THE INDIAN IN NATAL

This paper was written and presented to the Black Sash national conference by five members of the Natal Coastal Region: Doreen Patrick, Ann Colvin, Eleanor Mathews, Adele Keen and Mary Grice.

THIS PAPER CONCERNS the Indian race which was introduced to this country solely for the purpose of establishing an industry which has by now become a major exporter and a vital factor in our economic stability. Without the Indian we could not seize such a large share of the sugar market nor could we enjoy such provincial prosperity.

The first sugar-cane tops were brought from Mauritius in 1847 so that sugar might be established as the chief product of Natal. The cane was planted on five acres of land at Umhloti and four Indian labourers were brought from Mauritius to farm the crop. The experiment succeeded and cane was planted along the North and to a certain extent the South Coast.

The expanding industry was faced with a labour problem. It was not that labour was unobtainable but, as Dr. Edgar Brookes points out in his History of Natal, ". . . without a large and reliable number of capable hands, sugar-planting is a barren occupation." The African was unable to cope, and showed neither interest in, nor desire for the work.

The records show that other races such as Chinese and Malays were imported for farming before it was finally agreed to follow the Mauritius pattern of indentured Indian labour.

The first of the indentured immigrants from India arrived in 1860, and eighty-three percent were Hindus. With this group came the passenger Indian who had paid his own fare and was to trade in Natal. The passenger Indians were about ten percent of the immigrants and were Muslims. The other seven percent was of Christian and other faiths.

Considerable hardship was experienced in these early days and there was much conflict between employer and employee. The European farmer does not show up very well, and even 100 years later the Indian is still struggling for recognition. It is not fair at this stage to blame the present apartheid policy for all of this.

We must remember that after his five-year contract was completed, the Indian was free to go where he pleased — hence the migration to the towns and into commerce and industry.

In the midst of this social turmoil and injustice in the late nineteenth century a few European farmers were very conscious of their responsibilities. The welfare of their labour force and families was of such concern to them that model villages and stable communities were established, where employees could retain their own culture and way of life.

The towns of Verulam and Tongaat were founded in 1850 and 1856, and they are now the centres of integrated farming. Indians and Europeans farm side by side, and they share their interests and responsibilities.

In the 1850's the Saunders family established what is now known as the Tongaat Sugar Company, and we have here a fine example of what private enterprise has done for its labour. In the last few years this company has diversified its interests into textiles, poultry and real estate, and it is well able to cope with the shift of emphasis of the twentieth century Indian from agriculture into commerce and industry.

We have often heard the argument that the Indian is better off here then starving back in India, but this does not seem to be a logical statement. Despite his considerable contributions to economic prosperity in Natal, his rights are still limited. It is true that many Indian bodies have been formed, such as the South African Indian Council and the Town Council of Verulam; but nowadays it is legislation rather than exploitation which limits the Indian's rights and freedom of movement. We must realise that his contribution to our society now merits further recognition.

SPRINGFIELD FLATS

DURBAN'S METROPOLITAN AREA — multi-racial in character — comprises a sizeable population of nearly 700,000 people, of whom the bulk — surprisingly perhaps — is Asiatic, 33% as opposed to 31% Bantu, 27% White, and a small Coloured community making up the remaining 4%.

An estimated 60% of Natal's Indians reside in the Durban/Pinetown complex. An interesting demographic feature of this complