonies. However, this was to be challenged and in many respects rejected during the establishing decades of Natal, where the white

---

[1] Davenport, T.R.H., *South Africa, A Modern History*. (London, 1991), p. 99.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Porter, B. *The Lion's Share, A Short History of British Imperialism 1850 - 1970*. (London, 1975), p. 211.
[4] Davenport, *South Africa, A Modern History*. p. 103.
[5] Brookes, E.H. and C. de B. Webb. *A History of Natal*. ((Pietermaritzburg, 1965), p. 75.
[6] Holden, W.C. *History of the Colony of Natal*. (Cape Town, 1963), p. 161.
[7] Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal*. p. 75.
[8] Ibid.

population felt that its domination was threatened by the other indigenous and foreign populations within the colony.

The Growth of the Sugar Industry and the Need for Indentured Labour

In its first decade as a British colony Natal progressed slowly, but the economy was stimulated both by the internal development of the sugar industry and external interaction with the Southern African colonies and republics.[10] Sugar was first produced in the early 1850s and by the 1860s it was successfully established and had developed into one of the colony's major industries.[11] The sugar mills in Natal in the latter half of the century were concentrated in the hands of a small number of people.[12]

Despite the wealth that the sugar industry generated, the cost of labour was always a concern. Sugar, unlike wool, was a crop that required relatively little land but a great deal of capital and labour.[13] The first pioneers were considerably handicapped by the fact that Africans could not be induced to work for white-owned agricultural and industrial activities in sufficient numbers. This was partly attributed to the state's inability to undermine the self-sufficiency of African homesteads in the 1850s.[14] Many Africans were reluctant to sell their labour[15] and forfeit their independence. Combined with this, the colonials were insecure about the threat of the large African population in the colony and to their north.

Pachai also highlights the problem that whites felt that manual labour should be performed by non-whites and they could not be persuaded to work for the plantation owners.[16] As a result, the contemporary Natal administration needed to persuade both the British and the Indian Governments to allow Indian indentured labour to come to the colony for the purpose of working the sugar plantations.[17]

---

[9] Davenport, *South Africa, A Modern History*. p. 103.
[10] Spooner,F.P. *South African Predicament*. (London, 1960), p. 55.
[11] Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*. (Oxford, 1994) p. 43.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Spooner, *South African Predicament*. p. 55.
[15] Guy, J. *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom: The Civil War in Zululand, 1879 - 1884*. (Johannesburg, 1982), p. 41.
[16] Pachai, B. *The South African Indian Question 1860 - 1971*. (Cape Town, 1971), p. 3.
[17] Spooner, *South African Predicament*. p. 55.

Development of Colonial Racial Attitudes and Policies within Natal

Davenport states that Indians' presence in Natal gave rise to a reinforcement of white racial attitudes.[18] By the middle of the nineteenth century, the institutions of Natal were recognisably British, as was its domestic ethos, save for the northern districts where Afrikaans-speaking communities set the tone.[19] The first Natal settlers were faced by both large numbers of Africans and a powerful military state to their north, which provoked a defensive reaction. Around the middle of the nineteenth century 10,000 whites lived amongst 100,000 blacks in Natal.[20] Inevitably, the whites' anxieties about being a minority group impacted on their actions and policies towards other population groups and they tried to create economic and political structures that would ensure their dominance in the colony. Furthermore, the Natal white population was virtually homogenous so that there was never any temptation for white politicians to look to the non-white population for political support as to some extent they did in the Cape.[21]

Hobson explained that the ideal policy of British Imperialism towards its non-white populations was that of a Radical Liberal opinion which professed consideration and humanity for all.[22] However, the strong deep-rooted general sentiment of inequality could not be over-ridden by philanthropic Imperial edict.[23] Hobson concluded that the British majority of settlers in Natal would no more dream of allowing political power to accrue to blacks than would the Dutch settler majority in the Transvaal or the Free State.[24] Furthermore, Guy has more recently argued that the official attitude of Britain towards the Natal region was based primarily on the region's strategic position in a world-wide commercial network. Their policy tended to be erratic as different solutions were tried in an effort to solve local problems with the minimum amount of expense.[25] This is relevant to this study as it implies that Britain could not always be relied upon to demand the implementation of non-racial policies in Natal if they were at the expense of other economic and political interests.

---

[18] Davenport, *South Africa, A Modern History*. p. 107.
[19] Ibid. p. 105.
[20] Porter, *The Lion's Share*. p. 56.
[21] Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion, the 1906 - 1908 Disturbance in Natal* (Oxford, 1970). p. 14.
[22] Hobson, J.A. *The War in South Africa: Its Causes and Effects.* (London, 1900), p. 238.
[23] Ibid. p. 291.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom*. p. 44.

The Introduction of Indentured Indian Labourers to Natal

White Natalians debate the Merits of Introducing Indentured Labour

The Natal planters petitioned for the introduction of Indian labour as early as October 1851[26] and even prior to this, J.R. Saunders, a planter, had made a special appeal in the *Natal Mercury* when he wrote that 'for our sugar growing prospects, they [the Indians] are indispensable.'[27]

The discussion about whether or not to introduce indentured labourers caused great debate among the Natal colonists. Whites wanted to consolidate political control and advance themselves economically, but they still were in an insecure position as the minority race group. Consequently, many whites were opposed to the proposal to introduce another non-white population into the colony. The initial conflict over Indian labour became one between large landowners with international finance, and local settlers who, besides being farmers, were establishing themselves as traders and artisans. The resentment of these latter colonists was later added to when ex-indentured and 'passenger' Indians started to settle in the colony, offering a degree of economic competition. The plantation owners had heavy financial commitments, required labour quickly, and did not care much where it came from, so long as it was immediate, plentiful and cheap.[28] The farmers who lived further inland did not need such large quantities of labour as the tea and sugar plantations required. Furthermore, due to closer proximity to the African reserves, they found that they 'had access to certain avenues of labour not readily available near the coast',[29] and were better able to entice small sectors of the African population to work for them.[30] These farmers believed that if the Government dealt 'properly' with the Africans, there would be no need to introduce an outside labour source with the potential problems a foreign population would bring. An article in the *Natal Witness* of 8 January 1865, reflected this opinion: 'Coolies are not regularly introduced to any country, except those devoted to the growth of sugar and coffee where obtaining money is of greater importance than the moral health of the people.'[31]

---

[26] Henning, C.G. *The Indentured Indian in Natal (1860 - 1917)*. (New Delhi, 1993) p. 7.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control', pp. 40, 41.
[29] Ibid. p. 38.
[30] Spooner, *South African Predicament*. p. 55.
[31] *Natal Witness* cited in Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 41.

The plantation owners increasingly pressed the Natal Legislative Council to introduce Indian labour.[32] A significant contribution to their plea was that the matter received favourable attention from figures in various sectors of the British colonial governments. Sir George Grey, Governor of the Cape Colony, when visiting Natal in 1855, expressed his support, as did both Chamberlain and Rhodes approve of the idea of utilizing all of the Empire's labour resources.[33]

Those who opposed importing indentured labour resented the fact that public money was to be spent on a project that benefited only one group.[34] However, since the government-nominated members of the Legislative Council were at the time political allies of the planters, the government subsidy was allowed.[35] Ginwala raises the relevant point that the inter-relationship between the employers, the state and the outside investments in the sugar industry was central to ensuring that indentured labour was brought to Natal. This relationship continued to play a major role in determining that the policies regarding the indentured Indians were advantageous to the employers.[36]

Approval by the British and Indian Governments

Pachai points out that by approving of the emigration scheme, both the British Government and the Indian Government committed themselves to monitoring the Indians' treatment in the colony.[37]

Sir George Grey, as newly-appointed Governor of the Cape, sanctioned the introduction of labour from the East in November 1855.[38] He advised the Colonial Secretary to inform the Governor of India that 'opportunities were present for constant employment for Indian labourers and for their becoming petty proprietors of land when they chose to retire.'[39] Great Britain and India, through their appropriate agencies, sanctioned Grey's request for labour but each asked for safeguards to be introduced which would protect the interests of labourers.[40] In her famous proclamation of 1858, in announcing the commencement of her rule in India, Queen Victoria proclaimed that 'We

[32] Henning, C.G. *The Indentured Indian in Natal*, p. 7.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 42.
[35] Stein, Z.A. 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893', (MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1942), p. 16.
[36] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 43.
[37] Pachai, *The South African Indian Question.* p. 5.
[38] Thompson, *Indian Immigration.* cited in Pachai, *The South African Indian Question.* p. 4.
[39] Polak, *The Indians of South Africa.* cited in Pachai, *The South African Indian Question.* p. 4.
[40] Pachai, *The South African Indian Question.* p. 4.

hold ourselves bound to the natives of our Indian territories by the same obligations of duty which bind us to our other subjects, and these obligations by blessing of Almighty God, we shall faithfully and conscientiously fulfill'.[41] By this declaration, the British Government ostensibly pledged itself to safeguard the interests of its subjects everywhere on the basis of a single imperial standard.[42] This rhetoric was often tested and invariably found wanting, not least by the Indian labourers of Natal.

Despite Grey's initial promises of the opportunities for Indians to become 'petty proprietors', many of the plantation owners did not seem prepared to consider what would happen to the Indians or the colony following the end of the indentureds' contracts, and later attempted to keep the Indians as labourers for as long as possible for their own benefit. The *Friends of India*, an organisation which had campaigned against the indentured labour system, declared with considerable foresight in 1839 that in any trade in slaves or serfs there would be a race 'between abuses and legislation.'[43]

Indians' Motivations for Indenturing Themselves

The Natal white community was not alone in debating the merits of Indians coming to the colony. Their own motivation or need to indenture themselves is a key indication of their relationship to the British and Indian governments and colonists.

Since the decision to emigrate would have largely been an economic one, the impact of British rule on Indian economic structures is important. Whilst many Indians had always known poverty, from the 1830s onwards until the end of the century, both natural disasters and the disruption of the agricultural and craft industries caused greater economic distress.[44] This encouraged thoughts of overseas work and the colonial planters offered promises of new opportunities to numbers of depressed and oppressed people.[45]

British interference with the social and political structures in India also caused frustration, and Moodley is one of those who claims that in the second half of the nineteenth century, British Indian rule may have played a major role in persuading

[41] Polak, *The Indians of South Africa* cited in Pachai, *The South African Indian Question.* p. 5.
[42] Pachai, *The South African Indian Question.* p. 5.
[43] Tinker, H. *A New System of Slavery: the Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830 - 1920.* (London, 1974), p. 236.
[44] Smith, V.A. *The Oxford History of India, Part 1.* (Delhi, 1958), p. 702.
[45] Moodley, P. 'Indentured Indian Immigration to Natal, 1860 – 1870 with special reference to the Hindu Caste System and its Implication', (Honours thesis, University of Durban-Westville, 1981), p. 18..

Indians to enlist for indenture.[46] Equally, the arrogant and patronising attitude that the British had often displayed in India did not bode well for their support of Indians in any other parts of the empire.

While general dissatisfaction with British rule prevailed, it was not the only factor that encouraged emigration. The closely-woven fabric of joint family and village community life would have made the prospect of emigration very difficult for some, but for others it imposed controlling regulations which they found intolerable,[47] so emigration was also a form of flight from local pressures.

Indians' Need for Adaptation in a New Colonial Environment

The first Indian indentured workers arrived at Durban in the *Truro* in 1860.[48] The indentured Indians were properly known as '*girmitiyas*' or '*grimitkaran*', a derivation from the term 'agreement'.[49] They came to be referred to as 'coolies' from the word '*Kuli* ', meaning porter or labourer,[50] a term with derogatory overtones. The majority of Indian indentured labourers served on sugar or coffee plantations. The Natal Government Railway became the second largest employer of indentured labour and the industries and corporations of Durban and Pietermaritzburg also began to take increasing numbers.[51] When the coal mines in Northern Natal opened up there was a demand for labour, and indentured Indians were also employed in up-country districts by private employers and small companies.[52] Note should also be made of a group of indentured labourers who were hand-picked for particular tasks, such as working as chefs, waiters, carriage drivers or dhobies (laundrymen) and who were known as 'special servants'.[53]

---

[46] Moodley, 'Indentured Indian Immigration to Natal', p. 11.
[47] Ibid. p. 17.
[48] Malherbe, and Mesthrie, *Not Slave, Not Free.* (Pietermaritzburg, 1992), p. 31.
[49] Brain states that this term was first used by Hindi-speaking people, Brain, J. 'Natal's Indians, 1860 - 1910 from co-operation, through competition, to conflict', Duminy, Andrew and Bill Guest (eds.), *Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910: A New History.* (Pietermaritzburg, 1989), p. 249.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Bhana, S and J. Brain, *Setting Down Roots, Indian Migrants in South Africa, 1860 - 1910.* (Cape Town, 1971) p. 31
[52] Ibid, p. 33
[53] Brain, J. 'Indentured and Free Indians in the Economy of Colonial Natal', Guest, B. and J.M. Sellers. (eds.) *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony: Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Colonial Natal.* (Pietermaritzburg, 1985), p. 226.

They also assumed civil service posts such as interpreters, postmen, and policemen.[54] These 'special servants' were paid considerably more than the indentured labourers.[55]

The early immigrants had little idea as to what to expect. They had no say in the selection of their first employer, nor in the locality in which they would work.[56] The indentured labourers encountered a cultural environment that had no understanding or empathy with the social systems which organised Indian society.

According to the Wragg Commission of 1885-87, five times more indentured Indians lived in the coastal districts than 'upcountry', the major three coastal districts being Alexandra, Victoria and Durban Country (including Durban).[57] Since the indentured labourers were scattered so far apart and had no access to transport, communication and political discussions would have been severely hindered. It was only when they finished their contracts and moved closer to Durban and other commercial centres that they would have been able to communicate in larger groups.

In terms of their religious inclinations, most of the workers were Hindus but some, perhaps 10 per cent, were Muslims and about 2 per cent were Christians.[58] Since the majority of the indentured Indians were Hindu, the caste system would have been the pivotal social structure out of which they would have emerged. The extreme discrimination and poverty that the lowest groups experienced would have been a strong force driving them to pursue opportunities elsewhere, and it is not surprising that the *pariahs* (outcasts or 'people without caste) were more numerous than people from other castes who indentured themselves.[59] Workers who spoke the same Indian language were not necessarily kept together and had to find a means of communicating with their employers and co-workers.[60] The Zulu-, English- and Afrikaans-speaking of Natal had already fashioned a common language called *Fanagalo* which used words from all the languages. Tamil- and Hindu-speakers also came to use *Fanagalo* to speak to each

[54] Guest, B. 'Indians in Natal and Southern Africa in the 1890s', Brown, J.M. and M. Prozesky (eds.) *Gandhi and South Africa: Principles and Politics*, (Pietermaritzburg, 1996), p. 14
[55] Bhana and Brain, *Setting Down Roots*. p. 22.
[56] Brain, 'Natal Indians, 1860 - 1910 from co-operation, through competition, to conflict', p. 253.
[57] Beall, J. 'Women under Indenture in Natal', Surendra Bhana (ed.) *Essays on Indentured Indians in Natal*. (London, 1991), p. 98.
[58] Malherbe. and Mesthrie, *Not Slave, Not Free*. p. 68.
[59] Sookdeo A., 'Indentured Indian Immigration into Natal with Special Emphasis on the 1890s and the Caste-Structure amongst Indians', (Honours thesis, University of Durban-Westville, 1982), p. 34.
[60] Malherbe and Mesthrie, *Not Slave, Not Free*. p. 68.

other as well as to their employers and African fellow-workers.[61] However, their inability to use more formal English was later to become an economic and political hindrance.

In spite of developing a basic communal language, Morrell asserts that assimilation between Indian labourers and Africans did not occur. On the sugar estates, Indian labourers were housed in compounds and the effect was that Indians retained a cultural and religious distinctiveness. This was consolidated by the constant influx of indentured workers.[62]

Women's Experience

Brookes and Webb indicate that indentured Indians were 'the only part of the population of Natal which came by special and urgent invitation'.[63] The invitation, however, was not extended to women as they were deemed to be of little use in the sphere of production. They were imported into the colony only grudgingly as the Government of India insisted on a female quota of 29 per cent (although this figure continued to change in subsequent years).[64]

Beall argues the case that indentured women in Natal had a very specific experience of exploitation that was grounded in history, culture and class and should be dealt with beyond any universal Marxist-feminist study of women's oppression under capitalism.[65] Indentured women experienced many forms of oppression: as workers, in the form of sexual abuse from both their employers and within the indentured community itself, and, in a society which was becoming increasingly racially hierarchical, as Indians. As child bearers, women were also blamed for creating a permanent Indian population.[66] However, this attitude diminished towards the end of the nineteenth century through an increasing need for labour, as resistance by Africans to proletarianisation seemed undiminishing.[67]

The obvious question arises as to whether women resisted their oppression and exploitation or whether they remained silent. Women were precluded from tasks which enabled them to develop the skills that would have given them any bargaining power,

---

[61] Malherbe and Mesthrie, *Not Slave, Not Free*. p. 68.
[62] Morrell, R., Wright, J. and S. Meintjes, 'Colonialism and the Establishment of White Domination 1840 – 1890', Morrell, R. (ed.) *Political Economy and Identities in KwaZulu-Natal: Historical and Social Perspectives* (Durban, 1996), p. 41.
[63] Brookes, and Webb. *A History of Natal*. p. 85.
[64] Beall, 'Women under Indenture in Natal'. p. 92.
[65] Ibid. p. 89.
[66] Ibid. p. 92.

and cultural constructs excluded Indian women from the limited education facilities that became available to the male immigrant children. These factors, together with the biological constraints of the responsibility for childbearing, reduced their potential for finding alternative forms of employment. The only route out of indenture for the majority of women, therefore, was either through repatriation or through a dependent relationship with a male partner who could make the break.[68] The lack of formal education would also have impeded women in politically representing themselves. Furthermore, they would have been aware that physical assault and wage and ration deprivation might well have been the consequence of speaking out.[69] However, there are examples of women expressing their complaints, such as when the Deputy Protector was 'besieged' during his visits to the railway stations by starving women, begging him to do something for them.[70]

Since women had very few personal means of protecting themselves, one must ask if the political consciousness of the free Indian community took women's issues into account. The clear answer in terms of public political discourse seems to be: no.

It is true that as Gandhi later embarked on a life-long fight on behalf of the 'untouchables', he also adopted an enlightened attitude towards women. This involved a personal recognition of how men tended to dominate women, with the result that women developed a sense of inferiority.[71] He assigned for women a very relevant role in the process of liberating the Indian population and in developing their moral conscience.[72] Gandhi may well have started to formulate these attitudes whilst in Natal, yet there is no real evidence that he was acting upon these convictions at that stage. In the discussions held by Gandhi and the Congress regarding the indentured labourers and free Indians' conditions, women remain unseen and unheard.

Protective Structures for Indentured Labourers

As foreigners with no political rights or financial security, indentured labourers were entirely dependent on the Natal authorities for protection, with this being monitored by the Indian and British Governments. One needs to look at what systems were set up for

---

[67] Beall, "Women under Indenture' p. 92.
[68] Ibid. p. 91.
[69] Ibid. p. 111.
[70] Deputy Protector to Protector (19 May 1895) cited in Beall,.'Women under Indenture'. p. 96.
[71] Richards,*The Philosophy of Gandhi, A Study of his Basic Ideas*. (London, 1982). p. 89.

indentured Indians' protection and the opportunities or restrictions they created. This in turn, will contribute to analysing how or if indentured Indians attempted to improve their conditions.

The laws that governed the indentured emigration to all British colonies had been laid down in 1842 by the British government,[73] and the Indian Government then approved of Natal's plan for indentured labour in 1860. The organisations that were initially set up by the Natal government to oversee indentured immigration were concerned with financial issues, rather than with the protection of the Indians.[74]

Immigration to Natal was terminated for a period in 1866, in part due to financial problems in Natal, but later the Indian Government in 1872 also insisted that immigration be brought to a halt. This was in reaction to hearing about the harsh conditions in Natal from the first returning party of indentured labourers on the *Red Riding Hood* in 1870 and subsequent returning ships. The Indian Government prohibited further labourers from being sent until the conditions were improved.[75] The Natal legislature therefore took special steps in 1872 to try to put right the abuses which had been alleged, such as flogging of workers and excessive pay deductions for absenteeism. Provision was also made to allocate land to Indians who had completed their contracts, on the ground that such people had skills to contribute to the welfare of the Colony and should be encouraged to remain.[76] When immigration resumed again in 1874, the Indian Emigration Act No. V11 that had been drawn up in 1871 was introduced. This was a comprehensive piece of legislation governing all stages of the emigration system.[77] Despite these attempts to monitor the indenture's condition, the immense distance and at times conflicting interests with the Natal employers would have limited the Indian Government's control.

Natal set up two bodies to oversee the indentured labourers: the Trust Board and the Protector's Department. Owing to the abuses that were disclosed by the 1872 Commission of Enquiry, and following on the recommendations of the report, the responsibilities of the Protector were enhanced. The holder's title was changed to 'Protector of Immigrants', and the Indian Emigration Act of 1871 stipulated that the

---

[72] 'All Men are Brothers' from *Selections from Gandhi*, cited in Richards, *The Philosophy of Gandhi*. p. 89.
[73] Malherbe, and Mesthrie. *Not Slave, Not Free*. p. 44.
[74] Stein, 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893'. p. 14.
[75] Malherbe, and Mesthrie. *Not Slave, Not Free*. p. 44.
[76] Davenport, *South Africa, A Modern History*. p. 105.
[77] Stein, 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893'. p. 11.

Protector would investigate complaints.[78] The Protector's responsibilities were many and varied, but it can be said briefly that he was concerned with everything connected with Indian immigrants, from the time they arrived in Durban until they returned to India, and even ex-indentured Indians who settled in the colony were to an extent his responsibility.[79] Thus, both the colony and the Government of India recognised the Protector as an official whose first duty was to the immigrants, although it should be noted that until 1876 he sat as a member of the Natal Legislative Council and on the Executive Council.[80] The Trust Board was described as being purely official, however as the planters considered that as they contributed two-thirds of the Immigration Fund, they should be represented on the Board.[81] Theoretically, the Protector was 'advised and assisted', not controlled by the Board, but usually they co-operated closely[82] and after 1881, the Protector's Department's personnel became employees of the Trust Board, with their salaries paid out of the Immigration Fund.[83]

Since there is a lack of written sources from the indentureds, the Protector's reports are the main form of understanding as to how Indians felt about their conditions and treatment. Stein records that the Protector usually reported that everyone seemed fairly satisfied and that this was also the view held by the Legislative Council.[84] Yet, it is highly unlikely that this was an accurate reflection of their feelings. The indentures' actions often indicated a deep unhappiness, and their available outlets to register complaints were highly questionable. Due to lack of literacy, many Indians were deprived of the more discrete forms of sharing their experiences such as letter writing, and were dependent on the structures the Natal authorities established.

The employers on the bigger estates were generally reputed to be treating their labourers with greater consideration, but quite often cases of cruelty and neglect were reported from small employers.[85] Possible explanations for this are, firstly, that the smaller farmers were likely to be poorer and so resorted to greater exploitation of their workers in pursuit of profitability; and, secondly, the bigger farms may have been more

[78] Stein, 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893', p. 12.
[79] Ibid. p. 17.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control', p. 16.
[82] Stein. 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893'. p. 16.
[83] Ibid. p. 17.
[84] Ibid. p. 21.
[85] Ibid. pp. 20, 21.

prominent in the government and public's eye, and if they practised ill-treatment it may have been more easily exposed. Brain contends that the numerous complaints from Indian labourers about non-payment of wages, unsatisfactory living conditions and food can, with some exceptions, possibly be explained through the financial insecurity of the more marginal estate owners as much as by deliberate disregard of regulations or negligence.[86] Malherbe and Mesthrie give examples of the forms of resistance used by the Indian labourers: desertion for days was commonplace and occasionally, they damaged the employer's property as an act of revenge.[87] Drugs, suicide and gambling were other desperate measures of escapism to which some indentures resorted. Bhana and Brain also highlight that even though obtaining the status of 'free Indian' and the social progress this might bring was a great motivation for Indians to endure their contracts, there were some who found their conditions intolerable and fled the estates.[88] Not only do these activities indicate unhappiness, they also expose the lack of remedial channels through which to address their grievances. Sometimes groups of workers on individual estates went on strike,[89] but it was not possible for indentureds to organise themselves politically on a large scale.

Although in theory the indentures could complain to the Protector, there were numerous factors that limited the Protector's effectiveness and indicated a split loyalty on his part with the employers.[90] Estates were seldom visited more than once a year,[91] so that on a day to day level, labourers had no state protection. By the mid-1860s the immigrants were scattered among 57 estates between Umhlali and Ifafa and the Protector pointed out that he could hardly get to all of them on horseback.[92] Furthermore, Brain underlines that the employers received sympathetic support from the local courts and the police, so that the powers of the Protector became progressively weaker.[93]

The immigrants' other option was to find their way to the Protector's office in Durban in order to discuss their complaints.[94] Yet this was accompanied by exceptional difficulties. They had to get a pass to leave the estate and they stood the risk of being

[86] Brain, 'Indentured and Free Indians in the Economy of Colonial Natal', p. 203.
[87] Malherbe, and Mesthrie. *Not Slave, Not Free*. p. 67.
[88] Bhana and Brain. *Setting Down Roots*. p. 60.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Stein, 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 – 1893', p.21.
[91] Ibid. p. 22.
[92] Malherbe, and Mesthrie, *Not Slave, Not Free*. p. 66.
[93] Brain, 'Natal Indians, 1860 - 1910, from co-operation, through competition, to conflict', p. 255.

fined or arrested by the magistrates, without their complaints being heard.[95] Apart from the practical problems of limited funds for transport, there were statutory bars preventing immigrants from moving freely about the country.[96] Admittedly, Law 25 of 1891 Clause 30, exempted immigrants who were on their way to the Protector from laws restricting movement. However, if their complaints were then found to be 'frivolous or vexatious', they could still be proceeded against on the usual grounds by employers.[97] Finally, there was the obvious problem of retribution from the employers on returning to the estates.[98]

Despite these major problems, recognition should still be conceded that in certain instances, the Protectors did record quite detailed descriptions of what occurred on the estates.[99] Initially, the Protector was given jurisdiction in all civil cases and in cases between Indian Immigrants and their employers. In 1874, the Protectors' jurisdiction was extended to cases of assaults on Indians whether by other Indians or Europeans. Though magistrates were given concurrent jurisdiction in all civil and criminal cases, except seduction, adultery, abduction and elopement, the Protector could refer any decision of the Magistrate to the Lieutenant-Governor for revision and this provided in effect for a special court of appeal for Indian Immigrants.[100] Thus, while the outlets of protection were not particularly effective they were equally not non-existent.

Another major problem impairing the labourers' ability to defend themselves was language barriers. The immigrants were faced with a situation where they spoke a foreign language, were ignorant of the law, often were illiterate and without financial protection. By contrast, the employers were normally educated, wealthy and understood the legal and political structures which placed the labourers in a position where they were vulnerable to exploitation.[101] Again, it must be acknowledged that these issues were not completely overlooked. The Select Report of 1872 [102] as well as practically

---

[94] Stein, 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893'. p. 34.
[95] Malherbe, and Mesthrie, *Not Slave, Not Free.* p. 65.
[96] Ibid. p. 65.
[97] Stein, 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893'. p. 35.
[98] Malherbe, and Mesthrie, *Not Slave, Not Free.* p. 65.
[99] See for example Bhana Collection (University of Durban-Westville Documentation Centre), 957/ 759, Complaints from indentured labourers on Mr Meikle's Estate to L.H. Mason, Protector of Immigrants, 19 February 1884.
[100] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 50.
[101] Stein, 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893'. p. 26.
[102] Ibid. p. 59.

every Protector's report from 1872 to 1895 made some reference to the matter of interpreters in the court.[103]

Establishment of a Free Indian Community

At the end of their indentured period, Indian labourers had various options: reindenturing to the same or another employer, finding alternative forms of employment or leaving Natal for other places in Southern Africa. Many moved to the diamond fields in the 1870s and later to the Transvaal gold-fields.[104] Over time, Indians came to be spread around other places in Southern African including the Orange Free State, Port Elizabeth, Kimberley, Rhodesia, Basutoland and Bechuanaland.[105]

The colonists attempted to make it increasingly difficult for indentured Indians to get out of their contracts, but if the labourers wished to be independent they could not be kept under contract indefinitely, and a population of ex-indentured labourers started to emerge in the colony. Some indentureds returned, but over half of the immigrants decided to make a new life in their adopted home.[106] They were aware of the potential for social marginalisation that would face them back in India, especially the Hindus who had broken caste rules in leaving. Furthermore, most of the Indians were sure that dire poverty would await them back home and that Natal at least offered the prospect of a degree of social mobility. Gandhi complained about the complacency that many free Indians showed in their lack of attempts to improve their social and political position in Natal. However, the knowledge of potentially harsher circumstances back in India may help to explain why these Indians did not offer much resistance to their conditions in Natal because it was an improvement on what they had known.

Bhana and Brain describe well what the status of being 'free Indians' meant. On completion of their indenture contracts, Indians were issued with discharge certificates. This allowed them to move around the colony and to purchase or rent property, to set themselves up in business, to practise a trade or to engage in an agricultural pursuit.[107] They became engaged in a wide range of occupations but became identified with several in particular: hawking the fruit and vegetables which they grew in their

[103] Stein, 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893' p. 59.
[104] Brain, 'Indentured and Free Indians in the Economy of Colonial Natal', p. 210.
[105] Guest, B. 'Indians in Natal and Southern Africa in the 1890s', p. 14.
[106] Malherbe, and Mesthrie. *Not Slave, Not Free.* p. 44.
[107] Bhana and Brain. *Setting Down Roots.* p. 43.

productive market gardens; and fishing and working in the service sector.[108] The early traders were ex-indentured Indians and their businesses were usually small, presumably because they did not have the capital to invest in larger ventures.[109] These small traders were know as *dukawallahs* and they often lived a hard life pedalling on foot.[110] By the early 1880s, the *dukawallahs* had penetrated far and wide into the Natal hinterland. There, often on the fringes of 'native locations', their customers were mainly African.[111] Some small traders' businesses grew by degrees and they became part of a commercial and professional class.[112] In addition, there were a few who were able to enter the professional sector in occupations such as accountants, bookkeepers and teachers.[113]

From the 1870s onwards, a new class of Indians reached Natal under their own initiative.[114] They frequently came from regions in close proximity in India where they had heard about opportunities in Natal and the Transvaal.[115] There were significant differences between them and the ex-indentured Indians. The 'passenger' Indians mainly spoke Gujarati and were predominantly Muslims, although some Gujarati-speaking Hindus also came. Malherbe and Mesthrie explain that 'passenger' Indians had often been previously established as merchants, and could afford to open large shops and import a wide range of goods.[116] The white colonists called the new traders 'Arabs' because of the way they dressed, although, they were naturally not Arabs.[117]

The 'passenger' Indians followed a tradition of pursuing trade opportunities outside of India[118] and they came to Natal primarily to satisfy the consumer needs of other Indian immigrants.[119] Many prominent traders, beginning with Aboobaker Amod in 1872, relocated from Mauritius to Natal on the basis of 'better' business prospects in the colony. Thereafter, many Indian traders and shipping merchants took the 'more direct route to Natal.'[120] They showed 'undoubted trading ability', according to the Wragg Commission and very soon ousted the ex-indentured immigrants from their position.[121]

---

[108] Malherbe and Mesthrie. *Not Slave, Not Free.* p. 31.
[109] Bhana and Brain, *Setting Down Roots.* p. 59.
[110] Padayachee, V and R. Morrell, ' Indian Merchants and Dukawallahs in the Natal Economy, c1875 – 1914', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 17, 1, 1991. p. 77
[111] Ibid. p. 88.
[112] Smith, *The Oxford History of India.* p. 703.
[113] Bhana and Brain. *Setting Down Roots.* p. 41.
[114] Davenport, *South Africa, A Modern History.* p. 105.
[115] Bhana, 'Indian Trade and Trader in Colonial Natal', p. 240.
[116] Malherbe, and Mesthrie, *Not Slave, Not Free.* p. 59.
[117] Ibid.

The 'passenger' Indians also often had access to credit and a range of financial facilities. This placed them in an advantageous position within the realm of banking and money lending,[122] especially since formal banking and credit institutions in the colony had largely excluded Indian traders.[123] Meer claims that the early free Indians were a highly frugal people and some became wealthy.[124] By 1885, over half the Indian population resident in the borough of Durban (approximately 4000) had market gardens on land which they had leased or had bought on hire purchase terms.[125]

[118] Bhana and Brain. *Setting Down Roots*. p. 34.
[119] Stein, 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893', p. 43.
[120] Padayachee, and Morrell, 'Indian Merchants and Dukawallahs in the Natal Economy', p. 74.
[121] Stein, 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893'. p. 43
[122] Morrell, Wright, and Meintjies, 'Colonialism and the Establishment of White Domination 1840 – 1890', p. 42.
[123] Padayachee, and Morrell, 'Indian Merchants and Dukawallahs in the Natal Economy', p. 77.
[124] Meer, *Portrait of Indian South Africans*. p. 24.
[125] Ibid.

2

Development of White Natalians' Reactions to Indians

When looking at the colonial reaction to Indians, a pattern of increasing discrimination emerges in which the growth of anti-Indian antagonism was directly linked to the growth of the overall Indian population. The resentment caused by the population increase was added to the other factors that were causing agitation. Certain colonials wanted to end the importation of indentured Indians altogether, whilst the employers were seeking ways of extending their contracts and thereafter to force Indians to return to India. Along with the population growth, free Indians were resented for their economic competition and their potential impact on the whites' control over Africans. The popular resentment came largely from the urban labouring class and pressure was put on the Natal Government to meet the demands of these various sectors of white society. When Natal achieved Responsible Government, it was in a stronger position to accommodate the colonists' demands with discriminatory legislation.

Colonial Response to Indentured Labourers

The planters and other employers of indentured labourers were dissatisfied that they were not able to exploit this system even more to their advantage. White property owners wanted to force the unindentured Indians into labour contracts through the expropriation of land, taxation and squatting laws.[1] They resented having to import more labour and they did not object to prejudices displayed by other whites towards free Indians.[2] Ram claims that the delight at the acquisition of Indian labour blinkered the planters and the colony against the sociological implications of the venture and indeed against showing the most elementary human feelings and understanding towards the immigrants.[3]

Response to Free Indians

The antagonism towards free Indians varied in its extremity. The first free Indians were generally accepted into white society and for a brief period the status of free Indians was

---

[1] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 43.
[2] Ibid. p. 44.
[3] Ram, P. 'Indentured Indian Immigration into Natal with particular reference to their social and economic conditions during the period 1870 -1905'. (Honours thesis, University of Durban-Westville, 1984), p. 44.

almost identical to that of other white workers.[4] Historians offer a variety of dates between the 1870s and 1893 (Natal gained Responsible Government) when white hostility first became evident. The 1890s were a time of political stress and commercial depression in the colony[5] and it was during this decade that colonial agitation against Indians was reflected in legislation. Increasingly, Indians became a touchstone or scapegoat for political and economic frustrations on both official and popular levels.[6]

The size and the rate of growth of the Indian population caused anxiety amongst the whites who were aware of their vulnerable position as a dominant minority. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century the Indian population grew at a rapid rate. In 1876 the white population of Natal was18,846; the Indian population: 6,787; and the African population: 281,797. By y 1891 the white population was 46,788; the Indian population: 27,206 and the African population: 455,983.[7] In terms of understanding white fears about being a minority population, these figures as significant as firstly they illustrate that the white population at the beginning of the 1890s was approximately only one tenth of the size of the African population. Secondly, they show how the Indian population growth was much greater than the white population and during the decade of the 1890s the Indian population came to be greater than the white population. Swanson explains that the towns emerged as the 'cockpits of communal conflict'.[8] The growing Indian population was central to the attacks made against Indians. Urban growth was dramatic from the 1870s onwards and by the 1890s Durban alone contained nearly a third of the colony's white inhabitants.[9] By contrast, only 22% of Indians were urbanized by the mid-1890s with the majority being indentured, free labourers or smallholders.[10] Yet it was their growing potential to offer economic and political competition that made them a target of anti-Indian attacks.

Indian antagonism was concentrated in urban areas but it also operated on an occupational level. One of the major factors that caused anti-Indian aggression was their apparent threat

[4] Ram, 'Indentured Indian Immigration into Natal', p. 48.
[5] Swanson, M. "The Asiatic Menace': Creating Segregation in Durban, 1870 – 1900', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 16, 3, 1983, p.413.
[6] Ibid. p. 405.
[7] Calpin, G.H. *Indians in South Africa.* (Pietermaritzburg, 1949), p. 23
[8] Swanson, "The Asiatic Menace', p. 421.
[9] Swanson, 'The Durban system: roots of urban apartheid in colonial Natal' cited in Wyley, C.H. 'The Natal Dealer's Licenses Act of 1897 and Conflict between Indian and White Capital in the Borough of Durban, 1897 – 1909', (Honours thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1986), p. 6.
[10] Guest, 'Indians in Natal and Southern Africa in the 1890s', p. 12.

to white commercial activities, especially, in trade, as well as the perceived competition they provided to the white labouring class. The Indian trading community can be divided into two relatively distinct groups. The first was the wealthier Indian merchants who established themselves in predominantly urban areas, particularly Durban. The second was the class of Indians, described as *dukawallahs* who built up smallholdings and trading stores, often in rural areas.

The growth of the Indian trader class gathered momentum with the coming of the 'passenger' traders. Whilst the 'Arab' sector of the Indian population was small they were resented for the direct competition they provided. They tended not to hire themselves out as labour, as many ex-indentured labourers had done, but entered commerce as proprietors of general businesses.[11] Initially, they came to supply the consumer needs of their Indian compatriots, but when opportunities to expand their activities to black and white customers arose, they took full advantage of them by diversifying their stock and extending their trade into the inland districts.[12] Bhana explains that it was particularly the small and medium white trading class in the countryside who felt the impact of merchant traders.[13] White storekeepers with only limited capital found it difficult to compete with their lower prices.[14]

However, this resentment was not shared by all within the colony. Swan points out that there are complications in analysing the dynamics of hostility. While certain whites felt threatened by Indian commerce, others benefited from the generally lower prices. It is equally clear that the cheap Indian labour benefited employers but threatened the position of white labour in Natal.[15] A member of the Natal Legislative Assembly, Archibald asked 'but who have been the greatest sinners? Not the planters, not the farmers – those who brought the Indians here to labour and cultivate the soil – but the men living in the towns who by higher wages induced them to leave the farms and settle in the towns.' He accused these people of encouraging Indian traders.[16]

---

[11] Huttenback, R.A. *Racism and Empire: White Settlers and Coloured Immigration in the British Self-Governing Colonies 1830 – 1910.* (Ithaca, 1976), p. 139.
[12] Bhana, S. 'Indian Trade and Trader in Colonial Natal', B. Guest and J.M. Sellers (eds.), *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony, Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Colonial Natal.* (Pietermaritzburg, 1985), p. 238.
[13] Bhana, 'Indian Trade and Trader in Colonial Natal', p. 238.
[14] Lambert, J. 'The Labour League and the Franchise Question in the Struggle for Responsible Government in Natal', Pachai, B. (ed.) *South Africa's Indians: The Evolution of a Minority.* (Washington, 1979), p. 74.
[15] Swan, M. *Gandhi: The South African Experience.* (Johannesburg, 1985), pp. 43, 44.
[16] Natal Legislative Debates, 3rd Session, May 11 - August 28 1899, Vol XXVIII, p. 553.

There are indications that this racial tension went beyond a more rational explanation of real economic competition and it was suggested that 'to a considerable extent perceptions of the scale of their economic threat were exaggerated.'[17] During the period 1875-85, white hostility was very vocal even though the actual levels of competition were on a scale too small to give natural rise to the level of fear and hostility that arose towards Indians of all classes.[18] Huttenback is just one of those who describes the violent anti-Indianism that grew in which Indians were frequently insulted with labels such as 'black vermin'.[19] The *Natal Mercury* in 1895 reflected the social agitation amongst colonists when it spoke of the 'evils of immigrating 'coolies' with their low standard of living and morals'.[20] Swan suggests that notions of Indians carrying epidemic diseases often seemed to function not simply as rationalizations but as active motives or forces tending to shape perceptions and behavior in those who ruled.[21]

The antagonism towards the growing number of free Indians gradually took the form of demonstrations. In 1886, the Natal Working Men's Association petitioned the Governor, Sir Arthur Havelock to stop all future importation of Indians on the ground that 'artisans [and] small tradesmen would suffer from unfair competition.'[22] They expressed their fears about being swamped by Indian immigrants. The artisans among them were concerned about losing their jobs to free Indians, or about other Indians who had been specifically imported to do skilled work over which they believed they should have some kind of monopoly.[23] However, Lambert indicates that this was largely perceived competition, having observed that Indians were proving to be formidable rivals to the white traders and storekeepers of Durban, the mechanics and labourers of the city began to fear similar competition.[24]

On 30 December 1896, the famous 'anti-immigration' riot took place, where demonstrators marched to the Point, the main shipping centre at the Durban docks, to

[17] 'Report to the Indian Immigrants Commission, 1887' cited in Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 49.
[18] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 48.
[19] Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*. (Ithaca, 1976), p. 206.
[20] Brown, J. *Gandhi, Prisoner of Hope*. (New Haven, 1989). p. 32.
[21] Swan, 'The Asiatic Menace', p. 402.
[22] Petition of the Natal Working Man's Association (23 April 1886) quoted in Brain, 'Natal Indians, 1860 - 1910 from co-operation, through competition, to conflict', p. 257.
[23] Bhana, S. *Gandhi's Legacy, the Natal Indian Congress, 1894 - 1994*. (Pietermaritzburg, 1997) p. 14.
[24] Lambert, 'The Labour League and the Franchise Question in the Struggle for Responsible Government in Natal'. p. 74.

protest against the landing of Indians from two steamers.[25] About 2,000 people, many being of the artisan class, participated.[26] The demonstrators were protesting against the arrival of free Indians in general and Gandhi in particular.[27] The Natal Government sympathised with the demonstrations but could not legally prevent the landing of British subjects. In response to the demonstration, Escombe addressed people at the Point on 12 January 1897. He assured his audience that the Government would introduce legislation to meet the people's wishes, although he also emphasised that free Indians in Natal would be safe. This announcement was reported to have been 'coldly received' by the whites.[28] The Government was called upon to discuss the importation of the free Indians, pending the sanction of a permanent law by the Imperial Government.[29] The Natal Working Men's Association thought that the campaign for Responsible Government and the Indian question could run together. Robinson, who at that time was a leader of the pro-Responsible Government movement, disagreed.[30] The Association was, however, determined not to allow the question to be dropped and increasingly insisted that the question of Indian immigration be given precedence even over constitutional reforms.[31] The Association's continued struggle will be discussed along with Natal's campaign for Responsible Government.

Perceived Impact of Free Indians on Whites' Relationship with Africans

Some historians have argued that one of the whites' major concerns about the free Indians as opposed to indentured Indians was their perceived potential to disrupt the colonials' relationship with blacks.

Ginwala claims that the status of indentured Indian labour provided no challenge to the existing system of keeping Africans out of the colonial economic and political structure. With the introduction of indentured labour, a new set of labour laws was brought into being and the two systems operated and developed in parallel and had much in common.[32] Even though in terms of the law there was to be no discrimination on racial grounds, this had no

[25] Vane, M. 'The South African Indians, A Plea for Better Understanding', South African Affairs Pamphlets, 17, third series (no date). p. 9.
[26] Ibid. p. 10.
[27] Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal*. p. 183.
[28] Vane, 'The South African Indians' p.9
[29] Vane, 'The South African Indians' p.9.
[30] Lambert, 'The Labour League and the Franchise Question', p. 76.
[31] *Natal Mercury*. 29 July 1890 cited in Lambert, 'The Labour League and the Franchise Question', p. 77.
[32] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 44.

force in practical terms and the indentured Indians were not in a position to really question or affect this. [33]

The white-African relationship in Natal, however, was not particularly stable, especially towards the end of the century. Welsh emphasises that in the 1890s and early 1900s, Natal showed every sign of being a society that was running headlong into a major racial conflict.[34] Ginwala stresses that whites were aware that unfettered Indians could challenge the ideological justification of racial discrimination. This could have led to a disruption of the existing patterns and thus threaten the entire exploitative system in Southern Africa, although this is probably an overstatement. Indians, who naturally could not belong to the dominant class, had therefore to be placed into the same category as African workers. For indentured workers, this was obvious, but for non-indentured, it proved less feasible.[35] Non-indentured Indians constituted an anomaly within the pattern of economic relations and their more fluid position contributed to the growth of anti-Indian prejudice.

The Wragg Commission

Growing hostility towards Indians and irregularities in the employment of Indian workers increased to such an extent that the Natal Colonial Secretary was compelled to address these issues.[36] A commission was appointed in 1885, chaired by Judge Wragg, to consider the Indian situation in Natal, and its findings were published in 1887.[37] It was the second of three commissions, the first having taken place in 1872, but the Wragg Commission seems to have had the most impact on Indian policy. These commissions reflect that the Natal Government felt compelled, if not to hinder, then at least to monitor the racial agitation towards Indians. Recognition was given to the aggression experienced by Indians but it did not seem resolved to ensuring that these conditions were improved. Its main emphasis was the discontent with the Indian presence in Natal.[38] The Commission recognised that the 'preponderance of opinion in Natal' was that the Indians should be indentured during the whole period of [their] residence in the colony'.[39]

---

[33] Meer, *Portrait of Indian South Africans*. p. 23.
[34] Welsh, D. *The Roots of Segregation, Native Policy in Colonial Natal, 1845 - 1910*. (Cape Town, 1971), p. 294.
[35] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. pp. 47, 48.
[36] Henning, *The Indentured Indian in Natal (1860 - 1917)*, p. 68.
[37] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 273.
[38] Ibid. pp. 273, 274.
[39] Ibid. p. 274.

Natal Government's Responses

The issues of how Indians were dealt with came to have a direct impact on the white electorate.[40] The Wragg Commission concluded that it was apparent that the prejudices of the white electorate would have to be appeased by the government.[41] However, the Natal Government had to deal with the fact that the Indians formed a unique group who had been brought to the colony within the structure of the British Empire which entitled them to abide there afterwards. The 'passenger' Indians were particularly unpopular because they had come to the colony independently, meaning that there was no documentation apart from British citizenship to control their presence.

In the light of the reluctance of the pro-Responsible Government leaders to embrace the anti-Indian cause, the Working Men's Association decided to form a Labour League to contest the election solely on a platform of legislation against Indians.[42] Yet, Lambert has pointed out that the Labour League did not enlist any considerable support among Durban workers who seemed to have been largely apathetic to its formation.[43] Ironically, it was the Indians themselves who gave momentum to the campaign to legislate against them. The few Indians who had the vote, decided to oppose the proposal for Responsible Government. This resulted in the pooling of resources of the pro-Responsible Forward Party and the Labour League to confront the so-called common enemy.[44]

Even though Natal was a young settler colony, white settlers had started to assume partial responsibility for the administration of the colony and its economic and political activities, rather than these roles being assumed solely by the interests of the metropole, Britain.[45] Inevitably, settlers came to question their commitment to many of the British policies. In particular, they felt as a minority group, the relatively liberal policies towards black populations that British authorities professed, were not suited to their circumstances. Thus, the Natal colonials demanded greater control over their racial affairs.

A most significant turning point for the legislation affecting Indians was when Britain agreed to give Natal Responsible Government in 1893. When they did gain Responsible Government, the whites became the dominant governing minority in a complex ethnic

---

[40] Ibid. p. 273.
[41] Meer, *Portrait of Indian South Africans*. (Durban, 1969), p. 26.
[42] Lambert, 'The Labour League and the Franchise Question', p. 77.
[43] Ibid. p. 78.
[44] Ibid. p. 82.
[45] Davies, R.J. *City in transition: outlines of residential segregation in a post-settler colonial city - Salisbury/ Harare*. (Cape Town, 1990), p. 4.

community.[46] Gandhi later wrote that Natal, having gained Responsible Government, then really began to feel its strength.[47] Although prior to 1893 a number of trends had been established and laws passed which were to shape the future of Indians, Natal achieved Responsible Government at the time when the anti-Indian campaign was gathering momentum,[48] and the Government responded with key discriminatory legislation.[49]

Policies Impacting on Indentured Indians

According to Ginwala, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century there were three parallel developments in Natal that affected indentured labourers. These were an increasing manifestation of popular white 'hostility' towards Indians; a steady deterioration in the conditions of indentured labour, especially in terms of their contracts; and an increase in the numbers being brought to Natal.[50] This in turn impacted on the former two trends.

The Natal employers of indentured labour pushed for increasing rights to exploit their labour sources. One of their earlier successes came in 1862 when the Indian Government approved of an extension of the indentured contracts from three years to five years. Natal fixed this term in Law 17 of 1864.[51] In addition to this, at the end of their five year contracts, indentureds were no longer entitled to a free journey home and had to reindenture themselves for a further five years if they wanted to claim that option.[52]

The Government constantly debated the merits of spending public money on the private venture of the sugar industry, especially since the result was a drastic rise in the Indian population. In 1891, within the period of thirteen years, the Indian population had increased by 200 per cent, from 10, 000 to 30, 000.[53] A solution to the problem was believed to be to prolong the indentureds' contracts as well as to terminate their contracts back in India.

With the introduction of Responsible Government, more aggressive action was taken.[54] The Government's statements did not find favour with all colonials and there were

---

[46] Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion.* p. 9.
[47] Narayan, S. *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol III, Satyagraha in South Africa.* (Ahmedabad, 1969), p. 37.
[48] Davenport, *South Africa, A Modern History.* p. 105.
[49] Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience.* p. 43.
[50] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 58.
[51] Malherbe and Mesthrie. *Not Slave, Not Free.* p. 31.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Henderson,(ed.), *Speeches of the Late Right Honourable Harry Escombe.* (Pietermaritzburg, no date), p. 191.
[54] Ibid, p. 336.

those who continued to favour the option of stopping Indian immigration altogether.[55] The new Responsible Government wanted to bring legislation against indentured labour that included forcible repatriation, the signing of new forms and an annual tax of £25 to be paid by ex-indentured labourers.[56] The tax was intended, ironically, to help alleviate the cost of importing Indians[57] as well as to encourage repatriation. In January 1894, Binns and Mason, who was currently the Indians' Protector, were sent to India to negotiate better terms for the planters and colonials in general.[58] Their aim was to reduce the number of ex-indentured Indians who settled in the colony and they used population statistics to reinforce their case. They told the Indian Government that the population of Natal included 470,000 Africans 45,000 whites and 46,000 Indians. Tinker suggests that the last figure was probably inflated to add emphasis to the whites' vulnerable position in the colony.[59] Binns and Mason stressed that there was a strong feeling against the 'Arabs' and it was felt that if the permanent Indian population in Natal could be cut down, fewer 'Arabs', would come to the colony. Stein introduces an interesting merging concept which is that the problems experienced by the free and indentured Indians were closely linked in that the one's presence impacted on the other, and only in connection with their place of origin, languages and means of coming out to Natal, need they be considered apart.[60]

The Government of India turned down suggestions that indenture be terminated in India, or that labourers be required to accept two consecutive terms of indenture (10 years).[61] These aggressive political proposals were also strongly opposed by the Natal Indian Congress as will later be discussed, and the Natal Government only succeeded in persuading the Indian Government to allow a £3 annual tax on ex-indentured labourers.

Policies Impacting on Free Indians

In 1875, Lord Salisbury, the Secretary of State, declared 'the colonial laws and their administration will be such that Indian settlers who have completed the terms of service to which they agreed ... will be in all respects free men, with privileges no whit inferior to those

[55] Meer, *Portrait of Indian South Africans.* p. 26.
[56] Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* (Ahmedabad, 1948), p.194.
[57] *Natal Witness*, 27 April 1894, 1 May 1894, 2 May 1894 cited in Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 37.
[58] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery.* p. 281.
[59] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery.* p. 281.
[60] Stein, 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893'. p. 45.
[61] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 61.

of any other class of Her Majesty's subjects resident in the colonies'. [62] This statement came to be regarded as a fount of Indians' rights and status in the Empire. Yet, it was to be challenged and ultimately overthrown by the pressure exerted by the colonists. In all this the Natal Government's response to free Indians was complex for there are some examples of protection being offered, mainly in the earlier years. Yet, as the free Indian population grew, and their perceived economic threat and potential to disrupt the exploitative white-African relationship became apparent, legislation reflected the colonists' growing hostility.

There were three developments in the Natal Government's approach to control Indians. The first two were social controls through attempted residential segregation and political exclusion, trends that were developed in the 1870s and 1880s. In 1888 Indians were classified as members of an 'uncivilised race' by the Registration of Servants Laws.[63] Yet in the 1890s there was an even more determined and concerted pursuit of commercial exclusion and suppression.[64]

A study of Escombe's speeches reveals that the Natal Government shifted from appearing to dilute whites' concerns regarding free Indians, to more seriously taking the colonists' side. His earlier speeches often had a fairly light-hearted tone but by June 1890 his words showed a change in attitude and acknowledged 'a real honest feeling which [was] in the Colony' when he said 'this Colony is meant to be a European Colony and not to be an Asiatic Colony.'[65] Brain, however, suggests that Escombe was often a lone voice as he appealed to his colleagues and his constituents to adopt a more reasonable attitude towards Indians.[66]

'Passenger' Indians in particular caused ill-ease amongst the whites and the Natal Government drew a definite distinction between the ex-indentured and 'passenger' Indians. The term 'Indian immigrant' in Natal legislation applied only to ex-indentured Indians and their descendants and not to the 'passenger' Indians. These 'Indian immigrants' were offered a degree of protection by the Protector's Office.[67] There were occasions when whites showed a degree of class respect for the 'passenger' Indians who were often more educated and wealthier but this was accompanied by racial resentment, creating a racial ambiguity.

---

[62] Tinker cited in Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 62.
[63] Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*. p. 195.
[64] Swan, The Asiatic Menace' p. 405.
[65] Henderson, (ed.), *Speeches of the Late Right Honourable Harry Escombe*. p. 154.
[66] Brain, 'Natal Indians, 1860 - 1910 from co-operation, through competition, to conflict', p. 262.
[67] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 50.

In order to protect their economic holdings, merchant Indians and other free Indians frequently sought to distinguish themselves from the Indian underclasses. Equally, Ginwala suggests that the mere presence of persons who were identifiably not of the dominant class, but who were outside of the economically subordinate class, was not welcomed. Free Indians either overtly or unintentionally challenged the ideology that provided for unequal economic relations with blacks: hence, their economic and political advancement needed to be vehemently resisted.[68] Whites were aware of the class differences that the free Indians (predominantly the 'passenger' Indians) were attempting to promote and were not impressed by them. This social irony placed the free Indians in a frustrating position when trying to promote their own cause. As will be seen, Gandhi and the free Indians generally attempted to be tactful and diplomatic in their political approach, including their offer to serve in the South Africa War. This resulted in varying degrees of success.

The laws relating to free Indians over time became less inclined to distinguish them as a special group. In the 1870s, when Natal sought to resume worker recruitment, the Government of India insisted upon certain reforms and safeguards for Indians as a condition. These reforms enacted from 1872-4 specifically differentiated non-indentured labour from African labour.[69] For a period on completion of their contracts, Indians were distinguished from all other labour both black and white. For this part, the planters petitioned against the reforms.[70] In the following years, legislation that differentiated black from white labour was also applied against free Indians whenever possible. Where white and Indian labour were legally equated, administrative and customary practice frequently operated to differentiate the two. In general there was constant pressure by all sections of the white community to equate the status of Indians and Africans.[71]

One of the first major moves on discriminatory legislation was the attack on the Indian franchise. The attitude of the Natal Legislative Council towards the Indian franchise question was not consistent nor unanimous but as the Indian population grew, so did the colonists' opposition to their exercise of the franchise. Moreover, the colonials and the government became increasingly aware of a possible response from the African population to the Indian franchise. The number of Africans who wished 'to rise in the scale of society' was indeed growing in the later nineteenth century, but at the same time the colonists' determination to

[68] Ibid. p. 54.
[69] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 50.
[70] Ibid. p. 51.

prevent this was hardening.[72] The whites were in a precarious political position, yet the official stance of the Empire was no discrimination on grounds of race. What this meant was that both the British and Natal Governments were agreed that the franchise was a privilege to be exercised by 'civilised' people only; this allowed them the opportunity to discriminate on grounds of culture and class.[73] Whatever the basis, however, after Natal gained responsible government, the Indians were less able to turn to the British and Indian Government for support.

Although the number of Indians who were able to vote at the end of the century was very small, it gave them some access to the colonial ruling structure. When in 1883 new qualifications for the franchise were enumerated, persons who were under the jurisdiction of special courts or subject to separate laws were deprived of the vote, unless in addition to the property qualification they were able to write an application in English and Dutch.[74] The difficulty that ex-indentured Indians were then experiencing in qualifying for the franchise was only to become worse in subsequent years. However, the Natal Government was faced with the challenges of its own legislature and if residents possessed the necessary property qualifications, they could still register for the vote.[75] In 1879, complaints were registered over the lax way in which Resident Magistrates enlisted the names of Indian voters.[76]

White traders in particular became increasingly aware that according to the law, free Indians were entitled to vote in the elections for the Legislative Assembly of Natal and to stand as candidates for the same.[77] James Saunders, on a visit to London in 1882, spoke to the Colonial Office about the growing Indian population,[78] insisting that 'the risk of the overwhelming proportion of votes falling into the hands of men alien in every sense to the English government must sooner or later be dealt with.'[79] It is significant that the free Indian population was about equal to the whites[80] which meant that free Indians had the potential to offer a real threat to the whites' dominance.

---

[71] Ibid p. 50.
[72] Welsh, *The Roots of Segration, Native Policy in Colonial Natal, 1845 - 1910.* p. 65.
[73] Ibid. p. 51.
[74] Ginwala. 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 52.
[75] Stein, 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893'. p. 45.
[76] Ibid. p. 47.
[77] Narayan, *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 38.
[78] Stein, 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893'. p. 47.
[79] Ibid. p. 48.
[80] Ibid. p. 45.

In 1894, the bill amending the Indians' franchise proposed[81] that except for those who already held the parliamentary franchise, 'no persons belonging to Asiatic races could qualify for the vote.'[82] But Lord Ripon as the Colonial Secretary would not pass the Bill,[83]as he would not tolerate its racial prejudice. Still no clear-cut decision was given, leaving it open for revision when a new ministry assumed office in the Colonial Office in June 1895.[84] By May 1896 a new and more subtly worded franchise bill designed to do the same job as the old one was passing through the Natal Assembly and by August the Colonial Office, under Chamberlain, had assented to the Bill.[85] Whilst the new Bill was not directly racist, Escombe as Attorney-General did not attempt to disguise its intentions. He said 'there need be no concealment with regard to the intention of the Bill. The Bill is to prevent Indians who might

flood the Colony ...become members of the constituent bodies by having their names of the Voter's Roll, and so be allowed to influence the legislation of the future in a country which is largely peopled by Natives as well as by Europeans.[86]The merchants witnessed that their political prognosis that the arrival of Responsible Government would be the end of the 'calm before the storm' was accurate. Swan suggests that what was more significant for the Indians' future than loosing their franchise was that the campaign reflected the hostility of the ruling white minority towards Indians.[87] Natal's first Legislative Assembly under Responsible Government demonstrated that the merchants' commercial interests would be a future target of attack, as they had already been in the Transvaal and the Free State.[88]

Early agitation for legislation against the merchant traders was presented in July 1885 when the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Commerce sent in a petition to the government, asking for various restrictions to be put on 'Arab' traders.[89] The Dealer's License Act was also passed in the 1897. [90] The law was intended to prohibit as many Indians from trading as possible.[91]

---

[81] CO 179/188/8751 Government to Secretary of State. (27 April 1894) cited in Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience*. p. 45.
[82] CO 179/189/14248, Minutes by Fiddes (17 November 1894) and Peace to Fairfield 4 December 1894) cited in Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience*. p. 45.
[83] Rudé, *Protest and Punishment* cited in Swan, *Gandhi: the South African Experience*. p. 67.
[84] Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience*, p. 67.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Natal Legislative Debates, 4th Session, April 25 - July 11 1896, Vol. IV. p. 45.
[87] Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience*, p. 45.
[88] Ibid. p. 46.
[89] Stein, 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1892'. p. 44.
[90] Debates of the Legislative Assembly, vol. 25, 73, (25 March 1897) cited in Bhana, S. 'Indian Trade and Trader in Colonial Natal', p. 245.

Wyley emphasises that restrictions on trade licensing were introduced as a direct result of pressure exerted upon Natal parliamentarians by the public and borough authorities. For instance, Prime Minister Escombe was under pressure to give in to the demands of the Patriotic Union, an association of white Durbanites established to oppose Indian immigration.[92]

The issue of Indian immigration became a major issue which was discussed almost every year in the 1890s by the Natal Legislative Assembly.[93] In 1897 the Government passed the Immigration Restriction Act which was intended to curb independent Indian immigration. It required prospective immigrants to own property valued at £25 or more and to pass a literacy test in a European language. This subtle solution to the migration of non-white races within the Empire did not have any directly racial qualifications and it became known as the 'Natal Formula' becoming adopted in other colonies in subsequent years.[94]

Other restrictions on freedom of movement were placed on ex-indentured immigrants, who had to get licences to leave the colony and carry passes in order to prove that they were no longer indentured.[95] Indians also experienced restrictions on trains and on trams, exclusion from public swimming baths and beaches, and were not allowed to reside in hotels. Moreover, insults from government officials were a source of annoyance, especially to rate-payers and educated Indians.[96]

[91] Bhana,'Indian Trade and Trader in Colonial Natal', pp. 246, 247.
[92] Wyley, 'The Natal Dealer's Licenses Act of 1897', p. 20.
[93] see for Natal Legislative Debates of 1894, 1896, 1895, 1897
[94] Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*. p. 141.
[95] Stein, 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893' p. 61.
[96] Ibid. p. 62.

3

Introduction of Gandhi and the Development of Free Indian Politics

Gandhi's Early Life

Curiously, whilst spirituality was to become such an integral part of Gandhi's leadership, he was not born into the *Brahmin* caste that was supposed to have provided Hinduism with its hereditary philosophical and religious elite, as his father was a member of the *vaiyas* caste of shopkeepers and petty tradesmen.[1] Yet, his grandfather and father were both prime ministers to the court of the Prince of Porbandar,[2] which would have introduced Gandhi to the proceedings of Indian political life. As a result of his father's death, Gandhi was sent to England to study law so that he, too, might become prime minister of a princely state.[3]

Scholars argue that as a young student he seemed unsure of himself, but nonetheless, his legal training would have been a valuable introduction to British legal and political structures. Collins and Lapiere describe how he made an unsuccessful attempt to try to acculturate himself and adopt some European habits,[4] but this did not prevent him from continuing to contemplate and digest certain English ideas and approaches in his early career in Natal and the Transvaal. Pillay also concludes that while studying in London, Gandhi had come to admire the British Constitution[5] and this respect is marked in the early stage of his political career.

After he was called to the bar, Gandhi rushed back to India with undisguised relief. Yet his homecoming was less than triumphant. For months, he wandered around Bombay courts looking for a case to plead. This failure led to the first great turning point in Gandhi's life. His frustrated family sent him to South Africa to unravel the legal problems of a distant kinsman. His trip was to have lasted a few months but he ended up staying over twenty years.[6]

---

[1] Collins, L and D. Lapiere, *Freedom at Midnight: the Epic Drama of India's Struggle for* Independence. (London, 1997) p. 49.
[2] Vane, 'The South African Indians, A Plea for Better Understanding'. p. 6.
[3] Collins, and Lapiere, *Freedom at Midnight.* p. 49.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Pillay, B., *Transvaal: Trade, Politics and Imperial Relations, 1885 – 1906.* (London, 1976), p. 113.
[6] Collins, and Lapiere, *Freedom at Midnight.* p. 50.

Gandhi's Introduction to Natal

Nothing about the young Gandhi walking down a gangplank in Durban harbour in May 1893 indicated a vocation for asceticism or saintliness. The future 'prophet of poverty' arrived in South Africa wearing a high white collar and the fashionable frock coat of a London Inner Temple barrister, his brief-case crammed with documents on the rich Indian businessman whose interests he had come to defend.[7]

When Gandhi left India for South Africa in 1893 he admits that he 'had no idea of the previous history of the Indian emigrants' and said 'I went there on a purely professional visit.'[8] When trying to analyse the philosophies that Gandhi adhered to in Natal and the Transvaal prior to the war, one must allow for some contradictions and changing stances because it was during his time in these places that he really started to formulate his political opinions.

Gandhi's introduction to racial prejudice in the South African colonies and republics came a week after his arrival on an overnight train ride from Durban to Pretoria. Halfway to Pretoria, he was approached by a white man and ordered into the baggage car. Gandhi, who held a first-class ticket, refused. The individual subsequently had Gandhi thrown off the train in the middle of the night.[9] This experience has been popularly remembered as Gandhi's metamorphosis experience and he claimed, four decades later, that he could recall the incident as a turning point. He passed the night, pondering his first brutal confrontation with racism and praying to the Hindu God of the *Gita* for courage and guidance, the next morning the timid, withdrawn man was a so-called 'changed man', ready to denounce oppression and prejudice.[10] Such at any rate is the classic Gandhi folklore version.

Gandhi's Leadership Philosophies and the Response they Received

Recognition should be given to the fact that some of Gandhi's ideas were better received than others. Some of Gandhi's contemporaries did not welcome his early insistence on cross-cultural borrowing. For example, he received criticism for his early reactions to colonial rule. Despite being concerned about the oppression that the British

[7] Collins, and Lapiere, *Freedom at Midnight.* p. 51.
[8] Narayan, (ed.) *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 54.
[9] Collins, and Lapiere, *Freedom at Midnight.* p. 51.
[10] Ibid. p.50.

had brought to India, at that stage he was loyal to the British and their policies.[11] This loyalty would go on to be a driving force in the Indian decision to serve the British in the South African War. According to Parekh, Gandhi concluded that the British had come to India because of the inner compulsions of this modern civilisation; they had been able to consolidate their rule because of their ability to legitimise it through a developed ideological language, thereby making their rule not merely political but also moral and cultural. Therefore, Indians had to respond to British rule at both a political but also at a moral and cultural level.[12] In Natal, he was faced with an extension of the British Empire and a new colony, and both the metropole and the colony had their own economic interests and political agenda to serve. This meant that Indians had to take responsibility for their own conditions. The Indians came to learn that the colonists' needs would always take precedence and thus they would have to find ways of defending their position in the colony.

Gandhi felt the Indians needed to undergo national self-examination.[13] When the Natal government passed discriminatory laws against the Indians, the latter either accepted or resorted to devious ways of circumventing them. When Gandhi urged the Natal Indians to protest, he sometimes found that they lacked readiness and expected him to do their fighting for them. Gandhi was not surprised that as a result the Government became bolder and passed increasingly oppressive laws.[14] His reflections on his Southern African experience led him to several interrelated 'discoveries' and he started to develop a theory of how victimisation was not merely the result of the oppressor's actions but also the fault of the oppressed for accepting their condition.[15]

Despite there being a degree of questioning from others about his leadership philosophies, Gandhi became very influential with a strong ability to motivate Indians into action.

Formation of the Natal Indian Congress

One must be wary of a total Gandhi-centric outlook on Indian political development and be alert to the complex, interactive process that created the path of the Indians' political

[11] Parekh, B. *Gandhi's Political Philosophy, a Critical Examination.* (London, 1989), p. 34.
[12] Ibid. p. 15.
[13] Ibid. p. 45.
[14] Ibid. p. 154.
[15] Ibid.

experience. Although, there is debate over the level of Indians' political awareness prior to Gandhi's arrival, one has to acknowledge that the politically-conscious Indians had already taken some action. In 1890, the Durban Indian Committee had been formed, representing trading interests of the merchant class in Natal as well as the Transvaal and Orange Free State.[16] It was headed by the prominent merchants Dada Abdulla and Haji Mohamed Haji Dada, and included in its membership were Abdullah Haji Adam and Mohamed Cassim Camroodeen. Its members began petitioning the Colonial Office and Officials in India, arguing that Responsible Government in Natal 'would do us incalculable harm.'[17] Swan suggests that by the time the Natal Indian Congress was established in 1894, their political priorities had been firmly established and a tentative start made on a political organisation, and that Gandhi helped the organisation to fulfill their objectives rather than to determine their priorities. She claims that Gandhi was able to fill a need and was drawn into merchant politics when there was an urgency for a full-time organiser, preferably fluent in Gujerati and English and with a legal training.[18]

Aside from the discussion about how organised Indian politics were in general, there is also a degree of questioning as to how ready Gandhi was to assume a leadership position. Brown says that he and his associates needed to become 'accustomed to speaking in public and to working amongst the Indian community, recruiting support'.[19] Despite the assertive role Gandhi assumed, Brown argues that Gandhi was not eager to be a public man. Rather, the position was thrust on him by the growing urgency of the Indians' situation and the seeming incapacity of any other Indian to champion the community.[20] Nonetheless, within a short period, he displayed a remarkable ability to mobilise his fellow Indians, so much so that Robert concludes that Gandhi was aided not only by the extraordinary veneration felt for his character but by his own acute political intuition and efficient and astute organisational abilities.[21] His training as a lawyer would have honed his skills in recognising bias in white political discourse towards Indians, as well as how to put together effective and legally-viable responses to these biases. He had observed the Imperial state in a developed form in

[16] Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience* cited in Padayachee, V. and R. Morrell., 'Indian Merchants and Dukawallahs in the Natal Economy', p. 95.
[17] Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience*, cited in Wyley, 'The Natal Dealer's Licenses Act of 1897', p. 19.
[18] Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience*. p. 38.
[19] Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*. p. 47.
[20] Gandhi to Dadabhai Naoroji (5 July 1894) cited in Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*. p. 34.
[21] Robert, P.E. *History of British India: Under the Company and the Crown*. (London, 1958), p. 591.

Britain, and in distorted colonial forms in Natal and India and he gradually came to understand how the government was interlocked with the dominant political and economic interests of the state and upheld the prevailing social order.[22]

A week after his arrival, Gandhi delivered his first public speech to the Indians in Pretoria. The advocate who had been so painfully shy in the courtrooms of Bombay, began to find his political strength. The meeting was attended principally by Memon merchants and Gandhi believed that he had made 'a considerable impression on the meeting.'[23] He suggested the formation of an association to make representations to the authorities concerning the hardships of Indian settlers.[24] A committee was formed which in May 1894 was converted into the Natal Indian Congress.[25] It is important to try to understand the composition of the Natal Indian Congress because, whereas it does not necessarily imply that the members' concerns were given exclusive attention, it does reflect who had the opportunity to decide which issues would be focused on. The early debates and campaigns of the Natal Indian Congress are also relevant to later Indian involvement in the South African War, as they help to offer a broader understanding of their motivation to participate.

Prior to the actual formation of the Natal Indian Congress, Sheth Haji Muhammad Haji Dada was regarded as the foremost leader of the Indian community in Natal, although he was not the most affluent of the merchants. When the free Indians took the decision to oppose the Franchise Bill, the meeting was held under his presidentship.[26] Abdulla Hajee Adam was the first president of the Natal Indian Congress and all the early presidents of the Natal Indian Congress's were prominent merchants.[27] Abdulla Hajee Adam was assisted by 23 vice-presidents, an honorary secretary and 37 other members of the Congress Committee. A body of 52 was too large to carry out the day-to-day operations of the Natal Indian Congress and the work was evidently entrusted to a small core, with Gandhi as secretary, taking responsibility for the administration of the organisation. Rajmohan Gandhi suggests that Gandhi

---

[22] Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, p. 110.
[23] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or the Story of my Experiences with Truth.* p. 156.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Gandhi, R. 'The Origins and Growth of Satyagraha: Gandhi's Reaction to the Conditions of Indians in South Africa', Shanti Sadiq Ali (ed.), *Gandhi and South Africa.* (no place, 1994). p. 127.
[26] Ibid. p. 171.
[27] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 1.

wanted to assume a quiet authority.[28] This may have been the case, or else possibly he wanted other Indians to assume the main leadership positions in order to encourage them to appropriate the organisation as their own. Whatever the motive, Bhana describes his work as 'energetic' and 'thorough and meticulous.'[29]

The people who volunteered to enroll in the Natal Indian Congress were mostly Natal-born Indians, many of these local merchants. These included some of Durban's largest property-holders such as Abubakar Amod, Dada Abdullah, Mohammed Isak and R Naidoo, Moosa Hadji Cassim and Davad Mahomed who later served as Vice-Presidents, and Adamj Miankhan who was Gandhi's replacement as secretary.[30] Among others who joined were men from the clerical class and unskilled wage-earners.[31] Many Christian Indian youths also joined as volunteers.[32] Gandhi claimed that 'in the face of the calamity that had overtaken the community, all distinction such as high and low, small and great, master and servant, Hindus, Musalmans, Parsis, Christians, Gujaratis, Madrasis, Sindhis etc. were forgotten. All were alike the children and servants of the motherland.'[33] The *Natal Mercury* of October 6, 1895, then asked 'How is it that Sepoys and Mussalmans (presumably meaning Hindus and Muslims) who are at deadly enmity in their own country, Bombay and Mauritius, etc. are now [in Natal] working together with such zealous fervour?'[34] Equally, it must be stated that those distinctions that were being overlooked were predominantly the cultural or religious distinctions of the free Indians, rather than the class differences of the whole community.

Predictably it was the leading merchants who made up the financial backbone of the Natal Indian Congress, and the net was cast widely to incorporate those in Verulam, Pietermaritzburg, Newcastle and Charlestown. The organisers of the Congress were expected to have regional branches but the official Natal Indian Congress reports are silent about these. Bhana notes that in practice, the Natal Indian Congress was Durban-centred.[35]

---

[28] Gandhi,R. 'The Origins and Growth of Satyagraha' p. 126.
[29] Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy, the Natal Indian Congress, 1894 - 1994* (New Haven, 1989), p. 12.
[30] Swanson, 'The Asiatic Menace', p. 419.
[31] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* p. 176.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] The *Natal Mercury* quoted in Gandhi, R. 'The Origins and Growth of Satyagraha'. p. 127.

The organisation's official aim was to reach all Indians, but the high subscription rate undermined that ambition and the indentured labourers were still outside the pale of the Natal Indian Congress.[36] Swan argues that Gandhi shared the merchants' ideologies.[37] In the course of his first two or three days in Natal, Gandhi observed the class breakdown of the free Indian community. Gandhi commented that the free Indian and 'passenger' Indian classes had some social relations with one another but that they had nothing but business relations with the indentured labourer class.[38] Pahad confirms this, saying that until the experience of uniform legislation after 1900, the two streams of Indian immigrants had very little in common, except for the epithet Indian, as a result of the economic, religious, cultural and linguistic differences which characterized the Indian population.[39] The divisions in the society concerned Gandhi, as he saw them as only hindering the Indians' fight against discrimination.[40] Similarly, Gandhi recongnised the divisions created by religion and language. Yet understanding Gandhi's ideologies is not a simple issue because of the contradictions and ambiguities that arise, especially in these early years. He either adhered to the apparent 'classist' attitudes of the merchants, or he attempted to convert them. Gandhi defended the state of free Indian politics up until 1893, saying that since the free traders saw themselves as the chief target of attack, their measures for defence were limited to that class.[41] Tinker confirms this[42] as does Bhana, saying that while the leaders of the Indian communities in Natal were only slowly becoming alert to the threat facing their future, in the early period the Natal Indian Congress was dominated by wealthy Indian merchants who hoped to resolve the issues relating to their own interests. They did this by appealing to the Imperial doctrine of equality,[43]which needed to be combined with the concept of 'respectable' free Indians having reached a level of desirability.

With the substantial representation of the commercial elite on the Natal Indian Congress executive, it is not surprising that the organisation was concerned with the

---

[35] First Report of the Natal Indian Congress, August 1895 cited in Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy, the Natal Indian Congress*. p. 10.
[36] Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy, the Natal Indian Congress, 1894 - 1994*. p. 10.
[37] Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience*. p. 38.
[38] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiences with Truth*. p. 136.
[39] Pahad cited in Davenport, *South Africa, A Modern History*. p. 9.
[40] Meer, *Portrait of Indian South Africans*. p. 28.
[41] Narayan, (ed.) *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. pp. 53, 54.
[42] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 283.
[43] Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy: the Natal Indian Congress, 1894 - 1994*. p. 1.

issues that most affected their interests, namely trade and immigration.[44] Yet, Gandhi and the Natal Indian Congress did not limit themselves to exclusive elitist-orientated activities while the indentured Indians were not given a direct opportunity to voice their grievances, Gandhi was nevertheless becoming aware of their state and argued that though 'the Congress was not yet theirs .... [the Congress] could win their attachment' through representing their needs.[45] Still, Naidoo contends that Gandhi drew a distinction between the Indians who were in South Africa to 'toil' and the Indians who were there to 'trade'. He was convinced that the position of the indentured Indian was one of contract whereas the position of the trade Indians was one of imperial relations.[46] The fate of the indentured labourers, as Gandhi saw it, had already been decided as the laws defining their status could not be redefined.[47] This attitude would still be applicable to the Natal Indian Congress' defense of the poll tax, to be discussed shortly, as the tax was only to be applied when indentured labourers ended their contracts. However, Gandhi recognised that as long as one sector of the Indian population was discriminated against, racial prejudice would develop and soon the whole population would feel the antagonism. One could possibly view Gandhi as according priority to the plight of both the indentured and free Indians but discretely segregating them. The complications in understanding the relationship between the free Indians, especially the wealthier merchants, and indentured Indians and whether or not they shared a sense of community, would be clearly reflected during the war period.

Gandhi was particularly concerned about the Indians' lack of self-respect and how to a large extent they seemed to have accepted a subservient position in Natal society.[48] For Gandhi, courage was also one of the highest human virtues, and he saw the Hindus as having become woefully deficient in it. He insisted that 'no revolution is possible till we build our character'.[49] Thus, he promoted self-respect amongst the Indians, and this is one of the areas where he seemed to differentiate between indentured and free Indians, feeling that free Indians should distinguish themselves as having advanced in society in terms of education and wealth. Gandhi encouraged free Indians to show that they had acculturated themselves and had become 'civil' enough to

[44] Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy: the Natal Indian Congress, 1894 - 1994*. p. 1.
[45] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiences with Truth*. p. 190.
[46] *Indian Opinion*, 1906. Cited in Naidoo, 'Clio and the Mahatma', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 4, 1990, p. 745.
[47] Naidoo, 'Clio and the Mahatma', p. 745.
[48] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiences with Truth*. p. 134.
[49] Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*. p. 46.

be regarded as equal members of European society.[50] He thus supported a campaign organised by the free Indians and especially the Musalman traders to resist being wrongly described as 'coolies'. Gandhi always claimed as a matter of course that the reasons for drawing a distinction between indentured and free Indians were not exclusive to South Africa but were linked to conditions peculiar to India.[51]

One of his first 'successes' was when he wrung from the railway authorities the right for well-dressed Indians to travel first- or second-class on South African railways.[52] This was a victory against racialism to an extent but still excluded the poorer sectors of the free population and the indentured Indians. Certainly, this type of sectional campaign was a far cry from the Gandhi who in future years would wear only his self-spun cotton cloth as part of his allegiance with the poor.

Linked to self-respect was the Indians' self-presentation. Gandhi sought 'internal improvement' in the Indians and later, he and his Congress associates initiated lectures and discussions on sanitation, hygiene and 'the necessity of having separate buildings for houses and shops and for well-to-do traders (to live) in a style befitting their position'.[53] At the same time, however, attempts were made to refute through newspaper correspondence, the derogatory labels that had been placed on Indians. Newspapers were supplied with information about the Indian movement and whenever Indians were unfairly attacked in the press, they sent replies to the newspapers concerned.[54] Gandhi insisted that in nationalist terms, 'their responsibility to be truthful was all the greater in a foreign land because the conduct of a few Indians was the measure of that of the millions of [their] fellow countrymen.'[55] He was always aware of how the Indians' actions would impact not only on their lives in Natal and the Transvaal but could also have repercussions overseas in India and in other colonies.

However, Gandhi's work extended beyond supporting the merchant Indians' cause and he also aimed to assist less affluent and educated Indians. He started to look for practical solutions to overcome the obstacles he saw as hindering Indians from bettering their position and treatment in the colony. Parekh stresses that Gandhi has been one of the few prominent people in history to fight simultaneously on moral,

---

[50] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* p. 164.
[51] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 53.
[52] Collins, and Lapiere, *Freedom at Midnight.* p. 52.
[53] Gandhi, R. 'The Origins and Growth of Satyagraha', p. 127.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.

religious, political, social, economic and cultural fronts.[56] Gandhi recognised the attempts the free Indians had made to fight against their difficulties. Yet they had been 'seriously handicapped', being 'ignorant of English', and with 'no experience of public work in India'. They had sought the help of European barristers and had petitions prepared for them,[57] but Gandhi came to realise that Indians would struggle to represent themselves if they were unable to speak English. Accordingly, he urged the Indians to unite in order to defend their interests and, as a first step, to learn how to communicate in their oppressors' English tongue.[58] Gandhi believed education would contribute to unifying the Indian community through improved communication, as well as advancing their position in political campaigns. Up until 1893 there were hardly any free and well-educated Indians in South Africa capable of espousing the Indian cause. Thus, the need to educate a larger sector of the population to speak English assumed great importance. Naidoo argues that Gandhi was not out to safeguard commercial interests, at least not primarily or exclusively, but instead to foster education: this was a principle he considered higher than mere trading rights.[59] Yet even though education did assume a level of importance, the merchant Indian community still prioritised their economic interests in their political actions.

When the Natal Indian Congress was formed, one of its main purposes was to ensure a better understanding of the position of the Indians by Natal's white colonists.[60] At the time the Natal Indian Congress was founded, some whites tended to perceive it as a secret organisation with sinister motives. The organisers sought to reassure them that their purpose was indeed to promote 'concord and harmony' with whites, and towards this end invited a white to serve as a vice-president.[61] They were anxious to present themselves as prepared to co-operate within colonial structures and not as wanting to disrupt it or bring it into disrepute. This attitude was to be carried through to their approach to the war. They knew if they were too aggressive in their approach, there was the risk of being subjected to further discrimination.

[56] Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*. p. 4.
[57] Ibid. pp. 53, 54.
[58] Collins and Lapiere, *Freedom at Midnight*. p. 51.
[59] Naidoo, 'Clio and the Mahatma' p. 743.
[60] Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy*. p. 9.
[61] Ibid. p. 10.

The Indians, in the short period between Gandhi's arrival and the war, achieved a fair degree of publicity even though their political campaigns were relatively unsuccessful. For all that, Brown's perception indicates the greater problems that awaited them in the future. She shows that in these early years of the Congress, the local government and London were still approachable. Pressure could be put on white settlers in South Africa and appeals made to liberal opinion in England and educated opinion in India.[62] Furthermore, she points out that the Indian Government was interested in the colonial Indians' complaints, largely because of concern about a reaction from India's educated public. [63]

Publicising the Indians' Concerns

A major activity of the Congress was propaganda and correspondence through which it aimed to create local and international awareness of the Indians' position in Natal and the Transvaal.[64] Gandhi maintained a list of friendly newspapers and individuals, and utilized these contacts for the distribution of open letters on Indian problems.[65] In the first year alone, after the formation of the Natal Indian Congress, more than 1,000 letters were written to persons and organisations inside South Africa and abroad in connection with the franchise and immigration legislation and the petitions of the Transvaal merchants.[66] In India, Anglo-Indian papers such as *The Statesman* and *The Englishman* showed concern for these Indians abroad. This turned out to be most useful, as these papers enjoyed the support of sympathetic English residents.[67] Sir William Wilson Hunter, the editor of the Indian section of the *Times* in London also highlighted the Indians' cause. In Gandhi's view, 'he discussed our question in its true perspective'.[68] Within Natal, Gandhi used public correspondence to refute anti-Indian arguments and to correct any misinformation that was published regarding Indians.

The determined approach that the Indians adopted with their correspondence succeeded in creating an international awareness and aided the prospect of Imperial intervention on their behalf. The work had begun prior to Gandhi's arrival. In 1891, the merchant firm of Hajee Mahamed Dada established contact with the Indian Political

[62] Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy*. p. 10.
[63] Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*. p 33.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid. p. 51.
[66] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. pp. 165, 166.
[67] Pillay, *British Indians in the Transvaal*. P. 116.

Agency in London through Dadabhai Naoroji. He ensured that questions regarding Indian trade and travel were raised in the House of Commons.[69] Naoroji acted as a pivotal contact both for Indian Nationalists and the British Government. As a founding member and former president of the Indian National Congress and a later member of the British Parliament, he was in an ideal position to channel representation to the correct quarters and to mobilize support.[70]

Gandhi wrote two critical pamphlets in 1896, supported by his knowledge of the general conditions of Natal Indians. The first was 'An Appeal to Every Briton in South Africa.' It contained a statement supported by evidence of the general conditions of Natal Indians. The other was entitled 'The Indian Franchise - An Appeal'. It contained a brief history on the Indian franchise in Natal with facts and figures.[71] On a visit to India prior to the war, Gandhi wrote a pamphlet on the condition of Indians in South Africa. It was noticed by most Indian newspapers and five thousand copies were distributed in India. During this visit, he also secured the privilege of seeing elite Indian leaders, including Gokhale and his circle in Poona.[72]

The publicity created about Indians' conditions had mixed implications for Indians in Natal and those who had settled in other colonies. They awoke to the importance of their own position, and the local Europeans awoke to the danger which they believed Indians may pose to their predominance.[73]

The agitation that Gandhi created in India regarding Natal and Transvaal Indians' conditions attained enough importance for the principal Indian newspapers to notice it in their columns and for it to be cabled to the British press.[74] On returning to Natal, Gandhi discovered that a Reuters' representative in England had sent a brief cablegram to South Africa, containing what Gandhi felt was 'an exaggerated summary of [his] speeches in India.'[75] This added to the anger that many whites were feeling regarding Indian immigration. As has been previously mentioned, he and the 'passenger' Indians on his returning ship were met by the angry white mob at the Point Demonstration[76]

---

[68] Narayan,(ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. p. 89.
[69] Masani, *Dadabhai Naoroji: Grand Old Man of India* cited in Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousmess and Control'. p. 160.
[70] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 160.
[71] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth*. p. 185.
[72] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. p. 67.
[73] Ibid. pp. 90, 91.
[74] Ibid. p. 70.
[75] Ibid. p. 71.
[76] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. p. 72.

Gandhi believed that they were concerned that they had been 'blackened before India.'[77] Gandhi was assisted by M.H. Nazar and attorney F.A Laughton, who acted as a counsel for the Indian community.[78] It is presumably through these events that a bond developed between Nazar and Gandhi. Nazar was described as having a deep concern for the poor and he was later to become first editor of *Indian Opinion* and joint secretary of the Natal Indian Congress 1901 – 1904.[79]

In the period prior to the war, Nazar was deputed to England on behalf of the Indian community. He was instructed to work with members of all parties, and during his stay in England kept in touch with Sir William Wilson Hunter, Sir Muhcherjee Bhownuggree and the British Committee of the Indian National Congress. He also made contact with several influential retired officers of the Indian Civil Service, with the Indian Office and with the Colonial Office. Thus, he also played a role in making the condition of Indians overseas a question of some public importance in the eyes of the Imperial Government.

Response to Pending Legislation against Free Indians

Gandhi had intended to return to India at the end of 1893. At a farewell party in Durban, he read a few lines in small print in the *Natal Mercury* to the effect that the Responsible Government was about to introduce a bill to disenfranchise those few Indians who had the right to vote. In Durban at the time, only 251 Indians were registered as voters and in the capital, Pietermaritzburg, only 31 in contrast to 7000 and 300 white voters in the respective two cities. But, as small as their present numbers were, the Indian voters were seen as a future danger.[80] Gandhi asked his friends to fight the proposed law and they asked him to stay and guide them, to which he agreed.[81] Thus, prior to the establishment of the Natal Indian Congress, the Indians embarked on their first protest campaign.[82]

The Indians put together a subtle and intricate set of arguments to fight the franchise campaign. They were aware that in so doing they stood the risk of worsening

[77] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. p. 72.
[78] Bhana, S and J.D. Hunt, *Gandhi's Editor: The Letters of M.H. Nazar, 1902 – 1903*. (New Delhi, 1989), p. 4.
[79] Ibid. p. 5.
[80] Ibid. pp. 14, 15.
[81] Gandhi, R. 'The Origins and Growth of Satyagraha'. p. 126.
[82] Ibid.

their position, and had to ensure that they presented their case so as to accommodate the whites' anxieties. The Indians were well aware that the whites feared the growing Indian population and believed that with the franchise, Indians could threaten white supremacy. They also had to take into consideration that in many whites' opinion if the Indians received the franchise, it could arouse tensions within the black population that would be difficult to subdue. Referring to his philosophy of oppressors and their victims, Gandhi commented on whites' relationship with Africans. He suggested that the whites in Southern Africa could not deprive the blacks of their livelihood and basis of human dignity without suppressing their doubts .... and becoming victims of moral conceit, morbid fears and irrational obsessions.[83]

Indian-African Relations

Since the Indians' presence and demand for the franchise was presented as a threat to the white-African relationship, one needs to examine how Indians, or in this case free Indians, viewed themselves in relation to Africans. Here, the position of free Indians and Gandhi in particular was often inconsistent.

Meer claims that Gandhi had advised Indians to keep their issues distinct from those of other non-white groups and that this was purely a political tactic, and had nothing to with a belief in Indian cultural exclusiveness.[84] Adding to this, Naidoo contends that Gandhi regarded South African affairs as an appendage of Indians' relations with Britain and continued to see the Indians of South Africa 'as sons and daughters of mother India'.[85] Even though Gandhi is renowned as a spokesman for humanitarian conduct, in Natal he did not seem to want to interact or align Indians' politics with that of Africans. Naidoo emphasises Gandhi was generally ignorant of Africans' history, sensitivities, plight and aspirations, even their leaders.[86] Tinker, however, opposes Meer's proposition and writes that in public and private communications the Indians constantly emphasized the difference between their own civilization and the primitive barbarity of Africans.[87] Huttenback also claims that to the average Indian, blackness connoted inferiority. Lightness of skin was associated with a

[83] Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosoph: A Critical Examination*. p. 91.
[84] Meer, *Portrait of Indian South Africans*. p. 28.
[85] Naidoo, 'Clio and the Mahatma' p. 749
[86] Ibid.
[87] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 283.

high caste status attained through virtue in previous journeys along life's path.[88] Whether this religious viewpoint had any significant bearing on the political attitudes of the Indians towards Africans is debatable but it does add to the complications of their relationship. Spooner also observes that Africans 'at times [were] none too happy about [the Indians'] presence'[89] and that the Indians '[did] not [fuse] with Africans, and continue[d] to live a life rather alien to conditions in [Southern Africa] largely because of their religion.'[90]

Gandhi's statements about Africans are as interesting as are those about class differences in Indian society. It is difficult to find a consistent trend and, in both cases, he seems to be liable to promote equality as well as differentiation. One cannot claim to know Gandhi's nor other Indians' personal attitudes towards Africans, but in their political presentations the Indians' statements reflected their tricky position. The free Indians wished to distinguish themselves from Africans, as they did at times from indentured Indians, yet they also had to be cautious of being seen to promote discrimination.

A comparison can be drawn between the aspiring elitist African class, the kholwa and the merchant Indians who were both trying to create a unique place for themselves in the colonial social hierarchy. The kholwa (believers) were mission-educated Christians who formed the greater part of the new African land-owning class. Their education and Christianity distinguished them in African society,[91] and they chose to emphasise this identity. Instead of politically identifying themselves in terms of their relationship to chiefs, as did most African homesteads, the kholwa consciously developed an identity that was located in the colonial discourse of progress. They put themselves forward primarily as subjects of the British monarchy,[92] and as Lambert explains their break with traditional society was exemplified by their attempts to obtain exemption from the operation of customary law.[93] Even though the kholwas' numbers were not large (10 000 out of 350 000 at the end of 1880),[94] in order to maintain their evolving segregational policies, the Natal white supremacist ideology could not allow for

[88] Huttenback, *Gandhi in South Africa,* p. 44
[89] Spooner, *South African Predicament.* p. 107.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Morrell, Wright and Meintjes, 'Colonialism and the Establishment of White Domination 1840 – 1890', p. 43.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Lambert, *Betrayed Trust: Africans and the State in Colonial Natal.* (**,1995)p. 50.

a kholwa class which aspired to white cultural and socio-economic norms.[95] Thus, the kholwa experienced similar frustrations to those of the elitist Indians, as the very social group from which they sought acceptance, was finding their presence hostile.[96] However, there were no attempts from either of these groups to support each others' cause and to fight a unified campaign.

The Franchise Campaign

Here, the Indians organised an impressive campaign, for within a month of hearing of the proposed Franchise Bill, ten thousand Indians across Natal had signed a petition to Lord Ripon. Gandhi's main helpers were Muslim traders who collected the signatures within two weeks, with no payment despite the problems of poor communication links and vast illiteracy in the free Indian community.[97] The signatures were submitted to Ripon[98] and accompanying this list Gandhi submitted a written petition.[99]

In a petition to the Legislative Council and Assembly of the Colony of Natal of 28 June 1894, the Indians responded to the reports in newspapers about the Second Reading of the Franchise Law Amendment Bill. The reasons that were presented for Indians not being allowed to vote included that Indians had never exercised the franchise in the land they come from and that they were not fit to exercise the franchise.[100] The free Indians refuted both of these statements. They claimed that the Indian nation had partaken in election processes 'from times far prior to the time when the Anglo-Saxon races first became acquainted with the principles of representation',[101] and they emphasised their right to vote in India's municipal local self-government. Gandhi also reminded Governor Hely-Hutchinson on 3 July 1894, that 'even in England any British subject having the proper property qualifications is entitled to vote irrespective of caste, colour or creed.'[102] The Indians also quoted a variety of leading figures who spoke of the positive characteristics of Indians. They furthermore requested

---

[94] Morrell, Wright and Meintjes, 'Colonialism and the Establishment of White Domination 1840 – 1890', p. 43.
[95] Lambert, *Betrayed Trust: Africans and the State in Colonial Natal.* p. 167.
[96] Ibid. p. 125.
[97] Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope.* p. 50.
[98] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 40.
[99] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* p. 178.
[100] Bhana Collection, 1402, 957/3054, Petition to the Legislative Coucil and the Assembly of the Colony of Natal from Indians resident in the Colony of Natal, (28 June 1894)
[101] Ibid.

a Commission to investigate whether or not the Indians resident in the Colony were fit to exercise the privilege of franchise, before proceeding further with the Bill.[103]

Gandhi sought to give a firm constitutional basis to the Congress's demand for the franchise by claiming that equality followed Crown rule in India.[104] However, Gandhi recognised that the Natal Government was clearly not prepared to accept all Indians as fellow subjects and Swan asserts that neither did the Congress's ideology lend itself to the notion of equality for all Indians. Thus, the campaign tried to find an acceptable compromise, saying that Indians should be entitled to the vote as members of the Empire when they had reached a level of being 'desirable citizens', a status for which the merchants felt they obviously qualified.[105] According to Swan, whatever the root cause of the anti-Indian hostility in Natal, the form in which it manifested itself was racial discrimination. It was this in particular that the commercial elite fought because they wanted to be seen as a class and not as a race group. On this basis, in order to protect their economic interests they sought to distinguish themselves from the Indian underclasses.[106] Furthermore, Swan argues that there were direct links between the Franchise Bill and the continuing security of Indian commercial interests.[107] Thus, the free Indians sought to present themselves as a valuable and unique group in order to protect their economic freedom. Swan suggests there could be no attempt to construct a sense of an Indian community so long as the distinction between the merchants and the underclasses was a logical requirement of the merchants' ideology.[108] But, according to Tinker, Gandhi was also quick to see that the position of the Indians in Natal was indivisible: if the indentured Indians were treated as inferiors, excluded from ordinary civic rights, then this inferiority would be quickly fastened upon the Indian traders and professional people.[109] Gandhi outlined how the Indians could be defined as 'desirable citizens' in his petition to Ripon as Secretary of State for the Colonies in London. In his view, 'the indentured Indians while under indenture may not have the right to vote, [however], ... these men should not for ever be deprived from voting if they acquire the

---

[102] Bhana Collection, 1402, 957/3036, Letter to Sir Hely Hutchinson signed by Gandhi and other 'leading Indians' in Durban (3 July 1894)
[103] Bhana Collection, 1402, 957/3036, Letter to Sir Hely Hutchinson signed by Gandhi and other 'leading Indians' in Durban (3 July 1894).
[104] Meer, *Portrait of Indian South Africans*. p. 23.
[105] Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience*. p. 63.
[106] Ibid. p. 43.
[107] Ibid. p. 63.
[108] Ibid. p. 50.
[109] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 283.

sufficient qualifications in later life. Such men...come under European influences, and ... rapidly begin to assimilate themselves to the European civilization, and develop into full Colonists.'[110]

One should remember the irony that the merchants were campaigning for their right to vote as desirable citizens, and yet it was the free Indians who had really intensified anti-Indian antagonism because of the economic threat they posed, as well as of the prospect of a growing permanent Indian population. The free Indians' campaign had to be handled carefully so as to minimise the image of them being economic competition and a politically aggressive group who could impose upon existing political structures, especially with their growing population. They were anxious to counter any idea that the Indian vote would threaten the whites' dominance in the colony. Gandhi made it clear that the merchants had no ambition to share political power with whites, far less to pave the way for 'coolies' to vote.[111]

Inevitably, the franchise issue received international attention. For example, the *Times of India*, in a leading article on the petition strongly supported the Indian demands,[112] with Gandhi reporting that 'the *London Times* supported our claims and we began to entertain hopes of the Bill being vetoed.'[113] The combined efforts of the Indian franchise campaign as well as a loyalty to British legislation meant that Ripon disallowed the bill and declared that the British Empire could not agree to the establishment of a colour bar in legislation. This was regarded as a great victory for the Indians.[114]

Nonetheless, the planters and the Natal Government were not prepared to stop there. To curb the political power of Indians was for them the indispensable first step; but the real point of their attack was Indian trade and free Indian immigration.[115] For the time being, though, the result of the publicity created by the opposition to the disenfranchising bill was that colonial officials had to avoid express racial distinctions in their legislation, thereby attaining their aims in a more discreet manner.[116]

When the Bill was eventually passed in 1896, Gandhi's comment was that 'We all knew that this was a foregone conclusion but the agitation had infused new life into

[110] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 284.
[111] Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience*. p. 63.
[112] Ibid. p. 179.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. p. 40.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid. p. 41.

the community and had brought home to them the conviction that the community was one and indivisible and that it was as much their duty to fight for its political rights as its trading rights.'[117]

The Dealer' License Act and the Immigration Restriction Act

The Natal Government then passed the Dealer's License Act of 1897 and the Immigration Restriction Act of 1897 ; while neither of these laws mentioned Indians nor other racial groups, they were still intended to have a direct impact on Indians.

According to Wyley, merchants had emigrated to Natal at a time when laissez-faire was the prevailing economic policy in the British Empire,[118] yet they were to face increasing restrictions on their trading freedom. He explains that the initial phase in the process whereby whites attempted to secure control over land in the central business district occurred in the years 1897 – 1909, a period which marked the crucial beginning of the policies that eventually produced two distinct business districts in Durban.[119] The substance of the first Act was that no one could trade without a discretionary license issued by an official appointed in accordance with its provisions.[120] Considerations of appeals before the Town Council in 1897 indicate that all appeals by Indian shopkeepers were turned down, whereas in some cases dealing with white storekeepers, the Licensing Officer's decision was reversed and previously refused licenses were granted.[121] The merchants expressed particular concern that they were unable to appeal to the Supreme Court. They petitioned to the Government of Natal to amend the Act and threatened that the indentured labour scheme would otherwise be halted. Chamberlain proceeded to caution the Government of Natal as to the likelihood of this occurring.[122] Huttenback claims that this law was by far the most insidious piece of legislation passed against Natal Indians.[123]

The chief provision of the Immigration Restriction Act was that only such immigrants as were able to pass the education test in a European language could enter the Colony.[124]

---

[117] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* pp. 177, 178.
[118] Rajah 'The Durban Indian Central business district: case study in the geography of apartheid' cited in Wyley, 'The Natal Dealer's Licenses Act of 1897' p.16.
[119] Wyley, 'The Natal Dealer's Licenses Act of 1897', p. 1.
[120] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Gandhi.* p 40 .
[121] Town Council Minutes, Durban cited in Wyley, 'The Natal Dealer's Licenses Act of 1897', p.26.
[122] Wyley, 'The Natal Dealer's Licenses Act of 1897', p.32.
[123] Huttenback, *Gandhi in South Africa.* p. 77
[124] Ibid. pp. 41, 42.

Again, the Indians offered strenuous resistance, but in spite of this, the laws were enacted.

Swan concludes that the 'elite' Indian political activities between 1894 and 1906 fell into two distinct phases. The first, between 1894 and 1897, was an attempt to forestall the passage of damaging discriminatory legislation. The second, between 1897 and 1906, reflected the failure of phase one and was characterized by an attempt to mitigate the effect of discriminatory laws passed in 1897.[125]

Related Experiences in the Transvaal

While this study assumes a regional approach in focusing on the political development of Indians within Natal, the free Indians did not always limit their business or social contact to its boundaries. When free Indians chose to settle in the Transvaal, they often maintained their contacts with Natal Indians, especially through a sense of class superiority to other Indians. At a similar time to the foundation of the Natal Indian Congress, the Transvaal British Indian Association was formed and the two organisations probably became a support structure for one another. Gandhi was not uninterested in developments in the Cape and the Orange Free State, but as Indians were most heavily clustered in Natal and the Transvaal, it was there that they bore the brunt of the white settlers' sharpening fear and hostility.[126]

Even though entrance for Indians into the Transvaal was protected by Article 14 of the London Convention of 1884,[127] constitutionally the Transvaal Indians were much more powerless against Boer republicanism. The Boers passed the first anti-Indians law in 1885, restricting Indians' rights to occupation and trade in the Transvaal, and in 1891 all Indian business in the Orange Free State was restricted and the owners were given no compensation.[128] The Transvaal Indian merchants regarded themselves as superior citizens and, like the tactic adopted by the Natal free Indians, they presented petitions to the Volksraad which drew attention to the difference between themselves and 'Coolies' and Chinese.[129]

[125] Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience*. p. 61.
[126] Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*. p. 44.
[127] Vane, 'The South African Indians, A Plea for Better Understanding'. p. 13.
[128] Meer, *Portrait of Indian South Africans*. p. 24.
[129] Vane, 'The South African Indians, A Plea for Better Understanding'. p. 13.

The Transvaal Republican Government, after a lengthy correspondence with the British Government, succeeded in persuading the latter to waive its right to insist upon the strict interpretation of the London Convention. Thereupon, the Volksraad proceeded to pass Law 3 of 1885, which was based on the general principle that no equality between white and coloured races should be tolerated. It was referred to by P.S. Joshi, the Indian writer, as the great-grandfather of anti-Asiatic laws.[130] The law enacted that persons belonging to the aboriginal races of Asia could not become citizens of the South African Republic, or own property while those who already were traders had to be registered.[131] The Secretary of State from Natal said that he had understood that the proposed legislation would not apply to 'Arab traders or merchants' but to 'Indian or Chinese Coolie immigrants.'[132] However, Law 3 was never wholly effective because it was continually opposed by the British government.[133] The Boer opinion of the British actions was reflected in the *Standard and Diggers' News* during 1898. It questioned how the British government could support Natalians' attempts to restrict Indian competition and then intervene in the Transvaal's efforts to do likewise.[134]

Defending the Poll Tax

The Congress took up the indentured labourers' cause in 1894, when the Responsible Government wanted to bring legislation against indentured labour that included forcible repatriation, the signing of new indenture forms and annual tax of £25.[135] It was evident that no Indian labourer could pay such an exorbitant tax and still live in Natal as a free man.[136] Since the Government of India would not agree to compulsory repatriation, it amounted to a direct attempt to force Indians to remove themselves from the Colony or else to reindenture.[137] Gandhi declared said this was perceived by the Indian community as an expression of anti-Indian antagonism in the same way as the disenfranchising bill.[138] The free Indians' response to this issue does seem to offer significant insight into the Natal Indian Congress. Now, the merchant Indians were prepared to defend the rights of indentured and ex-indentured Indians. Yet, equally, the issue of how

[130] . Vane, 'The South African Indians, A Plea for Better Understanding'. p. 13.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid. p. 14.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Pillay, *British Indians in the Transvaal.* p. 68.
[135] Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* p. 194.
[136] Ibid. p. 37.
[137] Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy: the Natal Indian Congress, 1894 -1994.* p. 14.

concerned the merchant Indians were about the indentured Indians is complicated by the fact that the Indian traders knew their presence had in part provoked the agitation for the poll tax and they were anxious to curb the growth of general anti-Indian laws. It remains uncertain, however, how influential Gandhi was in motivating the Congress, as opposed to the members of the Congress calling for action to be taken. In this and other declarations of Gandhi's relationship to indentured labourers, there is a sense of a recognised social gap between educated leadership and the indentured labourers. Expressing his concern for their plight, involved adopting almost a paternalistic attitude towards them.

In Gandhi's view, 'the [tax] proposal astonished me. I put the matter before the Congress for discussion and it was immediately resolved to organize the necessary opposition.' The free Indians then wrote to Chamberlain as Colonial Secretary, mentioning the delegates' concern that the 'great Native problem, yet to be solved' could not be avoided.[139] All the same, the Indians sending the petition stated that the reasons given for the restriction of the settlement of free Indians was contradictory. They pointed out that the tensions that had risen related mainly to the merchant or 'passenger' Indians, although the people who would be effected by the bill would be indentured or ex-indentured Indians. These indentured and ex-indentured Indians were also 'equally British subjects and .... [were] so to speak, invited to go to the Colony' and who [had] therefore a special claim on the goodwill and attention of the Colonists.'[140] They also emphasised the positive qualities of the indentureds noting that 'the peace-loving disposition and the mildness of the Indian nation are proverbial.'[141]

Bhana observes that it was the Government of India that objected to the original amount of the tax.[142] In this, the Natal Indian Congress and Gandhi's role nevertheless should not be ignored, especially the work which they did in exposing the proposed tax, to which the responsiveness of the Government of India must be given due credit.[143] Gandhi explained that 'if the Natal Indian Congress had remained silent on the subject, the Viceroy might have approved of even the £25 tax but instead it was reduced to £3'[144]

---

[138] Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experience with Truth.* p. 194.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Bhana Collection, 957/3039, Memorial to Chamberlain.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy, the Natal Indian Congress.* p. 14.
[143] Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* p. 193.
[144] Ibid. p. 195.

The Natal Government then passed Act 17 of 1895 or the Indian Immigration Amendment Bill, which required indenture-expired Indians to pay a tax of £3.[145]

Yet, Gandhi and the Congress were not satisfied with the £3 tax, and Gandhi claimed 'the Congress could not regard it as any great achievement to have succeeded in getting the tax reduced from £25 to £3.'[146] The indentured labourers received such a minimal income during their contract period that it would in any event have been difficult for them to pay the annual fee.[147] Again, local Indians attempted to protest against the tax, and in August 1895, Gandhi, on their behalf addressed another petition to the Colonial Secretary. In conclusion, the petition ended: 'If the Colony cannot put up with the Indians, the only course .... is to stop a future immigration to Natal'. For the first time, Indian leaders dared to suggest that the solution to problems raised by indenture was to abolish 'coolie' emigration, even if other emigration was affected.[148] Yet, as seen with the franchise campaign, the issue of immigration was not limited to the indentured labourers' conditions and it was in part retaliation for the failure to grant equality to British Indian subjects anywhere in South Africa.[149] Against this background, the free Indians continued to campaign against the poll tax and also addressed a separate petition to the Indian Viceroy, Lord Elgin, but both petitions were a wasted effort.[150]

In the meantime, Gandhi sought also to serve the indentured community through other means such as representing them in court.[151] During the course of their campaign against racist colonial policies, the Indian elite was repeatedly told by white critics that men in glass houses should not throw stones at others. The fact that for centuries Hindus had been treating large masses of their own people as 'untouchables' showed that equality was not a value for them. Since they apparently did not believe in equality, it was inconsistent for them to ask for it and hypocritical of them to blame whites for denying them it to them. Gandhi rejoined that the Hindus believed not only in equality and brotherhood but also in the higher principle of the unity of all men. In his view, the deeply regrettable practice of untouchability was not an integral part of their religion but a corruption that had entered into it.[152]

---

[145] Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy, the Natal Indian Congress, 1894 - 1994*. p. 14.
[146] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth*. p. 196.
[147] Brain, 'Natal's Indians, 1860 - 1910, from co-operation, through competition to conflict'. p. 261.
[148] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 284.
[149] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 165.
[150] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. pp. 284, 285.
[151] Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth*. p. 190.
[152] Parekh, *Colonialism. Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse*. p. 215.

4

International Reaction to Natal Indians' Conditions

The ability of the Natal colonists to impose their will upon the Natal Government with regards to exploiting and controlling the Indian population, was partly dependent on the international response that the Natal Government received, especially in the period prior to Natal gaining Responsible Government. The three main international sources that monitored Natal Indians' experiences were the British Government, the British Indian Government and the Indian Nationalist movement. It is hard to find a consistent pattern when trying to understand the extent of concern that Imperial authorities felt for their non-white subjects. Individual characters within the two Governments were influential in shifting the concern towards or away from the Indians' treatment. The Indian Nationalist movement also only started to gain strength towards the end of the century and to a large extent their discussions focused around the free Indian propertied class.

Responses from the Indian Government

It is difficult to assess the extent of real concern or support that the Indian Government felt for its subjects in South Africa. It certainly appears that it was prepared to intervene more on the part of the indentured Indians than the free Indians, but even there it had limited success. The Indian Government compromised on its support for the Indians who wished to settle in the Natal when it complied, although to a greatly reduced extent, with the demands for extended indenture contracts and the poll tax to encourage repatriation. However, one must also take into account that once Indians had chosen to settle in the colony, India could offer less protection.

The Indian Government's response to the treatment of Indians abroad was in part impacted upon by its relationship with its subjects in India. Tinker records that sympathy and support for the overseas Indians receded in the aftermath of the Mutiny of 1857, which served to widen the already opening gulf between the British and those they ruled. However, the harsh reality of oppression in the sugar colonies was brought to the Indian Government's attention through reports from ex-indentured labourers and free Indian sources. This scandal necessitated some form of response.[1]

[1] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 240.

With regard to indentured Indians, Emmer argues that it is hard to understand why the Indian Government allowed the system to continue, knowing of the distress that it caused. There were naturally always pressures from the British Government, which wished to represent the economic interests of the colonies. However, Emmer believes that the most important reason for the 'benevolent neutrality' of the Indian Government was the absence of an Indian lobby of landowners and industrialists protesting against the loss of so many valuable workers.[2] Moreover, according to Emmer, the British Indian authorities were not really interested in the system of indentured emigration, since it only affected 0.01 per cent of the population.[3] Tinker offers another view and says that there was no firm intention, either from Whitehall in Britain or the Government of India to probe deeply into the wrongs of the system. While there was uneasiness that so many wrongs were being uncovered, the will to move was lacking.[4] Many high officials in Indian also felt sympathy for white settlers in Natal.[5]

However, the Indian Government did take some action. As it became aware of hardships experienced by the indentured labourers, it did start to demand that more information be supplied from the Natal authorities.[6] As already mentioned, the Indian Government in 1872 stopped sending out labourers to Natal until better protective structures were introduced. India's response to Natal was at times part of a broader reaction of all the British colonies that imported indentured labour. Following exposure of some of the worst aspects of the Indian emigration system in Grenada, Demerara, British Guinea, and Mauritius, the Indian Government monitored Natal at least for a period and the free labour began to enjoy some degree of protection.[7]

When looking at how the Indian Government handled Natal's demand for greater restrictions and the imposition of a poll tax on ex-indentured Indians, the Government responded in stages. Initially, it would not agree to the £25 suggested by the Binns-Mason commission. Yet, India was not beyond stiff negotiation. The Indian authorities started to discuss the idea

---

[2] Emmer, 'The Meek Hindu; the recruitment of Indian indentured labourers for service overseas, 1870 – 1916,' Emmer, P.C. (ed.), *Colonialism and Migration; Indentured Labour Before and After* Slavery. (Dordrecht, 1986), p 200.
[3] Ibid. p. 204.
[4] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 247.
[5] Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*. p. 143..
[6] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 244.
[7] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. pp. 56, 57.

that 'if the settlement of Indians is not restricted, the emigration to that colony will be closed'.[8] Faced with what allegedly was almost an ultimatum, the Government of India accepted a policy that was contrary to principles that had been reiterated for fifty years. It was made simpler, according to Tinker, by the fact that the Viceroy, Lord Elgin, was not concerned about the rights of common people, although, he did write to the Governor of Natal in September 1894 in a reasonably firm tone. He asserted that the Government of India had 'little sympathy with the views that would prevent any subject of the Crown settling in any Colony under the British flag'. Nevertheless, it was agreed that there should be a system which encouraged indentured Indians either to return to India after their indenture or to renew their contracts.[9] The new Natal laws were accepted by Britain in January 1896. Elgin made it clear that he did not intend to reconsider the issue. In his view, 'the question whether it is right to compel any class of Her Majesty's subjects to pay for permission to reside in any part of Her Majesty's dominions is rather for the consideration of Her Majesty's Government than for ours.'[10] The only reservation was that 'such coolies as refuse to return should in no case be made subject to penalties under the criminal law.'[11]

Elgin could not escape a reaction from citizens in India, and in March of the following year, he received a memorandum from the British Indian Association of Calcutta. It commented on the 'impositions' on the Natal Indians and demanded more information.[12]

The poll tax exposes a number of interesting issues regarding the Indian Government's support for free Indians in Natal. The proposal for the poll tax was strongly opposed by the free Indians and their petitions made some impact on the negotiation process. Yet, the Indian Government acceded to the white colonials' demands and the tax was in essence the Indian Government's tacit approval of Natal's attempts to discourage Indian settlement. Furthermore, Elgin openly relinquished responsibility for protecting Indian settlement, claiming that it was exclusively Britain's duty.

However, there were other British Indian authorities who regarded the responsibility of imperial trusteeship as more firmly involving the upholding of rights of 'the lesser breeds'. Lord Curzon, who became Viceroy in 1898, took a more concerned paternal stance than his predecessor, Elgin. He was to reassert the doctrine that the Government of India was *in*

[8] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. pp. 281, 282.
[9] Thompson, *Indian Immigration*. quoted in Pachai, *The South African Indian Question 1860 - 1971*. p. 9.
[10] Ginwala, "Class, Consciousness and Control. p. 285.
[11] Ibid. pp. 282, 283.
[12] Ibid. p. 285.

India but his position changed little.[13] Nevertheless, in 1899, both the British and the Indian Governments warned the Natal Government that if unjust measures towards Indians continued, it would bring to an end the Colony's participation in the indentured labour scheme.[14] The threat of terminating the indentured labour system, it seems, was used freely by both the Natal and the British Governments, however, it did little to aid those Indians who were already resident in Natal.

Responses from the British Government

The British Government showed great inconsistency in its reaction towards Indians' treatment in Natal, and, invariably, its current broader colonial concerns impacted upon its racial attitudes and policies. Colonial Office policy towards Natal during its formative years was marked by the difference between Ripon's and Chamberlain's priorities, but it gradually assumed the direction which it was to take in the period following the war. Swan stresses that Ripon, who was the Colonial Secretary from 1892 to 1895, was unusually sympathetic towards the Natal Indians.[15]

It has been suggested that the presence of an Indian population delayed the grant of full responsibility to Natal.[16] However, as Stein points out, that the Indian question influenced the British Government to any appreciable degree seems unlikely. The Governors and Secretaries of State, when deciding whether to grant Natal Responsible Government, were focused on what were perceived as the major problems: the administration of the black population, and the question of defence, both internal and external.[17]

Still, the Colonial Office under Ripon did take a firmer stand on Natal's attempts to impose discriminatory legislation. Ripon saw the proposed Franchise Bill of 1894 as an affront to Indians which would cause dangerous repercussions in India if it were passed. The India Office was behind the condemnation of the bill.[18] By contrast, Swan reports that when Chamberlain took charge of the Colonial Office in 1895, within three months the guidelines of more racist future policies had been laid down.[19]

---

[13] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 286.
[14] Pachai *International Aspects.* cited in Brain, 'Natal's Indians, 1860 - 1910, from co-operation, through competition, to conflict'. p. 262.
[15] Swan, *Gandhi: the South African Experience*, p. 66.
[16] Stein, 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893'. pp. 69. 70.
[17] Ibid. p. 70.
[18] Rudé, *Protest and Punishment,* cited in Swan, *Gandhi: the South African Experience*, p. 66.
[19] Swan, *Gandhi: the South African Experience*, p. 67.

Nevertheless, having allowed Natal Responsible Government, Britain objected to its first discriminatory actions towards free Indians. Pachai summarises Natal's response to this reproach, saying that this reprimand might have proved to be a deterrent in ordinary circumstances. But Natal, in the early days of having Responsible Government, 'was in no mood to be dictated to as a recalcitrant schoolboy.'[20] In taking this disapproving stance, the British authorities chose to overlook the fact that the Colonial Office allowed the Franchise Amendment Bill of 1896, the Immigration Restriction Bill and the Dealer's Licenses Bill to be passed.[21] Guest concludes that Whitehall officials believed that the colony's voterless majority would be adequately protected by the Legislative Council and by the Governor's authority as 'Supreme Chief' of the African population,[22] yet Natal proved to be wanting in the protection it offered. When the Natal Government proposed to disallow Indians the vote, Chamberlain as Colonial Secretary firmly opposed this. However, Pachai argues that it is doubtful whether the British Government took this stand purely as a matter of principle, and not more due to political expediency. The move to disenfranchise the Indians coincided with an uncertain period for Britain during which it was attempting to establish overall supremacy in South Africa. Since the British were taking a stand against the treatment of the *Uitlanders* in the Transvaal and the barriers that were being imposed on them gaining franchise rights, it recognised that would be inconsistent if it acceded to Natal's Indian disenfranchisement campaign.[23]

Britain also protested against the Transvaal's discrimination against Indians and used it as a minor justification for interfering in the Transvaal.[24] In the build-up to the war, the British made political use of the question of maltreatment of Indians by the Government of the Transvaal, although there were fundamental flaws in the British approach. Apart from the restrictions placed on Indians in Natal, the *Uiitlander* merchants were in full agreement with the Transvaal legislative restrictions placed on Indian traders, as they, too, were opposed to the 'cut-throat' competition'. In April 1899, Milner decided to win the tacit silence of the *Uitlanders* on the Indian question in order to exploit the issue.[25] The *Uitlander* response was that 'any stick is good enough to beat Kruger with, and though we don't love the Indian we

[20] Pachai, *The South African Indian Question 1860 - 1971*. p. 11.
[21] Swan, *Gandhi: the South African Experience*, p. 68.
[22] Guest, 'Indians in Natal and Southern Africa in the 1890s', p. 8.
[23] Pachai, *The South African Indian Question 1860 - 1971*. p. 10.
[24] Thompson, E. and G.T. Garratt, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*. (London, 1935), pp. 585, 586.
[25] Chandramoham, "Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out'?', p. 153.

wouldn't say a word.'[26] The value of the Indian issue as a propaganda tool was not lost on the Transvaal government, which tried to embarrass the British Government by proposing a general South African conference on alien immigration. As Milner wrote in a letter to the Governor of Natal, Hely-Hutchinson, 'The Boers know the hole we are in over this business'.[27]

In 1897, a detailed approach to British non-white subjects was outlined by Chamberlain. The British authorities displayed an ability to change their viewpoint on their non-European subjects, depending on the circumstances, and here Chamberlain took a much less supportive stance towards British Asian immigrants. The Prime Ministers of the self-governing, settler colonies gathered in London to attend the Diamond Jubilee celebrations and an Imperial Conference, chaired by Chamberlain. Tinker's view is that Chamberlain thought only in terms of the development of white communities overseas, and describes the conference as 'the high-water mark of his mission in Imperialism'. In dealing with the issue of 'Alien Immigration', he spoke for example, of the right of the self-governing colonies to control the entry of Indians and Chinese.[28] In Chamberlain's view:

> 'we quite sympathise with the determination of the white inhabitants of these Colonies which are in comparatively close proximity to millions and hundreds of millions of Asiatics that there should not be an influx of people alien in civilisation, alien in religion, alien in customs, whose influx moreover would most seriously interfere with the legitimate rights of the existing population .... but we ask you also to bear in mind the traditions of the Empire, which make no distinction in favour of, or against race or colour; and to exclude by reason of their colour or by reason of their race all Her Majesty's Indian subjects, or even Asiatics, would be an act so offensive to those peoples that it would be most painful, I am quite certain, to Her Majesty to have to sanction it.[29]

Here, there was some sense of ambiguity, or of finding a balance. But the nub of Chamberlain's pronouncement came in his concluding words, 'if there were a clash between the ideal of an Empire in which race and colour were not inseparable barriers, and the reality of an exclusive white colony, then - however reluctantly - it would be necessary to bow to

---

[26] Cammack, *The Rand at War, 1899-1902: The Witwatersrand and the Anglo-Boer War* cited in Chandramohan, 'Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out'?', p. 154

[27] Chandramohan, 'Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out'?', p. 154

[28] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 285.

[29] Proceedings of a Conference between the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Premiers of the Self Governing Colonies (1897) cited in Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. pp. 285, 286.

white colonial opinions.'[30] In Huttenback's typical view, the nineteenth century was not the most tolerant of ages and many Englishmen must have found it difficult to have felt in their hearts that Africans and Indians were really the equals of white men.[31]

The Natal Indian Congress sent Nazar as their delegate to report on the conference.[32] This highlights that the Natal Indian Congress was attempting to monitor the Imperial response to their treatment and in this instance could be under no illusions of meaningful sympathies.

The Growth of Nationalism in India and its Concern for Indians in the Colonies

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Nationalist movement in India grew more vociferous.[33] Within India, the significance of the Nationalist movement was, of course, the start of the struggle for greater self-government or independence. But for Indians in other colonies, the impact that they would have felt was the increasing vocalised concern for their treatment.[34] Initially, the Moderates amongst the Nationalist movement accepted but wished to transform the British rule.[35]

On this basis, the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885. Its members were Indian, but it had owed its initial organisational inspiration largely to a British example.[36] Thompson and Garratt claim there is little accurate evidence about the strength of the Congress party in its early years, but it was soon popular enough to attract over a thousand delegates to its yearly meetings.[37] The Indian National Congress had at first enjoyed a certain amount of official approval from the British Indian Government. But before long it became the most influential opponent of the Government: the foremost representative of Indian nationalism.[38] In this, it was essentially an institution of nationalist moderates.[39]

In the 1890s, there was in general little coherent concern for the masses in the thinking of politically-advanced Indians. They were primarily interested in matters which

---

[30] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 286.
[31] Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*. p. 142.
[32] Bhana and Hunt. *Gandhi's Editor: The Letters of M.H. Nazar, 1902 – 1903*. p. 4.
[33] Thompson, and Garratt, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*. p. 527.
[34] Ibid. 527.
[35] Ibid. p. 542.
[36] Lumby, E.W.R. 'The Transfer of Power', Lewis, M.D. (ed.), *The British in India, Imperialism or Trusteeship?* (Boston, 1962), p.90.
[37] Thompson, and Garratt, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*. p. 544.
[38] Lumby, 'The Transfer of Power'. p. 90.
[39] Thompson and Garratt. *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*. p. 543.

affected their own class interests, such as higher education, employment in the public services and political enfranchisement.[40] The position of the indentured Indians had at first no place in their concern, whereas the difficulties of a fraternal propertied interest overseas provoked a prompt response.[41]

The 10th session of the Indian National Congress in 1894 first publicly considered the question of restrictions on Indians in Natal and the Transvaal. During Gandhi's visit to India in 1896, he established personal contacts with Indian leaders in the commercial, civic and political sectors.[42]

A growing indigenous Indian bourgeoisie resented the prescriptive domination and privileged economic position of a colonial British bourgeoisie. It was for this reason that restrictions on the 'passenger' Indians in South Africa began to find such a ready response from the Indian National Congress.[43] By 1897, the question of Indians' status in Southern Africa was being considered in relation to the status of Indians within the Empire, and demands were being made for the full equality of British Indian subjects with European British subjects.[44] Thus, the Indian National Congress' views on the need for class distinctions coincided with those which, in certain respects, the South African Indian elite were also underlining.[45] Gandhi, on his return to India, pressed the idea that enlightened Indians needed to partake in setting the standard for Indian treatment abroad. Yet he also took a 'non-classist' view when he repeatedly reminded his countrymen that as long as they treated some of their own people as 'untouchables', they could not legitimately blame the Canadian, South African and other foreign governments for treating them as the '*pariahs* of the empire'. Though Gandhi's argument was not new, the international dimension that he brought to it was.[46]

International defence for the treatment of indentured Indians only started to grow in the first decade of the twentieth century. This was led by resolute individuals and anti-indenture organsisations.[47]

---

[40] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 280.
[41] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. pp. 163, 164.
[42] Gandhi, *Satyagraha.* cited in Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. p. 164.
[43] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control'. pp. 162, 163.
[44] Speech of Sir C. Sankaran Nair, President of Indian National Congress cited in Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control', p. 164.
[45] Ginwala, 'Class Consciousness and Control', p. 165.
[46] Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform, An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse.* (New Delhi, 1989), p. 215.
[47] Henning,. *The Indentured Indian in Natal (1860 - 1917).* p. 120.

5
Political Motivation for Indian Involvement in the War

Free Indians' Motivation for Involving Themselves in the War

Gandhi appealed to the free Indian population to offer their services to the British in the war and was met with a predominantly positive response. The free Indians recognised how the war effort could link into the Indian National Congress's objectives and it was agreed that this was a political opportunity to prove their devotion to the Empire and Natal in order to receive better treatment within the colony.

A major force driving Gandhi's campaign was that Indians were believed to be unconcerned about the British and the Empire. One of the charges laid against the Indians was that they had come to Natal and other colonies only for money-grabbing reasons and had become a deadweight to the British. They were described as 'worms which settle inside and eat it up hollow' and that 'the Indians were in South Africa only to fatten themselves upon them.... and would not render them the slightest aid if the country was invaded or if their homes were raided'. According to Gandhi, the British expected that instead of offering aid in protecting the Empire, the Indians would expect the British to protect them.[1] This meant that for Gandhi the urgent need to prove Indian loyalty did not start from a neutral standpoint but rather the issue was first having to overcome the attitude that they were uncommitted.

As has been seen with the assertive yet non-aggressive manner with which Gandhi and the Natal Indian Congress addressed the pending anti-Indian legislation, the Indians' offer to serve in the war reflected a similar diplomatic approach. Doke emphasises that the Indians were well aware that they were a minority, foreign group in the colony.[2] Thus they were in a vulnerable position and always had to be careful not to worsen their conditions.

In addition, Gandhi was quite aware that even if their services were accepted, anti-Indian hostility could continue, especially when having to work in close contact with whites in the war context. As he noted 'again, [they] would treat us all as coolies, insult us and look down upon us.[3] The phrase 'all as coolies' again raises questions about his attitudes towards Indians in the colony and whether he felt that certain Indians, namely

[1] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. p. 96.
[2] Doke, *M.K. Gandhi, An Indian Patriot in South Africa*. p. 59.
[3] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. p. 101.

the Indian elite or merchant Indians, did not deserve to be treated as such, or if he was concerned about the potential degradation of all Indians.

Gandhi was not alone in taking the initiative to promote Indian war involvement. For instance, an Indian called on the Indian community in the *Natal Mercury* to forget its grievances against the British. He argued that 'every Indian should bury the hatchet and reserve his resentment for the future, and come forward for the defence of the Colony.'[4]

In typical view, a self-styled gentleman calling himself 'Colonial Indian', wrote that 'if the Government were to call for Indian volunteers ... scores of young men would enlist themselves in it and it would be one of the best means to reconcile the Indian subjects and to enlist their sympathy.'[5]

General Black Optimism for Improved Treatment

The Indians' hopes for improved treatment through loyal war service can be placed within the broader context of general black hopes emanating from the war. Warwick outlines that the coming of the war aroused considerable interest among the most westernized and politically-conscious African, coloured and Asian groups in South Africa. It was widely believed that the defeat of the Boers would be accomplished without undue difficulty, and that once the republics had been overthrown, the limited political, educational and commercial opportunities afforded to black people in the Cape would be extended to those resident in the Transvaal and Orange Free State as well as Natal. In particular, the hope was generated that once these territories were administered directly by Britain, the Cape's mildly liberal franchise would be extended throughout South Africa.[6] Such optimism on the part of members of the black elite was encouraged by statements made by prominent British spokesmen during the early months of the war. As Chamberlain told the House of Commons in October 1899, 'The treatment of the natives [in the Transvaal] has been disgraceful; it has been brutal; it has been unworthy of a civilized Power."[7] The Colonial Secretary went on to imply that affairs there would be run very differently under British administration. Even the British

[4] *Natal Mercury*, 31 October 1899 cited in Tichmann, 'We are sons of the Empire after all', p. 10.
[5] *Natal Mercury*, 3 October, 1899 cited in Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II*, p. 266
[6] Warwick, 'Black People and the War', p. 189.
[7] Parliamentary Debates, 4th series, Commons, vol.77, c.271 (October 1899) cited in Warwick, 'Black People and the War', p. 189.

Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, informed Parliament that following a victory in the South African campaign, 'There must be no doubt .... that due precaution will be taken for the kindly and improving treatment of those countless indigenous races of whose destiny, I fear we have been too forgetful'.[8]

Indian Reaction to the British Attack on the Boers

Significantly, Gandhi took his firm stand to support the British despite his knowledge of the degradation that Indians had suffered both in Natal and in India.

In his view, Britain had done grave economic and cultural damage to India. He believed they had fought unnecessary wars at its expense, maintained a ruinously costly civil and military administration, destroyed indigenous industries and de-industrialised India, ignored its agricultural development, caused massive unemployment and famine, and in general had mercilessly exploited it. They had also sapped the foundations of Indian civilisation, de-nationalised the Indians, ridiculed their society and religion, and foisted alien values on to them. In the face of this severe criticism, it is curious that he claimed to think that on balance the principles and ideals of British rule were not too oppressive. As has been seen with his political approach prior to the war, Gandhi at this stage of his career remained loyal to the British Empire. He emphasised that he took this stance because he admired and shared many of Britain's political ideals, and had himself enjoyed the rights of an imperial citizen, including the freedom to live in South Africa.[9]

He then presented carefully constructed arguments to the Indian community as to why they should serve the British in the war. Gandhi was a good motivator and in all likelihood his legal experience and his understanding of the British political and legal systems contributed to his effectiveness as a leader. However, he did record some of the opposing ideas towards serving the British as well as his own doubts, which shows that there were diverse attitudes within the free Indian community regarding the war.

Gandhi acknowledged how certain Indians questioned the appropriateness of supporting the British when the British would oppress the Boers in a similar way to that in which they treated the Indians. Furthermore, they urged that since '[they were] more or less a community of slaves', how could they then fight a small nation like the Boers which was fighting for 'its very existence [and] why should [they] be instrumental in their

[8] Warwick, P. *The South African War, The Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902.* p. 190.
[9] Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy.* pp. 127, 128.

destruction?' The final argument that they presented was that the Boers would 'wreak vengeance' upon the Indians if they won.[10] Amongst some nationalist circles in India there was also great admiration for the Boers.[11] Most strikingly, despite the pro-British stance which Gandhi took, he even admitted that when the war was declared 'his personal sympathies were with the Boers' but he believed that he had no right 'to enforce [his] individual convictions.[12]

Even though Gandhi recognised that there was 'a powerful party among [the free Indians] which strongly advanced the above argument', he subsequently refuted their ideas as follows:

> 'Our existence in South Africa is only in our capacity as British Subjects. In every memorial we have presented, we have asserted our rights as such. We have been proud of our British citizenship, or have given our rulers and the world to believe that we are so proud. Our rulers profess to safeguard our rights because we are British subjects, and what little rights we still retain, we retain because we are British subjects. It would be unbecoming to our dignity as a nation to look on with folded hands at a time when ruin stared the British in the face as well as ourselves, simply because they ill-treat us here. And such criminal inaction could only aggravate our difficulties. If we missed this opportunity, which had come to us unsought of proving the falsity of a charge which we believe to be false, we should stand self- condemned and it would be no matter for surprise if then the English treated us worse than before and sneered at us more than ever. The faults in such a case would lie entirely at our door.'[13]

The notion that, 'We have been proud of our British citizenship, or have given our rulers and the world to believe that we are proud.' opens up the possibility that Gandhi did not necessarily respect British authority to the extent that he proclaimed, but saw a tactical display of loyalty more as the best means of improving Indians' conditions through incremental advance.

He also took his argument to an even more extreme level saying, 'if any class among the subjects considers that the action of a government is immoral from a religious standpoint before they help or hinder it, they must endeavor fully and even at the risk of their lives to dissuade the government from pursuing such a course'. For

[10] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. p. 97.
[11] Chandramohan, B. ''Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out'?, p. 161.
[12] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth*. p. 264.
[13] Narayan, (ed.) *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. pp. 97, 98.

Gandhi, however, 'we have done nothing of the kind. Such a moral crisis is not present before us, and no one says that we wish to hold aloof from this war.' Therefore he believed that '[their] ordinary duty as subjects ...[was] not to enter into the merits of the war,' but rather to, 'render such assistance as [they] possibly [could]'. In response to the concern about the Boers winning the war and taking revenge on the Indians, he replied that this 'would be doing injustice to the chivalrous Boers as well as ourselves. To waste the slightest thought upon such a contingency would only be a sign of our effeminacy and a reflection on our loyalty.'[14] For Davenport, this shrewd position reflected Gandhi's 'rare capacity for promoting a partisan cause without giving offense to the other side.'[15]

In all, he saw their cause as going beyond the boundaries of Natal and the rest of Southern Africa arguing 'It is true that we are helots in the Empire' but believing simultaneously that Indian rejuvenation would happen in the context of the Empire. 'This,' he said, 'has been the policy of all our leaders in India and ours too'. He went on to insist that, 'the authorities may not always be right, but so long as the subjects owe allegiance to a state, their clear duty is generally to accommodate themselves, and to accord their support to acts of the state.'[16] It is important to note, however, that Vahed argues that this war was a significant turning point in Gandhi's career with regards to his viewpoint on the Empire. Whilst prior to the war, Gandhi had placed great emphasis on India being part of the Empire, the British reception of the Indians' service 'forced him to reassess this strategy'.[17] Vahed acknowledges that the transition in Gandhi's attitude was not sudden but the war marked the beginning of the transformation process[18].

Gandhi placed a great deal of emphasis on Natal Indians' position within the British Empire and how their actions within the colony would have far a reaching impact. However, when looking at why the free Indians participated in the war, one should also consider the possibility that many of them had come to see Natal as their new home and their primary concern was improving their possibilities in the Colony.

---

[14] Narayan, (ed.) *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* pp. 98, 99.
[15] Davenport, *South Africa, A Modern History.* p. 108.
[16] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 98.
[17] Vahed, G. 'African Gandhi': The South African War and the limits of imperial identity', *Historia*, 45(1), 2000, p. 201.
[18] Ibid.

Gandhi was well aware of the opposition to the war from a large minority of politically conscious progressives in Britain, ranging from the pro-Boer Liberals and supporters of Labour, to smaller Marxist or neo-Marxist groups. But he believed that his starting point was different to theirs. They lived within the democracy of Britain and hence could involve themselves in the policies of their Government. Gandhi, on the other hand, felt that as he was a nationalist of a dependency of Great Britain, he was not in a position to question the British approach.[19]

Recording the War Experience

As a well-educated man, Gandhi had the foresight to recognise the relevance of recording his experiences. Consequently, much of the knowledge of the Indians' attitudes towards the British and the war has been told from Gandhi's perspective. In reporting on the Indians' decision to involve themselves in the war and the work they performed, Gandhi writes in the plural. It is difficult to ascertain whether the rest of the Indian community, both free and indentured, felt the same conviction for improving the Indians' image in Natal, or if it is more the case that Gandhi asserts that they were communally committed. Adding to this issue, it appears that no other known Indians recorded the service experience to the same degree as Gandhi, which perhaps raises some questions about the importance they attached to their service, although one must also allow for the fact that many Indians were illiterate, especially amongst the indentured community. Certainly, Gandhi was not alone in his commitment to serving the British, but it is difficult to ascertain how deeply the commitment ran throughout the Indian community. Gandhi claims that his arguments for Indians to serve in the war 'commended themselves to many' and that one should not suppose 'that [he] was the only one to advance them'. He added that 'even before these views were set forth, there were many Indians who held that [they] should do [their] bit in the war'.[20] Both in his contemporary and retrospective writing Gandhi's vocabulary was obviously motivated by his long term political cause and this should be taken into account when analysing his recordings of the Indian involvement in the war.

[19] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II: The Discovery of Satyagraha On the Threshold.* p. 227.
[20] Tichmann, 'We are sons of the Empire after all'. p. 10.

Gandhi's Theories on Non-violence

Gandhi is renowned for his philosophies on non-violence as a means of overcoming one's enemy. Thus, one needs to look at how he reconciled this belief system with participating in a war. It was only in the early 1900s that Gandhi specified the political strategy of *satyagraha*[21] but he began to develop the techniques of passive protest known as *satyagraha* (soul force), based on the teachings of the pacifist Jain sect of Hinduism in South Africa.[22] Chandramond claims that the war played a role in developing Gandhi's religio-political philosophy and, in terms of Gandhi's personal growth, sees this as the war's 'most significant legacy'.[23]

In his retrospective writings, Gandhi attempted to make sense of the Indians' contribution to the war effort. His teachings of *ahimsa* pertained particularly to the issues of war and non-violence and were uncompromising in their application. Yet, he believed that non-violence did not signify the unwillingness to fight against an enemy. For he argued, the enemy is always ignorance and the evil is that which men do: it is not in human beings themselves. Even though he loathed war and violence in all its forms, Gandhi could not be classified at this stage as an orthodox pacifist. He held that the courage and heroism often displayed by war-struck individuals reflected well upon their moral character, even if war itself was 'a dark, moral blot on those who encouraged or allowed it to happen.' He rejected avoidance or even indirect participation in war, and refused to let others fight his battles for him. As he proposed, 'if I have only a choice between paying for the army of soldiers to kill my neighbours or to be a soldier myself, I would, as I must, consistent with my creed, enlist as a soldier in the hope of controlling the forces of violence and even of converting my comrades'.[24]

He later wrote, 'I believe that where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence I would advise violence. Hence it was that I took part in the Boer War, the so-called Zulu rebellion and the late War. Hence also do I advocate training in arms for those who believe in the method of violence. I would rather have India resort to arms in

[21] Brain, 'Natal Indians, 1860 - 1910 from co-operation, through competition, to conflict, p. 263.
[22] Warwick,. *The South African War, The Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902.* p. 191.
[23] Chandramohan, B. ''Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out'?', p. 162.
[24] 'Difficulty of Practice', *Young India*, 30 January 1930, cited in Iyer, R.(ed.), *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II, Truth and Non-Violence.* (Oxford, 1986), p. 13.

order to defend her honour than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour.'[25] He later also philosophised:

> even the seeming endorsement of violent action by my participation on the side of Britain in the Boer War and the Zulu revolt was a recognition in the interest of non-violence of an inevitable situation. That the participation may nevertheless have been due to my weakness or ignorance of the workings of the universal law of non-violence is quite possible. Only I have no conviction then, nor have any now, of such weaknesses or ignorance.[26]

Indians Offer their Services

On 16 October 1899, about 100 Indians assembled at a meeting held in Durban under the auspices of the Natal Indian Congress to decide what their response to the war should be.[27] Pyarelal says although the arguments that Gandhi was presenting were not new, the burning conviction with which he spoke produced such enthusiasm that almost all present put their names down.[28]

Swan points out that the Natal Indian Congress's political activity, which had already started to decline before the war, was more or less suspended for the duration in the interests of maintaining a working relationship with the whites. She claims that Gandhi could see nothing in the party's future except monitoring the administration of discriminatory laws and appealing to the imperial government in the event of new threats.[29] In light of this, it is interesting how much energy Gandhi brought to the politically-motivated work in the war.

Vahed points out the irony that at the very time the Indians were striving to prove their loyalty, the 'Indian Question' was central to the contest for a seat for the Natal Legislative Assembly. When Gandhi was telling volunteers to be in 'a state of readiness', 'A Working Man' complained that whites did not object to Indians as long as they 'keep to their place' for Natal was 'a white man's country.'[30]

Aside from the whites' determination not to include the various black groups in

---

[25] Iyer, R. (ed.), *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*. p. 298.
[26] Ibid. p. 394.
[27] Gandhi, M.K. *Satyagraha in South Africa*. cited in Tichmann, P. 'We are sons of the Empire after all', pp. 10, 11.
[28] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II*, p. 266.
[29] Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience*. p. 60.
[30] *Natal Mercury*, 4 December, 1899 cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 4.

the war, the Indians faced the additional obstacle of lacking appropriate war skills. Gandhi raised the practical concern of what the Indians could do since 'none of [them] had ever wielded a weapon of war' and he well recognised that 'even the work performed by non-combatants in war required training.'[31]

He knew the Indians' offer would not be readily accepted, and pondered 'if we volunteered for service, how could we induce the Government to accept our offer?' Yet, Gandhi was very committed to the decision, and in his writings stressed that 'finally, we came to the conclusion that we should make earnest endeavors to get our offer accepted, that the experience of our work would teach us to do more work, that if we had the will, God would grant us the ability to serve, that we need not worry how we could do the work entrusted but should train ourselves for it as best we might, and that having once decided to serve, we should cease to think of discriminating between dignified work and other and serve, putting up even with insults if it came to that.'[32]

After the Boers had positioned themselves to seize Ladysmith, Colonel Gallwey, the principal Medical Officer, stressed to General Buller the need to make arrangements for an European Ambulance Corps. The Corps was formed accordingly, hospitals were improvised and doctors, nurses and bearers began to be hurried to the front. That gave Gandhi his opportunity. On behalf of the Indians he telegraphed the Government how they would do even 'sweepers' and 'scavanengers' work' in the hospitals.[33]

As Gandhi had predicted, the local colonials as well as many of the English initially met his offer with hostility, confirming his view that the average Englishman believed that the Indian was 'a coward, incapable of taking risks or looking beyond his immediate self-interest.'[34]

In his correspondence with colonial authorities Gandhi made no attempt to mask Indian intentions for offering their services. He wanted it to be understood that this was a voluntary act to prove their loyalty which they hoped would be reciprocated with greater respect and protection. In his speeches, he emphasised that the Indians had an 'unflinching devotion to duty and extreme eagerness to serve our Sovereign' and stated openly that the 'motive underlying their humble offer is to endeavor to prove that, in common with other subjects of the Queen-Empress in South Africa, the Indians, too, are

[31] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 100.
[32] Ibid.. p. 101.
[33] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 274.
[34] Gandhi,M.K. *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* p. 264.

ready to do duty for their Sovereign on the battlefield'.[35] In a letter to the Colonial Secretary in Pietermaritzburg on 19 October 1899, he explained that their 'services are offered by the applicants without pay' and it was 'open to the authorities to accept the services of all or so many as they may consider fit or necessary.' He admitted that 'we do not know how to handle arms. It is not our fault; it is perhaps our misfortune that we cannot, but it may be there are other duties no less important to be performed on the battlefield and, no matter of what description they may be.'[36]

Throughout, Gandhi remained positive, and believed that the willingness and preparedness conveyed through letters created a 'very good impression',[37] even though the offer was dismissed on several occasions. Local and Imperial authorities gave him a variety of responses ranging from insulting rejections to hesitation. In part, this probably reflected the lack of willingness from the British authorities, to have to reciprocate the Indians' services, rather than simply their lack of faith in the Indians' capabilities. Yet, as Gandhi wrote, he would not 'rest satisfied' with such refusal.[38]

He spoke to Jameson, a current Member of the Legislative Council, to whom he was well-known and offered the Indians' services. Doke recreates the dialogue between the two men which may not have been the exact words that were spoken, but indicates something of the struggles which Gandhi endured. Jameson, laughing at the idea, said 'you Indians know nothing of war. You would only be a drag on the army, you would have to be taken care of, instead of being of help to us.' 'But,' replied Gandhi, 'is there nothing we can do? Can we do ordinary servants work in connection with the Hospital? Surely that will not demand very great intelligence? 'No,' he said, 'it all needs training.' Yet, he had the support of F.A. Laughton, who he had initially met at the Point Demonstration. Laughton said to Gandhi, 'that's the very thing, do it well, raise your people in the estimation of us all, and it will do them good. Never mind Mr. Jameson.' Thus encouraged, another letter was written to the Government, but this failed too.[39]

The Principal Under Secretary of Natal wrote to Gandhi on 23 October 1899 in a more respectful tone, informing him that 'the Government [was] deeply impressed with the offer of Her Majesty's loyal Indian subjects in Durban who have offered their

---

[35] Meer, F.(ed.), *The South African Gandhi, An Abstract of the Speeches and Writing of M.K. Gandhi, 1893 - 1914*. (Durban, 1995), pp. 744, 745.
[36] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. p. 101.
[37] Ibid. pp. 101, 102.
[38] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth*. p. 264.
[39] Doke, *M.K. Gandhi, An Indian Patriot in South Africa*. pp. 53, 54.

services ... and should the occasion arise, the Government [would]l be glad to avail itself of those services.' and asking him to 'convey to the Indians in question an expression of the Government's appreciation of their loyal offer.'[40]

Thus, it can be seen that the process of simply gaining acceptance of their offer to serve was not easily achieved and it was largely thanks to the determination of Gandhi and the few European voices who were prepared to support and re-enforce the Indians' capabilities and willingness.[41]

General Resistance to Black Involvement

Apart from the specific agitation felt towards Indians who could claim special privileges as subjects of the Empire, the whites' reluctance to accept the Indians' offer should be placed in a wider context. They tended to classify the Indians as a non-white group rather than as British subjects. Warwick makes the obvious point that the South African War was fought in a region where white people made up only a fifth of the total population and in Natal the ratio was almost ten blacks to every white.[42] Thus, the white authorities would have been cautious of any form of Indian involvement if they saw any potential in it to evoke a troublesome response from other sectors of the black population. The Natal government was determined that firearms or ammunition should not be supplied to black civilians, whose protection the ministers felt, should be organised under the umbrella of the police force and not carried out on an irregular basis by chiefs themselves.[43] The whites feared the response of African people to the war, and neither the colonial British nor the Boers at the outset committed all their resources to do battle with one another. Both sides took precautions to ensure that troops were held in reserve to be prepared to counter possible African disturbances.[44]

Indians Prepare to Serve in the War

Gandhi asked Dr. Prince to examine the Indians who had volunteered their services to know how many were fit to serve on the battlefield. On 18 and 19 October Prince

---

[40] Meer, (ed.), *The South African Gandhi, An Abstract of the Speeches and Writing of M.K. Gandhi, 1893 - 1914*. p. 745.
[41] Doke, *M.K. Gandhi, An Indian Patriot in South Africa*. p. 54.
[42] Warwick, *The South African War, The Anglo-Boer War, 1899 - 1902*. p. 186.
[43] Warwick, 'Black People and the War.' p. 76.
[44] Warwick, *The South African War, The Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*. p. 192.

examined 25 of the volunteers and passed 23, whose names were sent to the Government.[45]

Many of the leaders who served would continue to play a prominent role in South African Indian politics in subsequent years. For instance, James Walter Godfrey, a lawyer, served 2 terms on the South African Indian Congress and became Vice President of the Indo-European Joint Council. Vincent Lawrence was Gandhi's confidential clerk for 6 years and became Chairman of the Durban and District Indian Educational Advisory Committee, Honorary Treasurer of the Indian War Memorial Committee and President of Catholic Indian Young Men's Society.[46] Interestingly, Nazar, along with J Horne, did not qualify in the initial examination but he subsequently was passed and went on to serve as a volunteer.[47] Prince recorded the men's professions as well as their ages, heights, weights and chest sizes, all of which were probably intended to be an indication of their strength.[48]

Shortly afterwards, Dr. Booth started to give ambulance classes almost every evening. He trained the Ambulance Corps leaders in ambulance and nursing work and also secured medical certificates of fitness for service for them.[49] Booth, who was an Anglican missionary medical doctor, was a friend of Gandhi's.[50] He introduced Gandhi to Bishop Baynes of Natal. There were a number of Christian Indians in the Corps, and the Bishop was delighted with the proposal and promised to help them in getting their services accepted. Laughton and Escombe also enthusiastically supported the plan.[51]

In the opening stage of hostilities, the British had underestimated the outer effectiveness of the Boer defenses against the relief of Ladysmith and soon found themselves in a position where additional aid was badly needed. Brookes and Webb

[45] The following names were listed: M.K. Gandhi (Advocate, 29), H.L. Paul, (Interpreter, 37), A.H. Peters (Interpreter, 30), R.K..Khan (Advocate, 26), Parsee Dhanyisha (Merchant, 27), C. Cooper (Bookkeeper, 22) J. Godfrey (Attorney's Clerk, 18), J.D. Horne (Clerk, 18), M.H. Nazar (Gentleman, Fellow of the Imperial Institute and Member of the East Indian Associate, no age given), R. Bughwan (Photographer, 24), P. Peter (Printer, 19), N Dhunde (Bookkeeper, 18), V. Lawrence (Attorney's Clerk, 26), L Gabriel (Photographer, 27), G.D. Harry (Attorney's Cleark, 21), R Govinda (no profession listed, 21), S. Shadrack (Clerk, 37), Ramtahan (Compositor, 20), P.K. Naidoo (Merchant, 23), A Singh (Clerk, 21), S.N. Christopher , Attorney's Clerk, 30), C Stearns (no profession listed, 40), Natal Archives, P.W.D. 8047, List of Indian Volunteers examined by Dr. Prince, 18 October 1899.

[46] Bramdaw, D. (ed.), *South African Indian Who's Who of 1939*. (Pietermaritzburg, 1939), pp. 106 - 142.

[47] Natal Archives, CSO, Vol. 1632, 8047/1899, Principle Under-Secretary to Gandhi, 23 October 1899 cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899', p. 2.

[48] Natal Archives, P.W.D.8047, List of Indian Volunteer examined by Dr. Prince, 18 October 1899.

[49] Gandhi,M.K. *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* p. 264.

[50] Tichmann, 'We are sons of the Empire after all'. p. 10.

[51] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* pp. 264, 265.

have accurately described the Siege of Ladysmith as a 'triangular tragi-comedy' between the Boers, White in Ladysmith and Buller who was in charge of the relief. The siege lasted almost four months until 28 February 1900. There are many critics who feel that White ought never to have let himself be besieged, but likewise there is a general agreement that Buller ought to have achieved the relief weeks before he did.[52] Thus the Indians' inclusion should be seen in the light of pressures, with the urgency of the situation forcing the British to call on Africans as well as to accept the Indians' offer. Lambert has suggested that, 'had the war not begun with such dramatic reverses in northern Natal, the Ministry's determination to keep the war 'white' and restrict African participation to the supply of labour might have succeeded.[53] Thus, external factors combined with the continued renewal of the Indians' offer meant they finally achieved their aim. It was at this point of extreme necessity that the Indians obtained acceptance.

At the stage when the British realised that they urgently needed additional auxiliary assistance, the concept of using indentured labourers was introduced. It was Gandhi's idea to permit indentured labourers to join the Corps, but he explained that it was the Government which approached the employers.[54] When it was finally formed, the Corps consisted mostly of indentured Indians supplied by the estates in Natal, through the Protector's Department.[55]

Introduction of Indentured Labourers into the Corps

Swan maintains that Gandhi's call for participation was notably to add substance to the merchants' claim to be 'desirable' citizens, and that this move fitted well into the elite's strategy which the Congress had pursued since its inception.[56] The picture of whether the motivation behind Gandhi and the Congress's work incorporated the concerns of the indentured labourers remains fairly vague, but certainly the indentured labourers were not in a position to participate in the free Indians' decision-making processes regarding the war.

---

[52] Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal*. p. 206.
[53] Lambert, J. 'Loyalty its own reward': the South African War experience of Natal's loyal Africans'. paper presented at the UNISA Library Conference, 'Rethinking the South African War, 1899 - 1902', 3- 5 August 1998, p. 4.
[54] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. pp. 101, 102.
[55] Meer, (ed.) *The South African Gandhi, An Abstract of the Speeches and Writing of M.K. Gandhi, 1893 - 1914*. pp. 755, 756.
[56] Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience*. p. 89.

In terms of considering whether the Indian contribution to the war was collective, it is relevant that the suggestion to use indentured labour came from Gandhi, although, their inclusion was only possible with the consent of the labourers' employers. The fact that it was the Natal Government which then approached these employers, rather than the request coming independently from Gandhi or the Congress, must have influenced the employers' decision to allow their workers to go. Furthermore, as will be shown, a situation almost arose where only the indentured labourers were used which would have altered the political significance of Indian involvement.

Buller wrote to the Natal Government at the end of November to recruit Indian bearers. In response to this, Barnes, Chief Engineer, Public Works Department was appointed to recruit men. [57] Buller made it clear to the Natal Government that the Indians would not be required to work within the range of fire.[58]

A letter from Clarence, Superintendent of the Indian Ambulance Corps, to Barnes on 12 December 1899, indicated that the response from the sugar estates had been good with the names of 543 men having been gathered.[59] For Barnes, the cooperation of sugar owners 'is to be the more appreciated seeing that this is the busy season of the year, cane crushing being in full swing.'[60]

Clarence listed the sugar estates that had sent labourers.[61] Pyralel added to these names Messrs Marshall and Wilson and the Colleries Company[62] and a later list of 11 December 1899 mentions further factories.[63] Clarence's list indicates that these men were accompanied by their sirdars.[64] These men were labeled as 'Sub-overseers' and were paid 10 shillings a day.[65]

Following the Indians' service, Gandhi received letters requesting the return of indentureds to their employers. Gilbert Wilkinson of the Ottawa Estate complained that a

---

[57] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 3.
[58] Natal Archives, P.W.D. 4964199, Chief Engineer to Protector of Immigrants, 811211899 cited in Tichmann, 'We are sons of the Empire after all'. p. 10.
[59] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 3.
[60] Natal Archives, PWD, 4694/99, Barnes to Col. Johnston, 13 December 1899, cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War', p. 3.
[61] Reynolds Brothers, Umzinto (105), Shires & Co. (67), Elands Laagte Colliery (68), Saville Bros (45), Cornubia (80), Milkwood Kraal (25), Sutton (18), Sacharine Hill Estate (31), Mount Edgecombe (41), Blackburn Factory (26), Natal Archives, PWD, 4694/99, Donnolly to Barnes, 21 December 1899 cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 3.
[62] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 275.
[63] Natal Archives, P.W.D. 4964/1899, Chief Engineer, PWD - Relative to Indians for Bearer Corps
[64] Natal Archives,. P.W.D. 4964, Clarence to Chief Engineer, 12 December 1899 cited in Tichmann, 'We are sons of the Empire after all'. p. 12.
[65] Natal Archives, PWD 4964/ 1899, letter from Clarence to Barnes, Chief Engineer, 12 December 1899.

number of his 'coolies' had left the estate and joined the Indian Ambulance stretcher bearers' corps and requested him 'kindly to arrange to send them all back to me ...On my behalf you can assure them that I shall take no action against them for desertion and shall give them free pardon.' Similarly the Natal Government Railway authorities intimated to Gandhi that one Sidney Josiah, a timekeeper in the Railway who had offered himself as a volunteer to work under him, could not be spared, and should be sent back to his job.[66] These letters seem to indicate that, in some instances at least, the sending of indentureds to the front had not been particularly well organised and the labourers had left without discussing their return with their employers. Although it is a tentative suggestion, it does open up the possibility that some indentured labourers were acting on their own convictions when they left for the front.

The first call for Indian service came when Colonel Gallwey requested 60 Indians to work at Fort Napier Hospital in Pietermaritzburg.[67] The Protector of Indian Immigrants sent 28 men on 7 December 1899, and promised that a further 32 would follow the next day.[68] However, it seemed only indentured labourers were wanted. Gandhi wired back that it would be a great disappointment, if after all their preparation, the Government would not accept the ambulance volunteers.[69] If the volunteers had not been able to participate in the war, the interest in the various services offered by the whole Indian community may have been considerably less in contemporary and historical writing. However, Barnes indicated to Clarence that he wanted to 'take advantage of the Indians from Canon Booth's Ambulance classes', based on the recommendation of Colonel Johnston,[70] and Gandhi, the leaders and the other volunteers were later called upon.

Thus indentured Indians served in the war prior to the volunteer Corps, and Gandhi acknowledges that the free Indians who helped him to form the Corps should not take credit for the inclusion of the indentured labourers. This he said 'should rightly have to go to the planters'[71] and he concedes how the indentured labourers who joined

---

[66] *Natal Mercury*, 15 December 1899 cited in Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II*. p. 294.
[67] Natal Archives, CSO, 9294/1899, G.D. Plowman to General Officer Commanding, Lines of Communication, 5 December, 1899 cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War', p. 3.
[68] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, p. 3.
[69] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II*. p. 275.
[70] Natal Archives, PWD, Vol. 2/72, 4964/1899, Barnes to Gallwey, PMO, 13 December, 1899 cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 3.
[71] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. p. 103.

the Corps were under the charge of the English overseers from their respective factories and plantations. Yet, he goes on to describe how the management of the entire Corps naturally passed into the Indian leaders hands,[72] and the whole Corps was described as the Indian Ambulance Corps (also referred to as the Indian Stretcher Bearers Corps).[73]

General Buller acknowledged the work done by 'the Indian community' and did not draw particular distinctions in his dispatches.[74] Nevertheless, when dealing with the issue of certificates of acknowledgment which Gandhi requested after the Indians had served in the war, the British authorities emphasised that the indentured labourers had been organised by the planters and did not hold the same status as volunteers.

Composition of the Indian Ambulance Corps

The Indian Ambulance Corps under Gandhi's leadership consisted of between three and four hundred free Indians with the remaining two thirds, being indentured labourers.[75] The number of Indians who served increased at each consecutive battle, as more indentured labourers were sent to the front. There are some discrepancies in writings about the total number of Indians who served but, according to Gandhi, the Corps became 1,100 strong, with nearly 40 leaders, a complement reached when they served at Spion Kop.[76] Most of the men were employed between 10 and 20 December1899.[77]

The ex-indentured Indians in the Corps were recruited through the efforts of other free Indians. Of these free men, thirty-seven were looked upon as leaders, and the offer made to Government had been sent under their signatures.[78] Among the leaders, there were barristers and accountants, while others were either artisans such as masons or carpenters, or ordinary labourers. According to Gandhi, there were Hindus and Musalmans, Madrasis and 'upcountry' men and all classes and creeds were well represented. There were hardly any traders in the Corps but they subscribed considerable amounts of money.[79] Apart from the names sent forward by Prince, when Nazar was sending names to the War Office of those men who should receive

[72] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 103.
[73] Tichmann, 'We are sons of the Empire after all'. p. 10.
[74] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 103.
[75] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* p. 265.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Vahed, Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African, 1899 – 1902', p. 3.
[78] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 102.
[79] Ibid. p. 103.

acknowledgement for their work, he included prominent Natal merchants, Mohamed C Anglia and Dada Osman. Among the other individuals he mentioned were associates Mr. Goodricke and Mr. Laughton, Durban law partners, and Rahim Khan, the other Secretary of the Natal Indian Congress, although it is not explicit in what capacity they served.[80] The other volunteers were mostly young free Indians, many of who became important political, sporting and community leaders over the next three to four decades.

Booth had agreed to accompany the Corps at Gandhi's request. Gandhi and the organisers of the Ambulance Corps faced numerous obstacles and were almost faced with a situation where Booth could not join them. In the few days preceding the Indians' departure, Bishop Baynes felt that Booth could not be spared from his mission work. Yet Gandhi persuaded Baynes of the strong need for Booth's guidance. Afterwards, Colonel Gallwey installed Booth as Medical Officer for the Corps.[81] An incident like this was minor but it does serve to illustrate the determination with which Gandhi worked. Whilst he worked predominantly with the Indian Christians, Gandhi says that he freely mixed with Indians of all denominations.[82] Another white, Herbert Kitchin, also joined the Corps.[83] After the Indians' work in the war, Kitchin sent Gandhi graphic descriptions of the war, allowing Gandhi to follow the developments from afar.[84]

The leaders served without any payment, but most of the free Indians who served accepted remuneration.[85] Vahed suggests that the free Indians joined because the bearer corps represented a valuable source of employment, whilst the situation was different for the elite merchant and trader classes who were continuing their fight against anti-Indian legislation on the ground that they were British subjects.[86] There may be validity in that statement, although Pyarelal reports that these men received £1 per week and rations, even though many of them were earning much more than £4 a week from their respective pursuits.[87] The £1 financial remuneration received by many of the free

[80] Bhana, and Hunt., *Gandhi's Editor*, p 56.
[81] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 276.
[82] Narayan. (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* 102.
[83] Vahad, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 2.
[84] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 301.
[85] Pillay, B. *British Indians in the Transvaal.* p. 88.
[86] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 13.
[87] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 276.

Indians does not imply they were not motivated to serve the British, but it does blur the reading of their loyalty. The indentured Indians were also paid about 20 shillings per week as against the 35 shillings per week paid to whites.[88] As will be discussed, understanding the indentureds' attitude towards the war is further complicated by their not having control over the decision regarding their participation. It is likely that they did not foresee the potential for social advancements accrued from loyal service which the free Indians were trying to gain.

[88] Natal Archives, PWD, Vol. 2/72, 4964/1900, F. W. Barnes, Chief Engineer to A. L. Griffin, Accounting Department, 30 January 1900. cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 3.

6
Indian Involvement in the War

The contribution that the Indians made to the British in the South African War, 1899 - 1902, was one of their more striking attempts to protect and improve their rights and to expand a level of political awareness and organisation which was to grow in future years. Indian activities, of course, were fairly minor in comparison to that of other black groups. However, their contribution deserves a place in the body of knowledge that recognises that many black groups throughout the Southern African republics and colonies were active in the war and were aware that the outcome would impact on their future. Furthermore, as part of a historical discussion of their own political development, their war involvement was physical proof of loyalty of the politically conscious free Indians to the British and the Empire.

Colonial Responses to Indians Leaving for the Front

The leaders of the stretcher-bearer corps were honoured by various leading individuals in the white and Indian communities of Natal. Significantly, they attended a reception at Escombe's residence before leaving for the front. Pyarelal reported that much water had flowed under the bridge since Escombe had met Gandhi in his office on 20 January 1897 after the Point Demonstration and that he was deeply moved by the Indians' actions.[1] Following on this, Escombe is reported to have spoken to Gandhi after the Battle of Colenso, saying, 'I have never realised there was so much Christian charity locked up in the Indian breast.'[2] He then went on to express his regret about 'Anti-Asian' measures and 'hoped that time would remove any inconvenience.'[3]

The *Natal Mercury* of 14 December 1899 provided a brief press report of the speech that Gandhi had been asked to make at the function. This prestigious invitation, and the fact that it was reported would have been regarded as a political advance by Gandhi and other leaders.[4] Naturally, this public acknowledgment was a marked contrast to the anonymous manner in which the indentured labourers' work was treated.

On this occasion, Gandhi spoke of the enthusiasm that the men had shown 'as subjects of the Queen, to do something to prove their loyalty.' He made it clear that they

---

[1] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 279.
[2] Gandhi in conversation with the author, Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 283.
[3] *Indian Opinion*, 3 September 1903 cited in Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 283.
[4] Meer, (ed.), *The South African Gandhi.* p. 743.

had '[come] to the conclusion that they would offer their services to the Colonial or Imperial Government, unconditionally and absolutely without payment, in any capacity in which they could be useful, in order to show the Colonists that they were worthy subjects of the Queen.' He acknowledged those whites who had supported their cause such as Prince, Booth, Bishop Baynes and also Colonel Johnston. Gandhi ended by saying that 'their dream had been realized, and although, unfortunately they were not to be engaged in the fighting line, he hoped they would be able to discharge their duties well.'[5]

Earlier in the day Gandhi, Nazar, Khun, Booth and other leaders had been given a hearty send off at the Congress Hall and that night Parsi Rustamji treated them to a sumptious dinner.[6]

Pyarelal claimed that the Indians' offer of service was all a revelation to many whites of Natal. More than one colonist felt compelled to revise his earlier attitude towards the Indians, as illustrated by the following which appeared in the *Natal Mercury* on 11 November, 1899:

> My apologies to you, Ramasamy Naidu - I have often called you names not altogether complimentary...but well, let bygones be bygones from now, for you are sons of the Empire after all, and
>
> Tho' he speak from a swarthy cheek
> The friend of a friend is mine.
>
> The offer made by the Indians of Durban to raise a coloured contingent ... will be always remembered to their credit in days to come.[7]

However, there were also examples of anti-Indianism or scepticism. The editor of the *Natal Mercury,* commenting on the departure of Indian volunteers for the Front, advised his readers not to forget the 'loyalty and patriotism' of Indians but hoped equally that after the war the means would be found to relieve Natal of the Indians who 'are not all that is desirable as inhabitants of Natal.'[8] This statement in many ways pre-empted the tone of the response that British officials would adopt towards Indians after the war.

---

[5] Meer, (ed.), *The South African Gandhi.* p. 747.
[6] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 280.
[7] *Natal Mercury*, 11 November 1899 cited in Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 278.
[8] *Natal Mercury,* 13 December 1899 cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 13.

Indians from the Transvaal

With the coming of the war, Vane notes that most of the Indians resident in the Transvaal left for Natal or the Cape Colony, while some went back to India.[9] However, the option of fleeing to Natal presented obstacles, since, the Immigration Restriction Act was in force. The Government would only allow Indians who could prove that they were previously domiciled in the Colony to enter Natal. They had to produce two affidavits to the effect that they were doing some 'permanent business' for a term of at least two years in Natal. To receive a 'domicile certificate' they were charged a fee of half a Crown and they then had also to pay lawyers to draw up the affidavits.[10] Otherwise, Indians were forced to pay a deposit of £10 for a temporary visit to the Colony. In July 1899, Gandhi asked the Government to suspend this deposit during the 'period of tension' to facilitate the entry of Indians. The Government replied that it did not have the power to do so.[11] The *Standard and Digger's News*, reflecting Boer opinion, ridiculed Natal's hypocrisy. In a scathing article it pointed out the inconsistency of the Imperial Government in coercing the Transvaal to do justice to the *Uitlanders,* while allowing Natal to treat the British Indians as they pleased. Faced with the embarrassing exposure of their inconsistent policies, the British Vice-Consul in Johannesburg vigorously took up the Indians' cause and further pressure was exerted from the High Commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner. The Natal Government thereupon conceded that In the event of the war breaking out, they would be 'guided by considerations of humanity'[12] and allow Indians to enter Natal.

Yet, there was an additional problem because the railway line between Durban and Johannesburg had been closed. Indian refugees had to go to Durban via Delagoa Bay, but the Natal Government had instructed shipping lines in Delagoa Bay not to take Indian passengers. Again, Imperial pressure was exerted and the Government suspended this instruction.[13] Vahed explains that although the Natal Indian Congress tendered its 'best thanks' to the Natal Government for this 'gracious act',[14] Gandhi questioned why it was that special arrangements were made to receive alleged white

---

[9] Vane, 'The South African Indians, A Plea for Better Understanding'. p. 15.
[10] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 229.
[11] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 11.
[12] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 230.
[13] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 11.
[14] Gandhi, M.K.*Collected Works* cited in Vahed, "Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902, p. 11.

prostitutes and criminals from the Transvaal, while Indians were subject to such difficulties.[15] Gandhi's reaction does show that at times his frustration with British policy was overtly stated, whilst in other situations he believed discretion to be more advantageous. It also highlights his always acute awareness of social distinctions.

Bhana and Hunt also raise the point that Indians who lived in Natal and wanted to leave the colony for the duration of the war, could obtain permits to return but only with great difficulty.[16] Thus, for those free Indians who did not align themselves with the British cause but wished to live in the colony, there was little option but to see the war through.

Responses to the War from India

Chandramohan has written an important, new essay on the significance of India's role in the war which is helpful to this discussion as the responses to the war from India are relevant from various perspectives. Firstly, there was the obvious link between Natal and India, with Natal having received many Indians and both places being part of the Empire. Despite their status as emigrants, the free Indians in Natal and the Boer Republics maintained their social affiliations with India and often economic and political links as well. The connection was also perpetuated in India. Many Indians within India as well as the British Indian Government, monitored and commented on Indians' experience around the Empire. When looking at how different sectors of Indian society responded to the war, one should question if they viewed this war in terms of the British and the Empire or if they were wanting to take a stand for Indians in South Africa as well as in India. Secondly, the racial discrimination displayed by the British authorities in not allowing their black subjects to assume combatant roles extended to the rest of the Empire and well-trained Indians were deprived of the chance of taking up their weapons to fight. Thirdly, there are comparisons to be drawn between the reaction of different sectors of Indian society and Natal Indians to the war. Yet, it should also be noted that there seems to have been minimal contact made between the Natal Indians and those auxiliaries who participated in the war from India.

The Indian Government naturally became involved in the war because it was part of the Empire and its Imperial voices rallied support for the war. Chandramoham relates a

[15] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p.11.
[16] Bhana, and Hunt, *Gandhi's Editor*. p. 11.

typical example where, at the special church service parade organised in February 1900 for the Lumsden Horse about to embark for South Africa, the Bishop of Calcutta declared, 'It is a matter which vitally and personally touches your interest that to your fellow-subjects in South Africa should have been denied elementary rights of citizenship, the common privileges of humanity.' He claimed that 'the injury that has been done to them is done to you.'[17] Nevertheless, as Chandramohan points out, there is no indication here that the Bishop included Indian South Africans in the 'fellow subjects'. India sent 7794 white combat troops and 6,761 horses.[18] Equally, there was a strong tradition of Indian loyalty and martial valour displayed in previous imperial wars[19] and it seems that the Imperial authorities assumed 'the Indian 'native' contribution' to be 'just a matter of loyalty to be expected in times of crisis.'[20]

All the same, there was predictably not a uniform reaction to the war and the ambivalence about what the war represented to the Indian population is reflected in their different responses to the conflict. Indian loyalists offered their services, but wider Indian support was not always so forthcoming.[21] Certainly, the princely assistance to the British was not unexpected, given the fact that many of them owed their position and survival to the Raj. The Indians' support was officially acknowledged by Queen Victoria and Lord Curzon who expressed his appreciation of the Indians' 'most exemplary and gratifying loyalty'.[22] Yet those Indians who chose to serve in the war were also subjected to racial limitation in that they were only allowed non-combatant roles. In the first year of the war alone nearly 7,000 Indians were sent[23] mostly highly disciplined and proficient Indian cavalrymen who resented being shunted into menial support jobs such as being washermen and farriers.[24] Some Indians also served as doctors, and others were engaged in work in the hospital camps.[25] The bravery of the work of Indian dhoolie-bearers at the Talana Hill Battle was described in the *Natal Mercury* which described the

[17] Morrison, D.M. *India and Imperial Federation.* cited in Chandramohan, ''Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out'?', p. 155.
[18] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 219.
[19] Chandramohan, ''Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out'?', p. 150.
[20] Ibid, p. 151.
[21] Ibid. p. 156.
[22] Ibid. p. 155
[23] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II: The Discovery of Satyagraha On the Threshold.* p. 219.
[24] Chandramohan, ''Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out'?', p. 159.
[25] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 3.

Indians as 'stoical and stolid' and claimed that 'it [was] due to them very largely that so many wounded were not afterwards numbered among the killed.'[26]

Two reasons were advanced within India as to why Indians should not participate, firstly that 'a civilised Power should not employ Black and savage allies against white and civilised foes', and, secondly that England would lose her prestige amongst the natives of India if the impression was created that she was incapable of fighting her own battles.[27] At the same time, the South African War was presented by the imperial government and elements of the pro-war press, as a crusade to uphold the ideals, unity and interests of the Empire.[28] It was these ideals that motivated both many Indians in Natal and those who came from India, and despite the indignity they suffered, each of these groups trusted that the ideals of equality for all subjects of the Empire would ultimately prevail.

The loyalists, in general, supported the war effort as a means of aligning themselves with the British. They wanted to be recognised as equal to the British through what they perceived to be their superior education and culture.[29] Here there is an overlap with the elitist elements of the Natal merchants whose loyalty was connected to their belief that they were superior citizens and deserved recognition as British subjects. The loyalists' position in India was probably more secure, making their loyalty more politically obvious. Yet, they, too, were looking to advance their political position and their assistance was also marshalled in support of a say in the government of the Empire.[30] In a similar fashion to the Natal merchant traders' contribution to the war, the Princely states of India responded generously to British appeals for financial support.[31] For example, Indian princes subscribed £40, 000 to the Transvaal War Fund and Lumsden Horse.[32] In

[26] *Natal Mercury,* 30 October 1899 cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 3.
[27] *The Times*, 28 January 1900 cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 2.
[28] Chandramohan, ''Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out'?', p. 150.
[29] Ibid. p. 156.
[30] Ibid. p. 155.
[31] Ibid. 154.
[32] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 266.

addition, different branches of trade in Calcutta provided everything required for equipment of the Indian corps.[33]

The Indian National Congress, which was the Natal Indian Congress' closest ally in India, was preoccupied at this time with famine-related issues and the South African War seemed only to be one of its peripheral concerns. Generally, however, it supported, or at least did not oppose, the British war effort. It seems that the Indian National Congress was mainly interested in the general principal of improving conditions for Indians in South Africa, rather than in specifically supporting the Natal Indians' war effort. The Indian National Congress hoped that the British, when victorious, would reward the Indians by undoing the restrictions and discrimination that Tranvaal and Orange Free State Indians were suffering under Boer rule. It also believed that a greater assertion of the role India played in the Empire would lead to improved recognition and justice within the whole Empire.[34] Yet, an indication of some misgivings over support for the war effort was that the Congress resented Indian resources being used in foreign adventures that did not benefit India.[35] After his work in the war, Gandhi returned to India and during the year which he spent there, tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Congress leaders to make a major issue of South Africa,[36] despite its 'foreign' status.

Indians' Contribution to the War

Contributions from the Free Indian Population

Many of the free Indians who did not go to the front still made contributions to the war, and despite there being less evidence as to what their experience entailed, it should also be recognised as part of the Indian war effort. Furthermore, their efforts were to an extent organised independently of Gandhi, supporting the possibility that numerous Indians felt a conviction for the war effort and were prepared to take action. Many traders, for instance, gave financially to the war cause. The significance of this contribution is heightened by the fact that the Indian trading community was passing

---

[33] Ameny, L. (ed.) *The Times History of the War in South Africa, Vol VI* cited in Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II: The Discovery of Satyagraha On the Threshold.* p. 226.
[34] Chandramohan, ''Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out'?: the South African War, Empire and India', p. 156.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Swan, *Gandhi: the South African Experience.* p. 91.

through a period of great stress due to the virtual suspension of business just prior to the war.[37] Gandhi, for example, started a Patriotic League Fund to collect funds from Indian merchants. The list of contributors included major merchants such as G.H. Miankhan, Musa Haji Cassim, Amod Jeewa, M.H. Joosab and Abbobakr Amod. These funds were used to support the families of 'such leaders as needed it' and to equip the volunteers.[38] The Corps was given minimum rations by the military, and the traders supplied such comforts as sweets, cigarettes and gifts for both the Indians and their patients.[39] Indian traders had paid for the uniforms of the leaders,[40] and they assumed the job of paying the salaries of the leaders of the units, although it is not clear if this entailed just the organising of the salaries or financially contributing towards them. They also cared for the stretcher bearers' families and undertook the task of supporting the large exodus of Indians fleeing the Transvaal and Northern Natal.[41] At a meeting in March 1900, John Nicol, the Mayor of Durban, thanked those Indians who had cared for the refugees.[42] Vahed points out that the Durban Town Council went out of its way to see to the needs of the white refugees, but did nothing for the Indian refugees, who numbered approximately 4000.[43] Yet, there were also examples of Indians either neglecting or being unable financially to help other Indians. A hospital was started by the voluntary effort of two white doctors intended to provide free treatment for Natal's impoverished ex-indentured workers. However, it folded due to lack of funds, despite Gandhi's attempts to secure financial support from the Congress.[44] Many Indians were left in charge of up-country farms by the British owners, and had to endure being turned adrift by Boer commandos, whilst others working in the coal mines were captured by the Boers,[45]an occurrence that will be discussed later. But whenever possible, assitance was provided. Gandhi records how 'whenever [the stretcher bearers] camped near towns, the local traders did their best to look after [them].[46]

[37] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 277.
[38] Gandhi, M.K. *Collected Works*, Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 4.
[39] Nayaran, (ed.) *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 103.
[40] Pyaralal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* cited in Tichmann, 'We are sons of the Empire after all'. p. 12.
[41] Meer, (ed.), *The South African Gandhi.* p. 743.
[42] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 11.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience.* p. 90.
[45] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery.* p. 288.
[46] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 103.

The white colonials set up a Durban Women's Patriotic League to provide medical assistance to wounded soldiers and volunteers and started a street collection. The treasurer, Mr. Palmer, complained in a letter to Gandhi that while 'Coolies' had contributed 35 pieces, the 'Arabs' had declined to render any help.[47] 'This had become the talk among the lady collectors' and would 'appear very strange when published.' Gandhi did not shy away from assuming responsibility for this section of the India community and yet again proved to be a diplomatic tactician. He requested Palmer to assure the 'self-sacrificing ladies that no Indian would have declined to assist for want of sympathy.' 'The existence, if it so,' he said 'of a few selfish persons need not ...cause us to think uncharitably of the whole class to which they belong.' He asked Mr. Palmer to send him the names of the collectors and of the 'Arabs' who had declined to help, indicating that he intended to intervene. As for the distinction that Mr. Palmer had drawn between 'Coolies' and 'Arabs', Gandhi gently reminded him that after all 'Coolies' were as much Indians as 'Arabs'.[48]

In addition to their own collection, the Durban Indian merchants and traders contributed to this Fund. They also donated materials which Indian women used to make pillowcases and handkerchiefs for the Women's Patriotic League Fund.[49] Despite, their absence from any of the decision-making processes, it is significant that women could claim to have made a contribution to the imperial war effor, however domestic its basis.

Commenting on the Indians' apology for their sum subscribed to the Women's Patriotic League Fund not being larger, an article in the *Natal Advertiser* intimated that there was no need to be apologetic, saying 'Such gestures as these will... not be forgotten by the Colonists in after years.'[50] What would have been in mind was an episode such as that in which Gandhi recorded an endearing account of an Indian woman who lived by selling fruit. She was reported to have emptied the whole content of her basket into the Tommies' truck at the Durban wharf saying that was all she could give that day.[51]

---

[47] Palmer to Gandhi, 3 November 1899 cited in Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 277.
[48] Gandhi to Palmer, 13 November 1899 cited in Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 277.
[49] *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* vol 3, quoted in Tichmann, 'We are sons of the Empire after all'. p. 10.
[50] *Natal Advertiser.* 4 December 1899 cited in Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 278.
[51] *Times of India*, 16 June 1900 cited in Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 277.

The Work of the Indian Ambulance Corps

When looking at the Indians' work at the front, the stretcher bearers were involved in what is described as the second phase of the Natal campaign, in Buller's attempts to relieve Ladysmith.[52] They first served at Colenso in December 1899. Here, they arrived at Chieveley on 15 December, where they were handed red cross badges and then proceeded to march to the field hospital 6 miles away.[53] The Indian Corps arrived at the hospital at dusk, hungry, thirsty and fatigued. The Battle of Colenso had just ended and the wounded were beginning to arrive. They were brought by the European bearers to the Field Hospital where their wounds were dressed.[54] From there the Indian Ambulance Corps volunteered to take them to the stationary hospital, even before the leaders' tents could be pitched or the men have anything to eat. About 45 wounded officers were carried to the hospital between 7 and 11 p.m. that night.[55] An eye witness recalls that the Indians worked 'steadily and ungrumbling the whole night'.[56] The following morning they were crammed into the train carriages and they had to wait for five hours before departing for Estcourt. They remained in Estcourt for two days in the open, exposed to the 'storm, sun and wind'. The corps was disbanded on 19 December.[57] They were sent back to Durban but told to expect another call soon.[58] On 25 December, Colonel Gallwey instructed Clarence to organise another corps. Clarence communicated with the indentureds' employers to establish the number of men that each could supply and whether the employer could supply rations for the railway trip to Durban.[59] On 29 December, Gandhi also received a letter from Colonel Gallwey informing him that another corps was being formed. Gandhi replied in early January that 500 free Indians, who had registered their names at his office since October were ready 'to start at instant notice' while Dr Booth would again act as medical officer.[60] The Corps

[52] Wessels, A. 'The Phases of the Anglo-Boer, 1899 - 1902', brochure at the War Museum of the Boer Republics, (Bloemfontein, 1998), p. 45.
[53] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 4.
[54] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 280.
[55] Ibid. p. 281.
[56] *Natal Mercury*, 4 October 1899 cited Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 280.
[57] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 5.
[58] Doke, *M.K. Gandhi, An Indian Patriot in Natal.* p. 55.
[59] Natal Archives, PWD. Vol. 2/71, 5117/1899, Clarence to Employers, 25 December 1899 cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 5.
[60] Gandhi, M.K. *Collected Works* cited in Vahed 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 5.

was reformed and proceeded to Estcourt from 7 January 1900; there were over 1000 men at the Front by the second week of January. [61] These men were there to assist Buller in a second attempt to force a way to Ladysmith. It was a fortnight before battle

commenced. An indication of the leaders' commitment to their work is that during this interval, 36 of their number placed themselves in training under the instruction of doctors so that they might prove of greater use in hospital work.[62] Booth used the two-week period to drill the bearers and their leaders. He taught them how to lift the wounded, place them on the stretchers and carry them and also made the Indian volunteers' perform long marches on extremely rough ground.[63] Their efforts paid off as Treves' testimony reflects. Treves was the surgeon in charge of the No. 4 Stationary Field Hospital which operated during the relief of Ladysmith and he spoke of the telling conditions under which the soldiers were brought to the hospital:

> Some of the wounded came up by train and some by ambulance or by waggon, but a very large portion, which included nearly all the serious cases were carried up on stretchers by hand. No mode of transport is more comfortable than this, or is less fatiguing to the patient, and the splendid organisation of volunteer bearers and of coolie carriers enabled this means of saving lives and of sparing those they carried an infinite amount of pain.[64]

On 24 January, the Corps received orders to leave for Frere, and from Frere they walked 25 miles to the military headquarters at Spearman's Camp, near Spion Kop[65] They remained for three weeks for in the field and during this period they were more than once under fire.[66] During the Battle of Spion Kop, it was the duty of the bearers to receive the wounded outside the line of fire and to tramp with them to Frere, some 20 or 30 miles away.[67] After Spion Kop, Boer General Botha took some prominent English officers prisoner, and then allowed the remainder of the wounded men to be taken away. Gandhi and his men worked along side other white stretcher bearers to complete this demanding task.[68] Some of the stretcher bearers helped again for another three

[61] Natal Archives, PWD, 147/1900, Chief Engineer to Minister, Land & Works, 13 January 1900 cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 5.
[62] Doke, *M.K. Gandi, An Indian Patriot in Natal*, p. 56..
[63] Gandhi, *Collected Works* cited in Tichmann, 'We are sons of the Empire after all'. p. 14.
[64] Treves, F. *The Tale of a Field Hospital.* (London, 1900), p. 34.
[65] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 6.
[66] Doke, *M. K. Gandhi, An Indian Patriot in Natal.* pp. 55, 56.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ransford, O. *The Battle of Spion* Kop. (Great Britain,1969), p. 116.

weeks at the Battle of Vaal Kranz, July 1900, and Gandhi was then awarded the position of Sergeant Major.[69]

The corps was disbanded after six weeks' service. After the reverses at Spion Kop and Vaal Kranz, the British Commander-in-Chief abandoned the attempt to relieve Ladysmith and waited for further reinforcements from England and India.[70] When Buller's operations in connection with the relief of Ladysmith were over, the Indian Ambulance Corps was dismissed, as was the European. Soon after the relief of Ladysmith, the Red Cross units arrived from Britain.[71] But the Indians stated that they were always prepared to rejoin. In the order disbanding the Corps it was stipulated that the Government it would certainly utilise their services if operations on a large scale again proved necessary, especially in Natal.[72]

In addition to his ambulance duties, Gandhi was in charge of the provisioning department. He distributed the wages to the bearers, kept account of all expense incurred and looked after the men under his charge, although he was also reported to be a great disciplinarian.[73]

After their service, Gandhi wrote to each of the volunteers to thank them for 'serving '[their] motherland at a critical juncture'.[74] He also kept meticulous records of all expenditures incurred and donations received, and personally thanked the stretcher bearers at the end of the war, offering each recruit free legal services to the value of £5.[75] Gandhi also valued the work of the volunteers as something done personally 'out of a regard for him'. Chandramohan describes well the mixture of self-sacrifice, idealism, patriotism, public loyalty to the Empire, private obligation and reciprocity which combined to give Gandhi the broader political base that no other public figure before or during his stay in South Africa could command.[76]

When describing what the stretcher bearers did, Gandhi observed that '[they] soon got to work and that too harder than [they] had expected.' The stretcher bearers' ordinary

---

[69] Henning, *The Indentured Indian in Natal.* p. 82.
[70] Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* p. 265.
[71] Warwick, 'Black People and the War', p. 133.
[72] Andrews, C.F. *Mahatma Gandhi: His Own Story.* (London, 1930), p. 147.
[73] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 288.
[74] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 12.
[75] Meer, (ed.), *The South African Gandhi.* p. 743.
[76] Chandramohan, ''Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out'?', p. 160.

routine was to carry the wounded at least seven or eight miles from the battle scenes to medical tents.[77] The march would commence at eight in the morning, medicines had to be administered on the way, and they were required to reach the base hospital at five. They had to endure hardships such as carrying the badly wounded over distances that were greater than 25 miles through rugged, hilly roads in mud and torrential rains, although Gandhi records that it was rare that they had to carry the wounded 25 miles in a single day.[78] The Indians assisted in the unpleasant task of disposing of those who had died. They carried the corpses to the mortuary tent, where each body was sewn up in an army blanket or in a sheet.[79] Since it was the Indians' intention to prove their devotion and sense of sacrifice for the Empire, Gandhi did not resent but took pride in the hardships and danger that they faced. The Government, on the terms in which it accepted the Indians' services, had said that the auxiliaries would not be expected to work within the range of fire, even though the Indians had not requested such exemption. Initially, the permanent European Ambulance Corps would fetch the wounded from the line of fire and leave them outside the danger zone for the Indians and the temporary European Ambulance Corps to collect. Yet, as the British army met initially with reverse after reverse and after the repulse at Spion Kop, Buller sent the message that the army would be thankful if the Indians would join the permanent Ambulance Corps and be prepared to fetch the wounded from the field. When such an emergency arose, they were reminded that they were not compelled to do this and it was understood that Buller had no intention of forcing them to work under fire if they were not prepared to accept such risk. But Gandhi claimed that 'we were only too willing to enter the danger zone and had never liked to remain outside' and concluded that they 'welcomed this opportunity.'[80] The action at Spion Kop found them working within the firing line and it was at this time that they had to move from 20 to 25 miles a day.[81] They were exposed to risk as at Spion Kop, where Wilson reported that the Boers fired on them 'with the utmost impartiality' as they either could not or would not see the Red-Cross badges.'[82] This frustrated remark probably reflects British anti-Boer opinion as much as it shows a real concern for the Indians. The Indian contingent was also

[77] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 105.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Treves, *The Tale of a Field Hospital.* p. 84.
[80] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 105.
[81] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* p. 265.
[82] Wilson, *With the Flag to Pretoria* cited in Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 286.

under fire at Vaal Kranz. In all of this, there is uncertainty about whether any Indians were killed. Narayan states that surprisingly, despite being in a danger zone on several occasions, none of the stretcher bearers received a bullet wound or any other injury.[83] In the same text, Gandhi is quoted as arguing that the Indians 'suffered hardly any loss of life.[84]

Gandhi was very aware of any prestige and acknowledgment that could be attached to Indian actions and reports that 'amongst the wounded we had the honour of carrying soldiers like General Woodgate'.[85] He describes how the agony of the General was excruciating as they 'hurried through the heat and dust, fearful lest he should die before they could reach camp.'[86] The bearers of the Indian Ambulance Corps also carried Lieutenant Roberts, Lord Roberts's fatally injured son from the Field Hospital to Chieveley. The leaders of the Corps were considered privileged to attend his military funeral.[87]

Provisions made for the bearers were very basic. Men carried food rations and firewood for a week or even two at a time, and were often unaccompanied by any wagons or water carts.[88] Men were given rice, dhall, ghee, oil and fish to last a week and supplied with one pot per twenty men. At dawn, they prepared a 'pot full and each man had his breakfast and filled a small tin with food for the day'.[89]The hardiness of these Indians was presented by Clarence as one of their advantages and he concluded that 'therefore the coolie becomes the most useful carrier to be obtained.'[90] In Escourt they camped in the open for two days, exposed to the sun and rain.[91] In addition to that, 600 bearers had to share 137 blankets.[92] Treves emphasised the general shortage of water and reported that 'water [was] precious, more precious than any other necessity for every drop has to be brought by train from Frere.'[93] The shortage of water was a major

[83] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 105.
[84] Ibid. p. 106.
[85] Gandhi,M.K. *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* p. 265.
[86] Doke, *M.K. Gandhi, An Indian Patriot in Natal.* pp. 55, 56.
[87] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 282.
[88] Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi: His Own Story.* p. 147.
[89] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 5.
[90] Natal Archives, PWD, Vol. 2/71, 5117/1899, Clarence to Chief Engineer, PWD, 23 December 1899 cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 5.
[91] Tichmann, 'We are sons of the Empire after all'. p. 13.
[92] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 5.
[93] Treves, *The Tale of a Field Hospital.* p. 21.

problem at Chievely and the Field Camp Hospital, particularly as the Corps did not have a water cart.[94]

When the Indians had completed their service, correspondence passed between the British authorities as to what could be done in the future to improve their conditions and performance if they were needed again. This response indicates to some extent what difficulties the Indians had faced whilst serving. The required items listed included a wagon, a water cart, tents and more stretchers as Clarence reported that there was fewer than one stretcher to every eight men, meaning that the stretcher bearers could not all be used very effectively. Another requirement was more food for the railway journey to the front, which would entail the supply of a loaf of bread per bearer,[95] bringing into question how much the Indians had been fed on their journey.

Observations of the Significance of the Indians' Work

Predictably, Gandhi attempted to contextualise the Indian role in the war effort as being part of the process of achieving various long term social and political goals. One of the goals was to create greater understanding and support for one another within the Indian community.

The war was asserted to have been a significant unifying episode which also affirmed the 'manliness' of Hindus. Still, there were certain symbolic divisions between the leaders and the stretcher bearers. It is hard to ascertain exactly what impact this had on their interaction. A most marked difference was clearly that many of the free Indians as well as the indentureds were paid whilst the leaders and other free Indians had volunteered. Other examples of differentiation were the way in which the various sectors of the Corps travelled to the Front, their accommodation and their manner of dress.

After the leaders' send-off dinner at Parsi Rustamji on 4 December 1899, they left in the early hours on the morning. Gandhi was supplied with 5 first class, 20 second class and 20 third class train tickets for the leaders.[96] The departure of the bearers was less elaborate. The men arrived at the railway station in Durban from the various

[94] Natal Archives, PWD, Vol. 2/71, 5117/1899, Clarence to Barnes, 23 December 1899, cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 5.
[95] Natal Archives, PWD 5117/99, letter from Clarence (Superintedent Indian Ambulance Corps) to Chief Engineer PWD.
[96] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 4.

plantations, where they were met by Clarence who was accompanied by two white overseers. The labourers were all provided with third class rail tickets.[97] Furthermore, as has been mentioned, the leaders were provided with tents but the other free and indentured Indians had to sleep in the open. The decision not to provide the other Indians with tents was in all likelihood the doing of British officers rather than Indian leaders, making it an example of how the British contributed to buttressing the hierarchy in the Indian Ambulance Corps.

The leaders adopted British uniforms, whilst the indentured labourers wore their traditional clothes, including their turbans. Brooke and Webb describe how Gandhi [and the leaders] wore a slouch hat, khaki uniform and puttees of the period, a clear identification with the British cause.[98] Treves has described the contrasting appearance of the indentured labourers, noting, 'with us were a hundred coolies, who were attached to the hospital for camp work. They were a dismal crowd as they stalked along with their bare legs and their picturesque tatters of clothing, with all their earthly possessions in bundles on their heads, and with apparently a vow of funeral silence in their heads.'[99] There is an obvious sense of the social gap between whites and the indentured labourers, who retained an image of being servants. Whether their leaders felt a similar gap remains unclear. In this, one needs to remember that between three and four hundred free Indians served[100]and they may have been more integrated with the indentured Indians than were the leaders in this war environment. However, the fact that the sirdars from the sugar estates accompanied the indentureds suggests that the labourers would have remained under their tight control, and would not have been wholly free to interact with the other Indians.

Prior to the war in Natal, in Indian political discourse there had been many situations where free Indians emphasised class differences within the Indian community, while there were also times when there was an acknowledgement of shared burdens within their population. One can argue that this was similarly reflected in the war. Vahed asserts that the Indian response to the war must be viewed in terms of the entrenched class differences amongst them,[101]and there is much evidence to support this, not least that the indentured labourers were organised independently of the free Indians.

---

[97] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 4..
[98] Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi.* cited in Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal.* p. 205.
[99] Treves, *The Tale of a Field Hospital.* p. 50.
[100] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* p. 265.
[101] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 13.

However, there appears also to have been at least some sense of a communal cause. Gandhi declares that 'the work for them was the same as for ourselves.'[102] He also described how 'the Indian community became better organized,' and declared that he was pleased that the war allowed him the opportunity to get into 'closer touch' with the indentured Indians. [103] Pyarelal writes that for the indentureds to live among and like free Indians was a new experience and claims that they were highly pleased.[104] Gandhi concluded that 'there came a greater awakening amongst them and the feeling that Hindus, Musalmans, Christians, Tamilians, Gujaratis and Sindhis were all Indians and children of the same motherland took deep root amongst them. Everyone believed that the Indian grievances were sure to be redressed.' [105]

A further objective of the Indians was to gain greater acceptance and respect from whites, both locally and from England. Here, the positive long-term impact of the war on whites' perception of Indians in Natal should be not be overstated for various clear reasons. The whites with whom they worked were not only Natalians, the interaction happened over a fairly short period of six weeks, and it was in a particularly, intense situation where service admiration may have been earned but not necessarily cultural understanding or sympathy on a social and political level. Fredrik Barth, who in recent years has organised a seminar on the difficulties of scale as an object of analysis, argues that there is a problem in trying 'to describe different combinations of scale in different empirical social organizations to measure the part they play in the different sections of the lives they shape.'[106] Yet, contact in the field was made and since the Indians' reception in Natal from white society was affected by factors such as class, occupation and geographical location, the status of the whites with whom they worked is significant. This status would have effected the nature of the attitudes that were brought to war- time social interaction. At the same time, one should take into account the factor that in this environment of greater interdependency, these attitudes may have been altered. In addition, as the Indians regarded the war as a chance to make a positive

[102] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 103.
[103] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* p. 266.
[104] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 277.
[105] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* p. 266.
[106] 'F. Barth (ed.), *Scale and Social Organization* quoted in Levi, Giovanni, 'On Microhistory', Burke, Peter (ed), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing.* (Great Britain, 1991) p. 95.

impression and to show their concern for the colony and the Empire, one should also consider how successful they felt that contact to be.

Gandhi was acutely aware of Indians' contact with whites in the war. An obvious concern was that some members of the temporary Corps had taken part in the anti-Indian agitation before the war.[107] Gandhi also feared that the indentured labourers who were 'supposed to be rather uncouth'[108] may not have been well received.

Indians would have had interaction with white soldiers as well as stretcher bearers, their contact with the latter obviously being more extensive as they worked directly with them. Pakenham, for example, describes the 'strange procession' of the two thousand volunteer stretcher-bearers, including Indians, heading out for Colenso.[109] The whites who worked within the medical corps came from various places. Pakenham suggests that since the War Office ambulances were notoriously unsuited to the stony veld, Buller had recruited 'body-snatchers' from 'any source at hand'. Early in the campaign, Colonel Gallwey was asked to organise a volunteer ambulance corps to work with the existing European Ambulance Corps. Two thousand bearers were needed and in a few days thousands were enrolled. Treves described the corps as containing 'examples of all sorts and conditions of men - labourers, mechanics, 'gentlemen' dock loafers, seamen, dentists, a chemist or two, a lawyer or two, tram drivers, clerks, miners and shop assistants'. Many of the men were refugees from the Transvaal.[110] Thus, the white stretcher bearers that the Indians had contact with were from varying social classes and often did not come from Natal society, as Gandhi and the other leaders predictably would have hoped.

Treves concluded that the white ambulance corps that Gallway had organised 'formed a strange company', as 'some were disposed to assume a serious military bearing, while others appeared to regard the venture as a silly joke of which they were beginning to be a little ashamed.'[111] They were nevertheless popular with soldiers. In Treves' view, 'they had the gift of tongues of a kind and could compete in the matter of lurid language. Their incessant hunger and indiscriminate thirst were a matter for

[107] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. p. 106.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Pakenham, T. *The Boer War*. (London, 1992), p. 224.
[110] Treves, *The Tale of a Field Hospital*. p. 74.
[111] Ibid.

admiration.[112] It is hard to know how the Indians responded to their apparently rowdy behavior and if they made any impression on those men who came from Natal.

Nonetheless, the more restrained and disciplined nature of the Indian leaders was appreciated by the white organisers of the ambulance corps. Clarence stated that Gandhi and the leaders 'are just the men required to take charge of the bearers as they speak English and are tee-totalers.'[113]

When looking at the possible nature of interaction between white soldiers and the Indians, Dominy's material suggests that previous racial tensions may even have been heightened in the war context. He analyses the overall social segregation within the Natal garrison and concludes that racism was a central part of the division process. Drawing on Judith Fingard, this perspective proposes the concept of there being 'rough and respectable' elements in the classic imperial military garrison. Within the Victorian army, this 'rough and respectable' division often paralleled the patterns of class and rank distinction, with officers drawn largely from the aristocracy and the gentry whilst the other ranks were recruited from the rural and urban poor.[114] Dominy points out that Natal was a favoured station for British officers, particularly bachelors who pursued hunting opportunities.[115] However, he stresses that the development of class distinctions within the settler community should not be unduly exaggerated for the simple reason that Natal had a very small settler community and the officers of the garrison and the 'small circle' of colonial officials were scarcely sufficient to constitute a significant class. With the exception of this minority elite, the colony was composed almost entirely of working men, tradesmen, farmers and labourers.[116] Combined with this, the garrison and settler society were situated in a much larger African context and needed to assert a racially defined superiority over the majority African population. As a result, social integrating mechanisms were necessary to *make* the 'rough' of the white, military non-commissioned ranks into the 'respectable'.[117] Thus, racial divisions would have been underlined by any army leadership, where black groups, including Indians,

---

[112] Treves, *The Tale of a Field Hospital*. p. 76.
[113] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 5.
[114] Dominy, G. 'The Making of the Rough and the Respectable: The Imperial Garrison and the Wider Society in Colonial Natal', *South African Historical Journal*, 37, November 1997, p. 48.
[115] Ibid. p. 51.
[116] Barter, *The Dorp and the Veld or Six Months in Natal* , cited in Dominy, 'The Making of the Rough and Respectable'. p. 52.
[117] Dominy, 'The Making of the Rough and the Respectable'. p. 49.

would have been catogorised as an inferior group. Dominy also reveals that there was a general attitude within the garrison that, as servants, Africans showed 'greater honesty', 'over the more intelligent "coolies" who were seen as 'slippery and untrustworthy'.[118] Added to this, the knowledge that the British had intended to keep this a 'white man's war' may have also brought a degree of ill-ease to any social interaction between whites and other races.

Aside from the likelihood that racist prejudices were an obstacle in the Indians' attempt to improve their image amongst the colonists, Stirling stresses the reality that numerically the contact with Natal soldiers was very limited. It is estimated that the total number of Natalians who served in the war as soldiers did not exceed 2,500.[119] Of these, approximately 1,000 were in Ladysmith,[120] and would not have been in direct working contact with the Indian stretcher bearers. This would all suggest that the Indian Ambulance Corps had minimal contact with soldiers from Natal.

However, there were individual whites who were impressed by the Indians' work. A positive and descriptive account was given by a 'European' who had taken part in the Ladysmith campaign. He gave his extravagant impression of Gandhi and the Indian stretcher bearers in the *Illustrated Star* of Johannesburg, writing:

> Every man in Buller's force was dull and depressed and damnation was heartily invoked on everything. But Gandhi was stoical in his bearing, cheerful and confident in his conversation and had a kindly eye. He did one good. It was an informal introduction, and it led to a friendship. I saw the man and his small undisciplined corps on many a field of battle during the Natal campaign. When succour was to be rendered they were there. Their unassuming dauntlessness cost them many lives, and eventually an order was published forbidding them to go into the firing line.

As has been mentioned, it is not clear if any Natal Indians died in the danger zone. It is intriguing to question why this man believed 'many' Indians to have been killed and that they ceased to go into the danger zone, when the opposite is true. These inaccuracies imply that this man's understanding of the Indians' circumstances was largely based on hearsay and imagination. It is also interesting that in the apparent growth of stories surrounding the Indians' work, their deeds were presented in an increasingly heroic light.

---

[118] Dominy, 'The Making of the Rough and the Respectable'. p. 51.
[119] Stirling, J. *The Colonials in South Africa, 1899-1902.* cited in Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal.* pp. 202, 203.
[120] Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal.* p. 207.

This same correspondent drew a graphic pen-picture of the work of the Ambulance Corps which was published in the same newspaper.[121]

On the other hand, there were also some complaints registered against indentured Indians describing cases of so-called unsuitability and desertion. These seem to relate mainly to the periods when the indentureds were working without the volunteer Indian Ambulance Corps. Of the indentured men working at Fort Napier Hospital, sixteen were returned on 10 December because they were found to be 'undesirable'. According to Gallwey, fourteen of them refused to work on Sundays while two had taken their wives along and there was nowhere to accommodate them. However, the returned men informed the Protector that they had not refused to work on Sundays but rather that the man who had been appointed Sirdar was a 'Madras man' and had told them that as they 'were Calcutta men they were of no use and had better go.' The men also complained that they had received insufficient food.[122] Another bearer, Firman, is reported to have left because he was not paid as much as he had been promised.[123] On 19 January, Clarence wrote to the Protector that three indentureds: Ramsamy, Munsamy and Arunachellan had returned home as they were 'missing their families.' He urged the Protector that the functions of the Corps be explained properly to the new men being engaged. They should be told that they had to remain with the Corps until it was disbanded since 'just when they are becoming efficient and begin to know their stretcher drill they leave.'[124] Apart from the possibility that descriptions may have been distorted, this behaviour does indicate less of a conviction for the war cause on the part of the indentureds.

Gandhi asserted that the overall contact between Indian and European recruits was positive. The two Ambulance Corps worked side by side, and for him 'at the moment the white man's attitude seemed to have changed.'[125] The Indians, he claimed, did not feel that they were being treated with contempt or even with discourtesy[126] and he concluded that 'the knowledge that the Indians... were out to help them in the hour of

[121] Natisan, *Mathatma Gandhi – the Man and his Mission* cited in Pyrelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II, The Discovery of Satyagraha On The Threshold.* p. 288 , see Appendix 1, p. 5, picture 10
[122] Natal Archives, PAR II, Protector's Letter Book: General, 15 August 1899 – 7 May 1900, 1921/99 Correspondence between Protector of Indian Immigrants and Gallwey, Sen. Medical Officer, 7 – 20 December 1899 cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 3.
[123] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 6.
[124] Ibid, p. 5.
[125] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or the The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* p. 266.
[126] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* p. 106.

their need, had melted their hearts for the time being.'[127] It is conceivable that since the Indians were responsible for the lives of the wounded soldiers they were transporting, an empathy for one another would have developed during that period. However, the phrases 'for the time being' and 'at the moment' were accurate, perhaps more sober than even Gandhi realised, because whilst the Indians enjoyed a brief period of recognition and respect, their war efforts would have a very limited long term political impact.

Gandhi summarized the Indian stretcher bearers' work as follows:

> This contribution of the Indians in South Africa to the war was comparatively insignificant. They suffered hardly any loss of life. Yet even a sincere desire to be of help is bound to impress the other party, and is doubly appreciated when it is quite unexpected. Such a fine feeling for the Indians lasted during the continuance of the war.' [128]

Newspapers are a useful indication of the interest that the civilian population took in the war. In the *Natal Advertiser* there were three articles on the 29 January 1900, after the Battle of Spion Kop, that would have pertained to the Indians' involvement.[129] The first was entitled 'Last Week's Battlefield Reviewed', and spoke of General Botha's resistance to having the wounded and the dead removed. The second was called 'With the Volunteer Ambulance Corps', and finally there was an article named 'Retreat from Spionkop', which reported that 'for the greater part of the day the stretcher bearers have been busy on top of the hill removing the wounded'. Yet none of these articles made any specific mention of the Indians.[130] However, in an article, "Ladysmith Relief Column, More about the Retreat' on January, 31 1900[131], the Indians were given a very positive report. Two of the sub-headlines of the report were: 'Splendid Ambulance Work' and 'Indian Corps in Evidence'. The article praised the Natal Volunteer Ambulance Corps, saying their work during the seven days' fighting was 'simply splendid' and mentioned their work within the firing line. It then went to record:

[127] Narayan, (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. p. 106.
[128] Ibid..
[129] *Natal Advertiser*. January, 29 1900.
[130] Ibid.
[131] *Natal Advertiser*. January, 31 1900.

> The transmission of the wounded to the base was accompanied by unusual difficulties. Two companies carried the wounded over the pontoon at Trichardt's, an arduous bit of work, while the Indian Volunteer Corps did excellent work in carrying bad cases all the way by road en route to Frere to be entrained there to the hospital down the line.'[132]

Although there were other scattered accounts in newspapers, many people remained unaware of the Indians' service. Another prominent white newspaper, the *Natal Witness*, made no reference to the Indians during the period of their service.

The Experiences of other Indians Directly Effected by the War

A number of other groups of Indians were also directly affected by the war. Hostilities had a severe impact on residents in northern Natal, where the republican commandos had laid siege in Newcastle, Charlestown, Elandslaagte and Dundee before the end of October 1899.[133] When the Boers reached Newcastle they destroyed property and it was reported that four Indians were shot by the Boers and a number were allegedly taken to Pretoria.[134] Approximately ten Indians died during the Boer occupation of Elandslaagte, while another 23 were reported 'missing' and could not be traced.[135] The majority of Indians were forced to flee even if they wished to remain under Boer occupation. Refugees vacated under trying circumstances and often left behind all their possessions, including their documents. Vahed reveals that when it became possible to return, the authorities were unsympathetic and made it difficult to obtain passes.[136]

Natal Indian storekeepers were also severely affected by the war. In the major towns, virtually all the stock in trading stores was removed, and doors and windows were broken. Aside from the actual Boer invasions, traders also fled because of panic created by rumours of imminent Boer arrivals, a good example being Estcourt. Here, the traders closed and left their stores even though the Boers never captured Estcourt.[137]

---

[132] *Natal Advertiser*. January, 31 1900..
[133] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 7.
[134] Report of the Indian Immigration Trust Board of Natal 1900, 1 cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 7.
[135] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 8.
[136] Ibid. p. 7.
[137] Ibid. p. 10.

A well-chronicled story is that of 230 Indians from the Elandslaagte coal mines who were instructed by the Boer Commandant Erasmus to leave for British territory. When the Boer forces occupied the districts north of Colenso, nearly all the indentured Indians working in the Elandslaagte collieries fell into their hands. [138] There were 137 indentured Indians, while 93 were free Indians. According to Lutchman, a free Indian who was a sirdar at Elandslaagte, and other Indians were detained by the Boers for about a month. Thereafter they were released at Modderspruit and told to go to Ladysmith.[139] However, White, already short of rations, refused to receive them and the Indians were forced to return to the Boer camp. The indentured labourers and their families were found on 11 December 1899 by a Reuters Special Correspondent to the *Natal Advertiser,* wandering on the veld beyond Bulwana. They eventually made their way to Frere Military Camp where they were received by Buller and given biscuits. Thereafter, they were sent to Durban as refugees. On this basis, they arrived on 11 December 1899, and 63 of the indentured Indians then volunteered to return to the front as stretcher bearers.[140] Breytenbach has made something of this incident, bringing an Afrikaner nationalist perspective to the adverse British treatment of their Indian subjects. He suggests that 'die Indiërs het 'n wit vlag na Gen. White gestuur het wat volgens hul beskouing vir die Britse onderdane in Noord-Natal moes sorg. White het egter geweier om hulle to ontvang en hulle na the Boerelinies teruggesteur aangesien die Boere sulke Britse onderdane aan die Britse outoriteite in Suid-Natal kon oorhandig'.[141] (the Indians sent a white flag to General White, who was responsible for British subjects in Northern Natal. White refused to receive them and sent them back to the Boer line on condition that the Boers handed over certain British subjects to the British authorities in Southern Natal). Breytenbach makes no mention of the British being short of rations, nor the fact that the Boers had detained the Indians for an extensive period, thus only emphasising the cruelty of the British act.

There were 'a few stray Indian settlers' in Ladysmith and surrounding areas during the siege. These were traders, free labourers and indentureds and whilst there have not

[138] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi Vol II*, cited in Tichmann, p. 12.
[139] Natal Archives, PAR, CSO 2925, 18 October 1901, Evidence of Lutchman before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 8.
[140] Pyarela, *Mahatma Gandhi Vol II.* cited in Tichmann, p. 12.
[141] Breytenbach, J.H. *Die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlorg in Suid-Afrika, 1899-1902, Deel II, Die Eertse Britse Offensief, Nov - Des 1899.* (Pretoria, 1978), p. 425.

been thorough accounts of their experiences, some individual stories have been recorded. One of the indentured labourers in Ladysmith was Parbhu Singh, and Gandhi describes this individual's legendary service as a 'noteworthy incident.' On a hill near Ladysmith, the Boers had stationed a field-gun which destroyed many buildings and even occasioned some loss of life. An interval of a minute or two passed before a shell which had been fired reached the town. If the besieged got even this short two minute notice, they could take cover and save themselves. Parbhu Singh sat perched in a tree, during all the time that the gun was operating, watching the hill, and rang a bell the moment he observed a flash.[142] Different sources claim that Singh was on a hill rather than in a tree, and one says he waved the Union Jack and another the Gordon Highlanders flag instead of ringing the bell, which reflects the folklore character that this act has assumed.[143]

A ceremony was held later for Singh where he was praised for his bravery by Lady Curzon, the Vicereine of India. The officer in charge of Ladysmith, in eulogizing his invaluable services, stated that Singh worked so zealously that not once had he failed to ring the bell, with Gandhi adding that 'it need hardly be said that his own life was constantly in peril.'[144] Among those present at the ceremony were Acting Durban Magistrate, Roch, the Town Clerk, Cooley, the Town Solicitor, Garlicke, the late Prime Minister Escombe's son-in-law, Mason, Protector of Immigrants, and Gandhi.[145] It was acknowledged that Singh had put himself in a position of great danger for the protection of white townspeople. Gandhi translated the speech for him as well as his response for the audience. Singh is reported to have said modestly he had done nothing more than his duty.[146]

He also expressed his wish to return to his country and to settle there.[147] Greenacre, the Chairman of the Dundee Coal Company, who employed Singh before the war, expressed the gratification of the directors to find that one with whom they were associated should have acted so nobly. It was agreed that he should go home and arrangements were made to cover the cost and to help finance him to settle back in

[142] Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi: His Own Story*. p. 147.
[143] see *Hindi*, Diwali Number 1923, p. 23 and Shaw's diary 'A Personal Narrative of the Natal Campaign, 1899 -1902', p. 64.'
[144] Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi: His Own Story*. p. 149.
[145] Pyralel, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 292.
[146] Ibid. p. 293.
[147] Maharaj, M.B. 'The Ladysmith India Hero, *Hindi*, Diwali No, 1923. p. 29.

India.[148] However, there were some who begrudged the monetary acknowledgment and thought that too much was being made of his work.[149]

Singh's brave deeds were honoured in local newspapers such as the *Natal Mercury* which, on 4 October 1900, included an article entitled 'The Ladysmith Indian Hero'.[150] When the story of his heroism reached England, several London illustrated newspapers published his portrait.[151] Still, despite the initial public reception his selfless service received, it was not the type of incident to be more broadly remembered in the decades following the war. As was often the case with other black contributions in the war, if an event was to receive any form of acknowledgement, it was generally a brief shower of accolades which was followed by no significant social improvements. In a South African Indian journal, *Hindi*, the editor, Matabadal Beethasee Mahraj later wrote an article, 'The Ladysmith Indian Hero, An Incident ignored by Historians',[152] showing the editor's frustration with the lack of recognition that this type of Indian contribution was receiving.

Shaw from the Natal Carbineers, was also in Ladysmith during the siege and observed the Indians in the town.[153] His record notes that 'The Indians were keen "conchologists" and the falling of the shell was a matter to them of intense interest. They would rush towards the soil-guper and whoever recovered the body of the shell would sell it that evening in camp.'[154] Whilst being quite gentle in its humorous approach, the patronising nature of the comment does indicate that for some British soldiers, the Indians, especially the indentured Indians, had no understanding of the war and merely exploited its consequences for financial gain.

A list of casualties from Ladysmith on 13 February 1900 reported that 'one Indian coolie' had died of enteric.[155] The white soldiers, by comparison, were named in the same list, which shows a lack of concern for the individual identity of Indians who were also trapped.

---

[148] Pyralel, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 293
[149] Ibid. p. 294.
[150] Maharaj, 'The Ladysmith India Hero', p. 27..
[151] Pyralel, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 292.
[152] Maharaj, 'The Ladysmith India Hero', p. 27.
[153] Shaw, 'A Personal Narrative of the Natal Campaign, 1899-1902', p. 64.
[154] Ibid. p. 65.

Lastly, a small and unclear article in the *Natal Advertiser* on 29 January 1900 reported on Indian women in the Intombi Spruit Camp. The Intombi Camp was a British-run, neutral hospital camp outside Ladysmith during the siege, from November 1899 to February 1900.[156] The hospital employed 250 Indians.[157] The article, entitled 'Trouble at Intombi Camp', warned:

> There has been more trouble at Intombi Spruit Camp! On Thursday night 70 coolie women were sent in from the camp by Mr. Bennett, the ex-Magistrate of Ladysmith. With his leg-iron handcuffs, birches, sjamboks and policemen it is strange that that peculiar man, Mr. Bennett, is not able to control the coolie ladies.[158]

This report poses many more questions than it answers, such as why were the women protesting or causing a disruption and why no men were involved. Stanack, who was present at the Intombi Camp, spoke of the problems of enteric and rations,[159] and possibly this female reaction related to deprivation of rations, although there is no direct evidence to support this suggestion. However, the reporter's approach has some revealing elements. He made no attempt to clarify or follow up on this story which shows that neither the newspaper nor its readers placed much importance on the Indians' experiences. His sardonic reference to Bennett's equipment also shows that he regarded physical punishment for Indian women as acceptable practice.

[155] Natal Archives, CSO 2609, Confidential Minute Papers, Anglo-Boer War, Transcript Telegrams, a list of casualties reported by G.O.C.Ladysmith, 13 February 1900.
[156] Pakenham, *The Boer War*. pp. 353-44.
[157] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 9.
[158] *Natal Advertiser*. Monday, 29 January 1900.
[159] Killie Campbell Africana Library, Dawes Collection, File B. Stranack, E.T.'Reminiscences of the Intombi Camp Hospital during the Siege of Ladysmith, Nov. 1899 to February 1900.'

7

Indians' Attempts to Capitalise on their War Work

The Work of the Natal Indian Congress

The Natal Indian Congress arranged a public meeting in the Congress Hall, Durban on 14 March 1900 to 'demonstrate their loyalty to the Crown'.[1] It was attended by about 1,000 Indians and, significantly, 60 leading white colonials. The building and vicinity were decorated with national imperial colours.[2] The letters of invitation bore the heading 'Long Live Kaiser-I-Hind' and pictures of Queen Victoria and three British Generals.[3] Sir John Robinson, former Prime Minister of Natal, presided and white guests included B.W. Greenacre, Member of the Natal Legislative Assembly and J. Nicol, Major of Durban.[4]

Sir John Robinson praised the Indian Stretcher Bearers Corps for its role during the war, reflecting:

> Though you were debarred from actual service in the field you were able to do excellent work in the succouring of the wounded, I cannot too warmly thank your able countryman, Mr. Gandhi, upon his timely unselfish and most useful action in voluntarily organising a corps of bearers for ambulance work at the front at a moment when their labours were sorely needed in discharging arduous duties which experience showed to be by no means devoid of peril. All engaged in that service deserve the grateful recognition of the community.[5]

Robinson added that 'the grand old flag of England beneath whose folds every man commands and enjoys full and equal security...must in future float unchallenged from Cape Town to Zambesi.'[6] The irony of this statement was to become only too apparent in future years.

The Indians at the meeting unanimously supported the proposal of Abdool Kadir, president of the Natal Indian Congress, to send telegrams to Roberts, Buller and White,

---

[1] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 12.
[2] *Natal Mercury*, 15 March 1900 cited in 'Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 —1902" p. 12.
[3] Gandhi, M.K. *Collected Works* cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 12.
[4] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 12.
[5] Gandhi, M.K. *Collected Works.* cited Tichmann 'We are sons of the Empire after all'. p. 14.
[6] *Natal Mercury*, 15 March 1900 cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 12.

congratulating them on their 'brilliant success'. This was in addition to the telegram Gandhi had sent on 1 February, congratulating Buller. Pyarelal suggests that they took special pride in the fact that both Roberts and White had at one time been Commander-in-Chief of the Indian forces.[7]

After the Relief of Ladysmith, there was a great deal of celebration and festivity in Durban in which, according to Vahed, Indians 'vied with Europeans in their patriotic zeal to celebrate the occasion by decorating their stores, etc.'[8] This exuberance was carried out despite the fact that Deputy-Mayor Ellis Brown had organised a mass meeting in front of the Durban Town Hall, in which thirty dignitaries sat on the pedestal, but not one Indian was included.[9] For the *Natal Mercury*, however, the event that 'proved the greatest attraction' of that day was the procession by Muslims, led by Osman Ahmed, assistant priest of the Grey Street Mosque.[10] Near the Queen's statue, Osman Ahmed delivered addresses in Arabic, Hindi and English. He declared that they had met to mark their joy at the brilliant victories of the British army and hoped that the day was 'not far distant' when the whole of South Africa 'united under the good old Union Jack'. The crowd cheered for the Queen Empress, Lord Roberts, General Buller, General White and 'our Governor'.[11]

Despite such outbursts of patriotism, alongside its public snubs, Vahed points out that the Government of Natal did not wait for the war to end but continued to introduce discriminatory legislation during its duration.[12]

Whilst the Indians' actions can be described as selfless and brave, they were also self aware, at least for those Indians who volunteered to serve. For free Indians did not allow the political motivation of their actions to remain unaddressed. Pyarelal claims that 'Gandhi shunned publicity', quoting an example when he turned down an interview with the editor of the *Advertiser*. An English friend who had seen Gandhi's notes on the Battle of Colenso, felt that there would be very little said by the Indians themselves

[7] Pyralel, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 290.
[8] Gandhi, M.K. *Collected Works* cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 11.
[9] *Natal Mercury*, 2 March 1900 cited Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 11.
[10] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 11.
[11] Ibid. ,p. 12.
[12] Ibid. p. 13.

about their work done in the war. Agreeing with his friend that their part was 'merely to do without speaking', Gandhi declined the next invitation from the editor of the *Advertiser* to send a similar account of their service at Spearman's Hill.[13] Yet, it is more likely that he saw this as an appropriate response at that particular time, for there are extensive examples of Gandhi's reflections on the Indians' involvement in local, Indian and English newspapers as well as in his own writings. Gandhi in fact acted immediately upon the war work, attempting to publicise the Indians' service and taking responsibility for publishing material on the Indians' contribution. For example, in a letter to the *Times of India* on 18 April 1900, he emphasised the admirable qualities of the Indians' devotion to the Empire and their work. It concluded with the observation that, 'it was freely acknowledged by the European Superintendent of the Corps and other Europeans who came with it that, without the leaders, the carrying could not be done with satisfaction'. Furthermore, 'many Europeans who ought to know have told me than no European Ambulance Corps could cover the distance of twenty-five miles, carrying the wounded under such difficult circumstances in a single day, which our Indian bearers and their leaders did in the face of serious difficulties about food and shelter'.[14]

Request for Discharge Certificates

Gandhi requested discharge certificates for all the men who had served. This was partly in response to the fact that European soldiers had received these and Gandhi wanted to assert the Indians' rights to equality of treatment. A chief feature of Gandhi's strategy for addressing the plight of Indians was to emphasise consistently the principles of fair play and justice that British rule claimed to represent.[15]

Moreover,Gandhi was determined not to compromise on the Indians' services being seen as a sacrificial display of voluntary dedication to the British Empire. On 15 December 1899, he wrote to the Colonial Secretary, Pietermaritzburg, and was emphatic that the leaders would not accept the salaries that were being offered.[16]

In retrospect, it seems that Gandhi showed much tactical foresight behind the strategy of not accepting salaries because, as will later be seen, the fact that the

---

[13] Gandhi, M.K. *Collected Works* cited in Pyrelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II, The Discovery of Satyagraha On The Threshold.* p. 288.
[14] Meer, (ed.), *The South African Gandhi.* pp. 755, 756.
[15] Chandramohan, ''Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out'?', p. 157.
[16] Natal Archives, PWD, 9585/99, Letter to Colonial Secretary, Pietermaritzburg from Gandhi, 15 December 1899, p.1.

indentured labourers received a salary for their work meant that Gandhi struggled to have their service recognised as a show of voluntary loyalty. Voluntary sacrifice would have carried greater meaning in that it would have claimed no material reward.

Gandhi wrote to the Chief Engineer, Pietermaritzburg, on 4 July 1900, stating that many bearers of the late Indian Ambulance Corps desired a discharge certificate.[17] It is uncertain whether the Indians ever did request the discharge certificates or if Gandhi took the initiative for the request upon himself. There is little upon which to gauge the extent to which the indentured Indians regarded the war as an opportunity to uplift themselves politically or whether, having been instructed to go to the front, it had little lasting individual impact on them. Since there was a lack of literacy amongst the indentured Indians, it is unlikely that many Indians would have had a means of writing down their memories and there are no known written sources. Furthermore, the lack of documentary outlets for the Indian war experience specifically in South Africa has meant that obtaining access to those memories has been lost.

Correspondence passed between Barnes, the Chief Engineer of the Public Works Department (P.W.D.), Clarence and Donnelly, District Engineer, regarding Gandhi's repeated requests for discharge certificates. The P.W.D. Chief Engineer gave Gandhi the impression that he was sympathetic to his cause and wrote on 9 July 1900 that he considered the proposal 'a very proper one' but was concerned about the difficulties of locating the men.[18]

By contrast to the fairly positive general response that he gave Gandhi, Barnes in other correspondence recommended that only 'Mr. Gandhi and the educated Indians who in the capacity of Sirdars and otherwise volunteered and gave their services practically free'[19] should receive some form of official acknowledgment. Gandhi's view was clear that he wanted certificates for all the men as a common body and not simply for the leaders. Clarence's response to this, in a letter to Barnes on 9 July 1900, was 'this I think is absurd, the indentured Indians were not Volunteers but were sent by their masters'.[20] Colonial officials for their part insisted on differentiation.

---

[17] Natal Archives, PWD 2458/00, Minute Papers, Correspondence regarding discharge papers, Letter to the Chief Engineer, Pietermaritzburg from Gandhi, 4 July 1900, p. 23.
[18] Natal Archives, PWD 2458/00, Minute Papers, Correspondendence regarding discharge papers, Letter to Gandhi, from Chief Engineer, PWD, 9 July 1900, p. 22.
[19] Ibid. Lines of Communication from Barnes, Chief Engineer, PWD, 24 July 1900, pp. 2, 3.
[20] Natal Archives, PWD 2458/00, Minute Papers, Correspondence regarding discharge papers, Letter to Barnes, Chief Engineer, PWD from Clarence, Superintendent Indian Ambulance Corps, 9 July 1900, pp. 20, 21.-

Gandhi tried to justify his demand by pointing out the European Ambulance Corps had received certificates. Yet again, his idea was refuted. Clarence's letter, 9 July 1900 declared that 'Major Wright's men were enrolled for work on the battle field and required discharges to enable them to get employment, these discharges being in some degree testimonials which Indians do not require. The discharge and character certificates the masters they are indentured to give them being all they require'[21]

However, Gandhi was not easily deterred and addressed the Chief Engineer, Pietermaritzburg, saying, 'I understand from the District Engineer that the General Officer Commanding was not inclined to advise the issue of such certificates for the bearers. But I respectfully summit that the Indians are entitled to the same as the European bearers to their discharge. I beg to draw your attention to the fact that I have not asked for certificates of merit. The mere statement that they served as ambulance bearers is all I have asked for.'[22]

Despite Barnes having given Gandhi the impression that the certificates issue would receive proper attention, Donnelly and Barnes each presented in correspondence the reasons why they disapproved of the bestowing of such acknowledgment.

Barnes wrote on 24 July 1900, 'Against the proposal, I would point out, that, though the services of the Coolies at the time were valuable and welcome, yet, on the other hand, the men were unquestionably highly paid, and the Imperial Government is consequently under no obligation with regard to them. Again, most of the men were indentured Indians, lent to the Imperial Government by Managers or Proprietors of Sugar Estates and others; and, as regards the voluntary Indians, there would be considerable difficulty in identifying the actual men who served. Moreover, if these certificates were granted to all the members of the Indian Ambulance Corps, it is more that likely that sooner or later we would have a similar application from the Kaffirs forming the Native Labour Corps.'[23] For Barnes, war service as wage labour seemed not to be deserving of any honour. Moreover, colonial officials were reluctant to create a precedent for any African claims.

Donnelly, who appears to have been adamant that the role of the Indians should not be over-emphasised, stated on 12 July 1900, that 'the Indians, in question were not

[21] Natal Archives, PWD 2458/00, Minute Papers, Correspondence regarding discharge papers, Letter to Barnes, Chief Engineer, PWD from Clarence, Superintendent Indian Ambulance Corps, 9 July 1900, pp. 20, 21.
[22] Ibid. Letter to Barnes, Chief Engineer, Pietermaritzburg from Gandhi, 4 August 1900, pp. 11, 12.
[23] Ibid. Lines of Communication from Barnes, Chief Engineer, Pietermaritzburg, 24 July 1900, p. 2.

Volunteers, but simply had to go where they were told and received approximately seven times the amount of their ordinary wages, and they were only too delighted at the opportunity given to them to make such an enormous amount of overpay'.[24]

Several of the statements in these letters undermined the goals for which Gandhi and the leaders were striving. Gandhi could do little to refute the fact that the indentured Indians were paid and this undermined his assertion that the Indians were a collectively motivated group, all wishing to display their voluntary loyalty to the Empire.

The debate over how the indentureds' work should be received extended to the Natal colonial public. Referring to the *Natal Mercury's* homage to the Indian volunteers' offer to serve without pay, 'Colonist' wrote to the editor: 'Your surmise is quite wrong. The Indians who have gone to the front have done so purely from mercenary motives, and quite two thirds of them are indentured Indians from various estates.[25] Depreciating such narrow-mindedness, the *Natal Mercury* replied that although the stretcher bearers were receiving a remuneration, it did not in the least diminish from the merit of their action.[26] However, another colonist was incensed by the *Natal Advertiser*'s plea for due recognition for the Indian community and made a scathing reference to the 'sugar-estate labourers', who 'patriotically threw up their 10s per month and enrolled as stretcher-bearers at £1 per week and rations'. Charging the journal with 'beating about the bush in a dirty underhand Asiatic fashion', he wrote that 'the *Advertiser*'s shrieks of joy might have been heard at the North Pole.'[27] The *Natal Advertiser* commented on this tirade as 'a specimen of the characteristic inability of some people to appreciating any but the lowest of motives.'[28] Such dialogue illustrates that there were strong racial feelings for and against the status of Indian war veterans within Natal.

Still, Gandhi did not slacken in his endeavours to have Indians recognised as equal to the European stretcher bearers. He wrote to the Chief Engineer, Pietermaritzburg, on 4 July 1900, urging 'I venture to think that they ought to have some writing in their possession to show that they had the privilege of serving the Queen during the war. It will be to the men a happy memento they will prize'.[29]

---

[24] Natal Archives, PWD 2458/00, Minute Papers, Correspondence regarding discharge papers. Correspondence from Donnelly, District Engineer 12 July 1900, p. 16.
[25] *Natal Mercury* cited in Pyrelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 290.
[26] Pyrelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 290.
[27] Ibid p. 294.
[28] *Natal Advertiser,* 6 January 1900 cited in Pyrelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 294.
[29] Natal Archives, PWD 2458/00, Minute Papers, Correspondendence regarding discharge papers,.Letter to Barnes, Chief Engineer, Pietermaritzburg from Gandhi, 4 July 1900, p. 23.

Such efforts seem all to have been in vain. Not only did leading figures like Donnelly and Clarence shrug off the idea that the indentured wanted or needed discharge certificates, with statements like, 'none of the Indians have applied to their employers for discharges, and the majority of them don't care or would not place any value on them'.[30] There was further weakening of Gandhi's methods of uplifting the image of Indians by portraying his attempt to gain political credit as negative. On 12 July 1900, Donnelly warned, 'Mr. Gandhi, in the future may make political capital out of this, and point out how the Indians volunteered for service whereas I distinctly state they never did'[31] Clarence agreed with Donnelly and added further that Gandhi may have been trying to 'accrue business advantages'.[32]

In this and other correspondence, there is a sense of shifting the emphasis away from Gandhi's patriotic contribution in organising the Indian Ambulance Corps towards other motives. Barnes, for instance, described how Gandhi 'lent some considerable assistance' in the formation and working of the Indian Ambulance Corps'[33] which de-emphasised the centrality of Gandhi's motivational work. However, the issue of acknowledgement lingered on for a few years and continued to cause frustrations for the leaders of the Corps. The decision had been taken to award the leaders' medals, but it seems that only a few received these. Nazar took responsibility for sending in unknown addresses of the leaders and also commented on irritation experienced by those who had been overlooked.[34] Furthermore, Nazar exposed that certain leaders also felt unsure about whether to accept the medals and it was generally felt that the medals were a poor substitute for greater political acceptance. In a letter to Gandhi on 21 April 1903, he questioned, 'I don't know what the military officer wrote to you about medals. Should they be accepted? Some have taken them already – others are waiting for your decision. Perhaps they may be accepted, but in thanking the authorities on behalf of the 'Leaders', you may hint that they are more eager to be recognised as citizens of the Empire than to have such recognition as medals,'[35]

[30] Natal Archives, PWD 2458/00, Minute Papers, Correspondendence regarding discharge papers, Letter to Barnes, Chief Engineer, Pietermaritzburg from Donnelly, District Engineer, 18 July 1900, p. 19.
[31] Ibid. Letter to Clarence, Superindentant of the Indian Ambulance Corps from Donnelly, District Engineer,12 July 1900, p.16.
[32] Ibid. p.17.
[33] Ibid. Lines of Communication from Barnes, Chief Engineer, PWD, 24 July 1900, p. 2.
[34] Bhana and Hunt, *Gandhi's Editor*. p. 56.
[35] Ibid. p. 73.

Alongside, the *kholwa*, who although not united with the politically-conscious free Indians, were striving for many of same advancements in the colony, were also bitterly disappointed by the lack of official recognition for their services once hostilities had ended. They, too, had believed that after the war a new dispensation would arise in Natal, as well as in the old republics and their disillusionment was correspondingly great. The government refused to allow the War Office to award those who had served as Native Scouts silver campaign medals, insisting that inferior bronze medals be cast for them. This led to considerable disenchantment and to a refusal to accept the medals.[36] Nazar asked Gandhi in a letter of 7 May 1903, 'What kind of medal did you get? We got a silver medal.[37] Although it was probably a minor difference, it is of interest that the Ambulance Corps leaders seem to have been given more prestigious medals.

Apart from the recognition that Gandhi sought for the Indian Ambuance Corps as a whole, he also endeavoured to have the leaders' contribution in particular acknowledged. Thus, he requested that the leaders be given the 'Queen's Chocolate' which had been awarded to the soldiers as a gift, writing to the Colonial Secretary on 22 February 1903, reinforcing that the leaders had volunteered without pay and that they would 'prize it as a treasure'.[38] Yet, the Colonial Secretary also turned down this request, giving the reason that the chocolate was for non-commissioned officers and men only.[39]

Little Praise for Indians' War Efforts

Thus, from the initial period after their work, the Indians received mixed reactions as was demonstrated with the handling of the discharge certificates. Yet, as has been seen, the Indians also received unambiguous praise, before and during their service, and afterwards some of this praise continued. In all, there were a fair number of accolades bestowed upon Indians for their bravery and selfless work.

---

[36] Lambert, *Betrayed Trust.* p.183.p. 77.
[37] Bhana and Hunt, *Gandhi's Editor.* p. 77.
[38] Natal Archives, CSO, Vol. 1641, 1462/1900, Gandhi to Colonial Secretary, 22 February 1900 cited in Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 6.
[39] Natal Archives, CSO, Vol. 1641, 1462/1900, Colonial Secretary to Gandhi, 9 March 1900 cited in Vahed, ' Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p. 6.

According to Gandhi, the work of the Ambulance Corps was also all a complete revelation abroad.[40] As General Sir William Olpherts wrote:

> 'While fully sharing the enthusiasm for bravery of our troops fighting in South Africa, I think that sufficient attention has not been called to the devotion of the Indian dhoolie-bearers who do their work of mercy on the battlefields. Under the heaviest fire they seek the wounded, fearing nothing, although without means of defence. These Indian fellow-subjects of ours are doing in Natal a work which requires even more courage than that of a soldier.[41]

In the Indian affairs newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, which Gandhi organised in subsequent years, he reported on 2 December 1905 that 'our note on the subject of Indian volunteering, we are glad to notice, has been warmly taken up by the *Natal Witness*, and some correspondence has appeared on the subject. We hope now that the matter has been taken up by the Press, that it will not be allowed to die out without an expression of opinion from the Government as to its policy'.[42]

Doke concludes that there was an initial burst of enthusiasm for the service performed by the Indian stretcher bearers. However, soon after the war, the Indians were treated as badly as ever in the colony and given less recognition.[43] The praise had little direct impact on improving their political position and in many respects their position further deteriorated under the new Union of South Africa Government. Yet, Gandhi did not cease to use the war as a political tool to promote the Indian cause locally and abroad. Despite the negative reception that Indians received from the Boers after the war, Gandhi continued his pre-war tactfulness and showed he was still capable of regarding them with respect. Gandhi referred to the conduct of the Boers during and after the war as providing vindication of the law of suffering.[44] Despite being defeated, Gandhi suggests that the Boers' endurance had earned them the respect of their opponents and

[40] Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiences with Truth.* p. 265.
[41] Huttenback, R. *Gandhi in South Africa.* cited in Siwundhla, H.T. 'The Participation of Non-Europeans in the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902'. (Ph.D. thesis, Claremont Graduate School, 1977), p. 57.
[42] Meer, (ed.), *The South African Gandhi.* p. 761.
[43] Doke, *M.K. Gandhi, An Indian Patriot in Natal.* p. 55.
[44] *Young India*, 16 June 1920 cited Pyralel, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 316.

bv

secured a settlement which kept them as the predominant factor in South Africa.[45]

The deteriorating conditions for Indians fitted into the broader trend of treatment of blacks after the war. Throughout South Africa, the hopes and expectations of many black groups that the triumph of 'liberal' imperialism would lead to an improvement in their position were soon shattered. Once the danger to the imperial and colonial interests had passed, narrow settler interests again asserted themselves. Tributes to black loyalty continued to be made, but proved to be little more than lip service, and government actions were directed to ensuring that no long-term benefits could accrue to blacks from the war, particularly benefits which would be at the expense of the settlers.[46]

[45] Williams, *Botha, Smuts and South Africa* cited in Pyralel, *Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II.* p. 316.
[46] Lambert, 'Loyalty its own reward'. p. 11.

Some Post-1902 Perspectives

A study of the legislation that impacted on Indians after the war as well as Gandhi's and the Indian community's political actions, would be far too detailed and complex to be adequately dealt with as a post-war conclusion to a modest study of this kind. Furthermore, the war cannot be seen as a starting point, nor as a major turning point for all of these future actions. This postscript is therefore an overview of how the Indians' actions in the war had some long term consequences, as well as an acknowledgment of the changing circumstances into which the South African Indians would have to integrate themselves

Impact of the War on the Indentured Labour System

The motivation for Natal Indians to serve as stretcher bearers had been initiated by the free Indians as they were predominantly aiming to improve their own conditions. The indentured Indians may have hoped for positive repercussions, but it is significant that their inclusion in the Indian Ambulance Corps was not as a result of their own doing. However, it seems that the only sector of the South African Indian community that felt some positive impact was the indentured population. This took the form of a discussion about the merits of the indentured system for the labourers themselves.

The process was prompted when Gandhi wrote to the Bombay Government on 4 May 1901, asking for 'some action' towards legislation to improve Indians' conditions in South Africa. He declared that 'under the strong and sympathetic Viceroy we have in Lord Curzon, the great question.... cannot but be decided favourable.' The Viceroy took no decisive action at that stage.[1]

Yet, Gandhi's grasp of things was instinctively right and Curzon was the first Viceroy to see that the indentured Indians were merely being exploited by the Empire, and to ask why the system should continue.[2] At the same time, it is likely that Gandhi was appealing for the conditions of all Indians of varying status to be addressed. Curzon called on the assistance of his old friend, Sir Arther Godley, the Permanent Under-Secretary for India. Curzon was aware that those who knew of the Indians' participation in the South African War admired their fortitude. This was the moral basis of Curzon's appeal to Godley, arguing 'now that they have assisted so nobly in the defense of the Colony..... it is impossible that their

[1] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 288.
[2] Ibid.

conditions can be allowed to continue.'[3] Curzon wrote officially to the Secretary of State on 12 July 1900, demanding a 'just settlement' for the Indians.[4] However, he received a somewhat sour reply, stating that 'there is a certain amount of unreality and cant about our proceedings: for if Natives of India showed any inclination to immigrate into this country [England] and to supplant or underbid the small British tradesman or the British working man we should behave.... I believe, exactly as Natal has behaved.' Godley made a similar plea to the Under-Secretary for the Colonies on 23 August 1900. Receiving no answer, Godley wrote again to the Colonial Office, 8 August 1901 and this time elicited a reply from the Under-Secretary, 14 August, which explained that Lord Kitchener had set up an Indian Immigrants Office in the Transvaal, and intended to take a 'firm line; but no information was offered concerning Natal.[5]

The attempts to offer greater protection to the indentureds was hindered by an enormous demand for cheap manual labour. At the end of the war, industrial activity resumed, and for the first few years of the new century, the Natal employers were successful in obtaining increased supplies of labour.[6] Yet, a struggle had begun between the Natal Government and its demand for less restricted forms of recruitment, and the Indian Government under Curzon, questioning the merits of the system.[7]

The moves towards reforming the indentured system happened in the context of the entire Empire.[8] The trying conditions of many Indians abroad had also been forced upon the attention of the British Government. It came to realise, however, that addressing emigration to the Crown colonies was comparatively simple, but the self-governing Dominions posed a more difficult problem.[9]

The Indian Government was in a strong negotiating position where it had the option of stopping the indentured labour system. Yet, on the other hand, it was the only option that India had and it had no real power to improve the conditions of the indentured labour

---

[3] Correspondence with the Secretary of State, Lord Salisbury, and Sir Arther Godley (1900). The Curzon Papers:India Office Library and Records. Curzon to Godley (4 July 1900), and Godley to Curzon (27 July 1900).) quoted in Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p.288.
[4] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. pp. 288, 289.
[5] Ibid. p 289.
[6] Ibid. p 290.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Abstract of the Proceedings of the Council of the Governor-General of India (1901), Assam Labour and Emigration Bill, (8 March 1901) quoted in Thompson and Wilson, (eds.), *The Oxford History of South Africa, 11*. p. 338.
[9] Thompson and Garratt. *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*. p. 541.

system.[10] To aggravate matters, the Natal Government continued to ask for greater concessions for employers in the recruitment of Indian labour.[11] There were mixed sentiments in India as to how to respond to these demands. Some felt that India was in a commanding position and should not give in to the requests, while others believed that closure of the system would be 'cut[ting] off the coolie's nose to spite the face of Natal Government'[12] The first moves came from the Government of India. It agreed to many of Natal's requests, including compulsory repatriation, but in a 'Confidential dispatch' to Sir Henry McCallum, Governor of Natal, on 25 April 1903, Curzon insisted that 'the change must be justified'. He started to make demands, the main ones being the abolition of the £3 tax after ten years, an amendment of the Traders Licensing Act and the Vagrancy Act, and proper provision for marriage among indentured Indians, entailing the release of one party when the other reached the end of indenture.[13] Given these circumstances, Curzon entered into controversy with Lord Milner who was High Commissioner in South Africa as well as Governor of the Transvaal. Tinker suggests that the two were a formidable pair to engage in a clash.[14] At that stage, negotiations came to a halt,[15] but Gandhi and Curzon had succeeded in calling the whole indenture system into question. Tinker emphasises, however, that the fate of this issue was decided ultimately by Indian public opinion and as such it was the first major Indo-British political and social issue to be decided in dependent India and not in metropolitan Britain.[16]

New Racial Circumstances after the War

Gandhi correctly anticipated that after the war, Indians were going to face increasing discrimination, even though Swan notes that this was insufficient insight to keep him from returning to India.[17] On his arrival in India in 1902, Gandhi addressed people in Calcutta on his experiences in South Africa. He told them that 'the policy that was followed by [their] countrymen in South Africa in connection with their legal disabilities could be summed up in two maxims which guided it, viz., to stick to the truth at all costs and conquer hate by love.' He furthermore assured them that 'these [were] no catch phrases, but that [they had] all

[10] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 292.
[11] Ibid. p. 293.
[12] Curzon Papers, (27 January 1903) cited in Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 294.
[13] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. p. 294.
[14] Ibid. p. 295.
[15] Ibid. p. 296.
[16] Ibid. p. 289.
[17] Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience*. p. 90.

through these years tried to live up to the ideal.' and claimed that 'the local Indian contribution to the present war [was], perhaps, the very best illustration of that line of action.'[18] For all that, under the post-war regime the Indians encountered ever more restrictive and racist policies. Their was patriotism had counted for nothing in the Union.

Much of Gandhi's work after the war took place in the Transvaal, especially between 1907-1908.[19] In many respects, Gandhi is renowned for his achievements after the war, once he was more established, although the new South African legislation also created an ever more restrictive environment. Gandhi came back to South African in 1903 when Nazar made an earnest plea for him to return in response to the announcement that Colonial Secretary Chamberlain would be making a whirlwind tour of South Africa. Interested parties sought to use this event to present their case and Indians wanted to discuss their grievances about anti-Indian legislation.[20] When Gandhi reached Pretoria, he found all was changed: the officials were new and unapproachable. An Asiatic Department had been created which apparently had little sympathy with Indians. Gandhi found he was unable to make contact with Davidson, the Colonial Secretary. Only after repeated efforts was he able to arrange a meeting with this individual who then ended up referring Gandhi to his Assistant. The Assistant Colonial Secretary reprimanded Gandhi as well as the resident Indians for having invited him to the Transvaal. In effect, he made no effort to understand the Indians' position. Gandhi was also disappointed by what he perceived as the local Indians' lack of attempts to maintain their rights.[21] In this period after the war, Gandhi loosened his ties with the Natal Indian Congress when he resigned as secretary and moved to the Transvaal in 1903. Bhana, however, states that he continued to make a contribution to Congress' policies at least until 1910.[22] In the Transvaal he helped to found the British Indian Association in 1903, and again became secretary of this organisation.[23]

[18] Meer, (ed.), *The South African Gandhi, An Abstract of the Speeches and Writing of M.K. Gandhi, 1893 - 1914.* p. 757, 758.
[19] Brain, 'Natal Indians, 1860 - 1910 from co-operation, through competition, to conflict, p. 263.
[20] Bhana and Hunt, *Gandhi's Editor: The Letters of M'H. Nazar, 1902 –1903'*,p. 7.
[21] Doke, *M.K. Gandhi, An Indian Patriot in South Africa.* p. 58.
[22] Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy.* p. 16.
[23] Ibid. p. 17.

In Bhana's view, Indian leadership preferred to see the whole post-war drama against a larger canvas and continued to have faith that Indians' status as British subjects and India's strategic position within the British Empire would give Indians a certain leverage in the South African situation.[24] Between 1900 and 1910 especially, they pleaded for protection against increasing racial discrimination.[25] This strategy was bound to fail, because the development of discriminatory inter-racial politics was taking place within a South African rather than an imperial framework. One should also note that the hopelessness of the situation had become apparent to some Indians, who consequently were less inclined to see their position in terms of India. They were in favour of not resisting the new governing bodies.[26]

During the war, the Natal Indian Congress enjoyed some growth and by 1901 they had 723 paying members and had set up a Congress Hall. However, there were complaints about the organisation being too exclusive.[27] Bhana argues that while the Congress still held viable support overseas, by 1910 it did not enjoy the support of the majority of South African Indians.[28] The narrow base of the Natal Indian Congress is reflected in the issues they continued to focus on most strongly, namely, merchant interests, immigration and trade. The crisis in the organisation came to an temporary halt when the satyagraha campaign in the Transvaal expanded to incorporate issues and strategies beyond those of the commercial elite. Other organisations also started to emerge in the Indian community such as the Natal Indian Patriotic Union, the Colonial Born Indian Association and the South African Indian Committee which were independent of, and at times challenged, the Congress.[29]

In terms of the continuing and increasing discrimination that Indians faced after the war, the Peace Preservation Ordinance drastically cut down Indian immigration.[30] The British Government was anxious to conciliate Boer opinion and they allowed for national 'Home Rule' in the Union Act of 1909. This meant they relinquished any residual power to protect

---

[24] Bhana and Hunt, *Gandhi's Editor: The Letters of M.H. Nazar, 1902 – 1903*. p. 6.
[25] Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy*. p. 19.
[26] Bhana and Hunt, *Gandhi's Editor: The Letters of M.H. Nazar, 1902 – 1903*. p. 6.
[27] Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy*. p. 11.
[28] Ibid. p. 14.
[29] Ibid. p. 18.
[30] Pillay, B. *British Indians in the Transvaal: Trade, Politics and Imperial Relations, 1885 – 1906*. p. 103

minorities, including the Indians,[31]although this had never amounted to much. During the early years of Crown Colony Government in the Transvaal, there had also been much friction between Indians and the Government. They found that they were unwelcome in the Transvaal, a stance supported by Lord Milner, who claimed the Indians there were 'strangers forcing themselves upon a community reluctant to receive them.'[32] This view obviously calls into question how concerned the British really had been about the treatment of Indians in the Transvaal prior to the war. Restrictions on Indians' entry was already in place in the Orange Free State and was extended to the Cape Colony in 1906.[33]

The shapers of the new South Africa included Boer leaders like Botha and Smuts who remembered all too well that in war the Indians had sided with the British. General Botha who became Prime Minister of the Transvaal after the war and first Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa in 1910, had commanded the Boers forces in northern Natal where he saw at first hand the loyalty of Indians to the British. Vahed emphasises that many Boers did not disguise their dislike for the Indians, as they treated them with contempt, while the British were devious and had no intention of rewarding them for their loyalty.[34] Gandhi's own frustration with British unwillingness to ensure the rights of Indians was expressed in the following words to Lord Elgin: 'Our lot today [1906] is infinitely worse than the Boer regime', a sentiment shared by Africans and Coloureds.[35]

In these circumstances, Indians adopted a policy of passive resistance in 1907 against the Transvaal Asiatic Registration Act of 1902. About 2,500 people under the leadership of Gandhi marched into the Transvaal from Natal to assert their right to go from one province to another. Gandhi and other leaders were arrested and strikes occurred in various parts of the country, accompanied by some loss of life in collisions with the military.[36] Still, Gandhi had not reached the point of seriously challenging the whole white-dominated system.[37]

---

[31] Thompson and Garratt, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India.* pp. 586, 587.
[32] Vane, 'The South African Indians, A Plea for Better Understanding'. p. 15.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Vahed, 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 – 1902', p.
[35] Chandramohan, "Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out'?: the South African War, Empire and India', p. 161.
[36] Robert. P.E. *History of British India, Under the Company and the Crown.* (London, 1958), pp. 575, 576.
[37] Tinker, *A New System of Slavery.* pp 289, 290.

Conclusion

An assessment of the Natal Indians' involvement in the South African War, 1899 - 1902 does not draw any dramatic conclusions. The loss to the Indian community was comparatively small and there were no real rewards for their efforts. The promises that the British had made to address racial discrimination after the war proved to be disappointing and the brief recognition that Indians were given by some for their efforts did not have any impact on the laws which effected Indians in a discriminatory way. The policies that were defined in the process of establishing the Union of South Africa were intended to protect the white population's dominance. This meant that the sacrifice and loyalty of black groups in the war was not acknowledged through legislation that promoted the enhancement of all races alike.

Prior to the war, both the free and indentured Indians were experiencing increasing discrimination against them, which in turn impacted on their economic and social circumstances. Indentured Indians would have been well aware of their oppressive situation but they were highly restricted in their ability to protect and promote their political rights in the colony. The indentured labour system was established to benefit the employers and white colonists in general and it did not aim to enhance the labourers' position. Added to the difficulties of being bound into contracts, indentured labourers lacked the financial resources and the means of large-scale communication to effectively resist their exploitation. In these harsh circumstances, women were least able to defend themselves and their unwanted presence was generally met with hostility by the colonists. Furthermore, the indentured Indians did not receive a great deal of support from the free Indian community and to a large extent the caste or classist attitudes that organised Indian society were reflected in the Natal Indian community. Comparatively, free Indians had much greater leverage to present their concerns, although their political campaigns had few more positive repercussions. They were in a position where, without recognition of their British status, they had very few political options. They were often perceived as an economic threat and were not seen to be bringing major contributions to the economy. Thus, in order to protect their ability to settle in the colony, they generally adopted a respectful approach when presenting their grievances to the Natal and British Governments. Their offer to serve in the war fitted into this tactful political strategy, and it was an attempt to reassert their status as citizens of the British Empire and their loyalty to Natal and Britain. In response to their pre-war environment, an act which reflected devotion and no resentment was a creative approach. However, the

success that the Natal Responsible Government had in passing restrictive and discriminatory legislation against free Indians, indicated that Indians were losing political ground. It was becoming clear that whites had no real intention to work with the Indians in the colony nor to protect their rights. This indicates that it is unlikely that the Indians' endeavors in the war were going to make a major impression but one can still ask: if the Indians had made no effort would this have worsened their position? Furthermore one must remember that the circumstances into which Indians had to integrate themselves after the war were not limited to the boundaries of Natal as they were in the process of being incorporated into the new racial environment of South Africa.

The Indians' service during the war can be remembered as a heroic deed, and it also presented an image of a working degree of homogeneity and co-operation between the different sectors of the Indian community. Whilst this mutual support was not forced, it perhaps equally does not offer an accurate impression of the social complexities within the Indian community. These complexities should not be overlooked in an attempt to protect the image of Indians as a monolithic, oppressed group. The political motivation to serve in the war came from the free Indians and when the opportunity arose to work with indentured Indians, it is hard to know what this long-term experience meant to both groups. Furthermore, one cannot measure how long-lasting or far-reaching were the effects of the positive impression they made on some of the whites with whom they served.

Despite the lack of positive political response that the Natal Indian war effort achieved, it is significant that on a long-term historical basis their willingness to serve the Empire was clearly displayed. Although their actions were not broadly reported, even within the South African Indian community the written and few photographic records that were made still remain and the Indians' contribution can take its place alongside that of other black contributions to the war. Chatterjee notes that an Indian commentator wrote 'Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi remains South Africa's greatest gift to India' for it is 'where the steel within him was tempered'[1] Whilst Gandhi was to lead many more and arguably more important campaigns in South Africa and of course those in India, his leadership role in the war reflected one of his earlier attempts to put his current philosophies regarding the Empire

[1] Chatterjee, M., 'Reviewing the Gandhian Heritage' in Brown, J.M. and M. Prozesky (eds), *Gandi and South Africa: Principles and Politics*. (Pietermaritzburg, 1996), p. 95.

into practice. He showed his effectiveness as a motivator and his courage as a leader, qualities that he would draw on so many later occasions.

Gandhi came to be remembered for the numerous activities he organised and initiated in South Africa. Some of his more noteworthy achievements in South Africa were the establishment of the Natal Indian Congress, the foundation of the Indian journal, the *Indian Opinion* in 1903, the passive resistance campaign in the Transvaal in 1907 and the creation of the Phoenix settlement. The Phoenix settlement was on a piece of land outside Durban that Gandhi had purchased and he used it to develop a community which lived according to the philosophies he was developing and teaching. As a legacy, Phoenix provides a way of suggesting how the Indians' efforts during the war should be contextualised and given an appropriate degree of prominence, and stands as a staging post in the history of Natal Indian life in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Natal Indian Congress appears to have become less central in Natal and South African Indian politics in the immediate post-war years, especially as it was seen to be too elitist by the majority of Indians and other political organisations were emerging. Bhana reports that the Congress was left in some disarray in 1914 and not much is know about its activities in the next several years until it was revived in the 1920s.[2] While it contributed to the war, it derived little of lasting value from this brief moment of empire patriotism. Furthermore the issue of resolving the tension between 'elite' politics and the needs of its poorer Indian constituency would remain a difficult challenge.

[2] Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy.* p. 31.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

Official

Natal Archives Repository, Pietermaritzburg

CSO - Colonial Secretary's Office

vol. 1641 1900/1650
Telegram to General Buller from Gandhi (1 February 1900)

vol. 2609 Confidential Minute Papers, Anglo-Boer War, Transcript Telegrams
List of casualties reported by G.O.C. Ladysmith, 13 February 1900

PWD - Public Works Department

vol. 2458 1900 Correspondence regarding discharge certificates.
Letter to Barnes, Chief Engineer, PWD, Pietermaritzburg from Gandhi, 4 July 1900
Letter to Gandhi from Barnes, Chief Engineer, PWD, Pietermaritzburg, 9 July 1900
Letter to Barnes, Chief Engineer, PWD from Clarence, Superintendant of the Indian Ambulance Corps, 9 July 1900
Correspondence from Donnelly, District Engineer, 12 July 1900
Letter to Clarence, Superintendant of the Indian Ambulance Corps from Donnelly, District Engineer, 12 July 1900
Letter to Barnes, Chief Engineer, Pietermaritzburg from Donnelly, District Engineer, 18 July 1900
Lines of Communication from Barnes, Chief Engineer, PWD, Pietermaritzburg, 24 July 1900
Letter to Barnes, Chief Engineer, PWD, Pietermaritzburg from Gandhi, 4 August 1900

vol. 4964 1899 Chief Engineer, PWD - Relative to Indians for Bearer Corps
Letter from Clarence to Barnes, 12 December 1899
List of indentured labourers sent to the front from Blackburn Factory

vol. 5117 1899 Chief Engineer, PWD re: Indian Ambulance Corps
Letter from Percy, F. Clarence (Superintedant Indian Ambulance Corps) to Chief Engineer PWD.

vol. 8047 1899 Forwards lists of Indians who are willing to offer their services unconditionally to Government
List of Indian Volunteers examined by Dr Prince, 18 October 1899

vol. 9585 1899 Relative to departure of Indian Volunteers for the front
Letter from Gandhi to Colonial Secretary, Pietermaritzburg, 15 December 1899

Debates of the Legislative Council of the Colony of Natal

vol. XXVIII
3rd Session, May 11 to August 28 1899, p. 553

vol. IV.
4th Session, April, 25 to July 11 1896, p. 45.

University of Durban-Westville Documentation Centre

Bhana Collection

vol. 957/ 3008 - 3058

3037 Letter to Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson from Gandhi and free Indians in Durban
3039 Memorial sent to Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies, London from Indians residing in the Colony of Natal.
3054 Petition to the Legislative Council and Assembly of the Colony of Natal from the Indians resident in the Colony of Natal.

vol. 957/ 752 - 810 1877 - 1911

759 Complaints from indentured labourers on Mr Meikle's Estate to L.H. Mason, Protector of Immigrants, 19 February 1884.

Unofficial

Killie Campbell Africana Library

Dawes Collection, File B, no. 15.
Notes of Stranack, E.T. 'Reminiscences of the Intombi Camp Hospital during the Siege of Ladysmith, Nov. 1899 to February 1900.'

Natal Museum Services, Pietermaritzburg

Diary of Shaw, D.A. (Natal Carbineers) 'A Personal Narrative of the Natal Campaign, 1899 - 1902'.

NEWSPAPERS

Natal Advertiser. January - December 1900
Natal Witness. January - December 1900

BOOKS

Andrews, C.F. (ed.), *Mahatma Gandhi: His Own Story.* George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1930.

Beinart, W. *Twentieth Century South Africa.* Oxford University Press, Cape Town and Oxford, 1994.

Bhana, S. *Gandhi's Legacy: the Natal Indian Congress, 1894 - 1994.* Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1989.

Bhana, S. and J.B. Brain. *Setting Down Roots: Indian Migrants in South Africa, 1860 - 1911.* Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1990.

Bhana, S. and J.D. Hunt. *Gandhi's Editor: The Letters of M.H. Nazar, 1902 – 1903.* Promilla & Co., New Delhi, 1989.

Bramdaw, D. (ed.), *South African Indian Who's Who of 1939.* Natal Witness, Pietermaritzburg, 1939

Breytenbach, J.H. *Die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlorg in Suid-Afrika, 1899 - 1902, Deel II, Die Eerste Britse Offensief, Nov - Des 1899.* Staatsdrukker, Pretoria, 1978.

Brookes, E.H. and de B, Webb, C. *A History of Natal.* University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1965.

Brown, J. M. *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope.* Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1989.

Calpin, G.H. *Indians in South Africa.* Shuter & Shooter, Pietermaritzburg, 1949.

Collins, L. and D. Lapierre. *Freedom at Midnight: the Epic Drama of India's Struggle for Independence.* HarperCollins, London, 1997.

Davies, R. J. *City in transition: outlines of residential segregation in a post-settler colonial city - Salisbury/Harare.* University of Cape Town Press, Cape Town, 1990.

Doke, J.J. *M.K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa.* Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Publication Division, New Delhi, 1994.

Gandhi, M.K. *An Autobiography or The Story of my Experiences with Truth.* translated from the original text in Gujarati by Mahadev Desai, Navajwan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1948.

Guy, J. *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom: the Civil War in Zululand, 1879 - 1884.* Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1982.

Henderson, J.T. (ed.), *Speeches of the Late Right Honourable Harry Escombe*. P. Davis and Sons, Pietermaritzburg, no date given.

Henning, C.G. *The Indentured Indian in Natal (1860 - 1917)*. Promilla & Co., New Delhi, 1993.

Hobson, J.A. *The War in South Africa: Its Causes and Effects*. James Nisbet & Co., London, 1900.

Holden,W.C. *History of the Colony of Natal*. C.Struik, Cape Town, 1963.

Huttenback, R.A. *Gandhi in South Africa: British Imperialism and the Indian Question, 1860 - 1914*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1971.

----------, *Racism and Empire: White Settlers and Coloured Immigrants in the British Self-Governing Colonies 1830 – 1910*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1976.

Iyer, R. *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II: Truth and Non-Violence*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986.

Knight, L. *Go to Your God like a Soldier: the British Fighting for Empire, 1837 - 1902*. Greenhill Books, London, 1993.

Lambert, J. *Betrayed Trust: Africans and the State in Colonial Natal*. University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1995.

Malherbe, C. and U. Mesthrie. *Not Slave: Not Free*. Shuter & Shooter, Pietermaritzburg, 1992.

Marks, S. *Reluctant Rebellion: the 1906 - 1908 Disturbance in Natal*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970.

Meer, F. *Portrait of Indian South Africans*. Avon House, Durban, 1969.

Meer, F. (ed.), *The South African Gandhi: An Abstract of Speeches and Writing of M.K. Gandhi, 1893 - 1914*. Madiba Publishers, University of Natal, Durban, 1995.

Meer, Y.S et. al. *Documents of Indentured Labour, Natal 1851 - 1917*. Institute of Black Research, Durban, 1980.

Narayan, S. (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. III: Satyagraha in South Africa*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, India, 1969.

Nasson, B *Abraham Esau's War: A Black South African War in the Cape, 1899 - 1902*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991.

Pachai, B. *The South African Indian Question 1860 - 1971*. C.Struik, Cape Town, 1971.

Pakenham, T. *The Boer War*. Abacus, London, 1992.

Parekh, B. *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse.* Sapge Publications, New Delhi, Newbury Park, London, 1989.

--------, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination.* MacMillan Press, London, 1989.

Pillay, B. *British Indians in the Transvaal: Trade, Politics and Imperial Relations, 1885 – 1906.* Longman, London, 1976.

Porter, B. *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism 1850 - 1970.* Longman, London and New York. 1975.

Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi Vol. II: The Discovery of Satyagraha On the Threshold.* Seval Prakashan, Bombay, 1980.

Ransford, O. *The Battle of Spion Kop.* John Murray, London, 1969.

Reddy, E.S. *Gandhiji's Vision of a Free South Africa.* Sanchar Publishing House, New Delhi, 1995.

Richards, G. *The Philosophy of Gandhi, A Study of his Basic Ideas.* Curzon Press, London and Dublin, 1982.

Robert, P.E. *History of British India: Under the Company and the Crown.* Oxford University Press, London, 1958.

Smith, V.A. *The Oxford History of India, Part 1.* Oxford University Press, Delhi, New York and London, 1958.

Spooner, F.P. *South African Predicament.* Jonathan Cape, London, 1960

Swan, M. *Gandhi: the South African Experience.* Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1985.

Thompson, E. and G.T. Garratt. *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India.* MacMillan Press, London, 1935.

Tinker, H. *A New System of Slavery: the Export of Indian Labour Overseas.* Oxford University Press, London, New York and Bombay, 1974.

Treves, F. *The Tale of a Field Hospital.* Cassell, London, Paris, New York, Melbourne, 1900.

Warwick, P. *Black People and the South African War, 1899 – 1902*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983.

Welsh, D. *The Roots of Segregation: Native Policy in Colonial Natal, 1845 - 1910.* Oxford University Press, Cape Town, London and New York, 1971.

CHAPTERS IN BOOKS

Beall, J. 'Women under Indenture in Natal' in Bhana, S. (ed.), *Essays on Indentured Indians in Natal.* Peepal Tree, London, 1991.

Bhana, S. 'Indian Trade and Trader in Colonial Natal.' in Guest, B and J.M. Sellers (eds.), *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony: Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Colonial Natal.* University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1985.

Brain, J. 'Indentured and Free Indians in the Economy of Colonial Natal.' in Guest, B and J.M. Sellers (eds.), *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Colonial Natal.* University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1985.

-------. 'Natal's Indians, 1860 - 1910, from co-operation, through competition, to conflict.' in Duminy, A. and B. Guest (eds.), *Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910, A New History.* University of Natal and Shuter & Shooter, Pietermaritzburg, 1989.

Chandramohan, B. "Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out'?: the South African War' in Lowry, D (ed.), *The South African War reappraised.* Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 2000.

Doke, J.J. *M.K. Gandhi, An Indian Patriot in South Africa.* Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Publications, New Delhi, 1994.

Emmer, P.C. 'The Meek Hindu, the recruitment of Indian indentured labourers for service overseas, 1870 - 1916.' in Emmer, P.C. (ed.), *Colonialism and Migration: Indentured Labour before and after Slavery.* Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht, 1986.

Gandhi, Rajmohan. *The Origins and Growth of Satyagraha: Gandhi's Reaction to the Conditions of Indians in South Africa.* in Shanti Sadiq Ali. (ed.), Gandhi and South Africa, Hind Pocket Books, 1994

Guest, B. 'Indians in Natal and Southern Africa in the 1890s' in Brown, J.M. and M. Prozesky (eds.), *Gandhi and South Africa: Principles and Politics.* University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1996.

---------, 'Towards responsible government, 1879 - 93' in Duminy, A. and B. Guest (eds.), *Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910, A New History.* University of Natal Press and Shuter & Shooter, Pietermaritzburg, 1989.

Lambert, J. 'The Labour League and the Franchise Question in the Struggle for Responsible Government in Natal' in Pachai, B.(ed.) *South Africa's Indians: The Evolution of a Minority.* University Press of America Inc., Washington, 1979.

Levi, G. 'On Microhistory'. in Burke, P. (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing.* Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991.

Lumby, E.W.R. 'The Transfer of Power.' in Lewis, M.D. *The British in India: Imperialism or Trusteeship?*. D. C. Heath and Co., Boston, 1962.

Mitchell, K.L. 'The Mechanism of British Rule.' in Lewis M.D. (ed.), *The British in India: Imperialism or Trusteeship?*. D.C Heath and Co., Boston, 1962.

Morrell, R, Wright, J. and S. Meintjes, 'Colonialism and the Establishment of White Domination 1840 – 1890' in Morell, R. (ed.), *Political Economy and Identities in KwaZulu-Natal: Historical and Social Perspectives*. Indicator Press, Durban, 1996.

Warwick, P. 'Black People and the War.' in Warwick, P. *The South African War, the Anglo-Boer War 1899 – 1902*. Longman, London, 1980.

Welsh, D. 'The Growth of Towns' in Wilson, M. and L. Thompson. (eds.) *The Oxford History of South Africa, II: South Africa, 1860 - 1966*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Dominy, G. 'The Making of the Rough and the Respectable: the Imperial Garrision and the Wider Society in Colonial Natal', *South African Historical Journal*. 37, November 1997.

Maharaj, M.B. ' The Ladysmith Hero, An Incident Ignored by Historians', *Hindi*. Diwali No. 1923.

Naidoo, Jay, 'Clio and the Mahatma', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16, 4, 1990.

Padayachee, V. and R. Morrell, 'Indian Merchants and Dukawallahs in the Natal Economy, c.1875 -1914' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 17,1, 1991.

Vane, M. 'The South African Indians, A Plea for Better Understanding', *South African Affairs Pamphlets*. 17, third series, no date given.

Swan, M. "The Asiatic Menace': Creating Segregation in Durban, 1870 – 1900', *International Journal of Africa Historical Studies*. 16, 3, 1983.

Tichmann, Paul, 'We are sons of the Empire after all: The Indian Ambulance Corps during the South African War, 1899 - 1902', *Soldiers of the Queen*. 87, 1996.

UNPUBLISHED THESES AND PAPERS

Ginwala, F.N. 'Class, Consciousness and Control, Indian South Africans 1860 - 1946.' Ph.D thesis, Oxford University, 1974.

Lambert, J. ' 'Loyalty its own reward': the South African War experience of Natal's loyal Africans'. paper presented at the UNISA Library Conference, 'Rethinking the South African War, 1899 - 1902', 3 - 5 August 1998.

Moodley, P. 'Indentured Indians Immigration to Natal, 1860 - 1870 with special reference to the Hindu Caste System and its Implication.' Honours thesis, University of Durban-Westville, 1981.

Ram, P. 'Indentured Indian Immigration into Natal with particular reference to their Social and Economic Conditions during the period 1870 - 1905.' Honours thesis, University of Durban-Westville, 1984.

Sookdeo, A. 'Indentured Indian Immigration into Natal with Special Emphasis on the 1890s and the Caste-Structures amongst Indians.' Honours thesis, University of Durban-Westville, 1982.

Stein, Z.A. 'A History of Indian Settlement in Natal from 1870 - 1893.' MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1942.

Vahed, G. 'Natal's Indians, the Empire and the South African War, 1899 - 1902', unpublished seminar paper, University of Durban-Westville, 1999.

Wessels, A. *The Phases of the Anglo-Boer War, 1899 - 1902.* Brochure at the War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein, 1998.

Wyley, C.H. 'The Natal Dealer's Licenses Act of 1897 and Conflict between Indian and White Capital in the Borough of Durban, 1897 - 1909' Honours thesis, University of Natal, 1986.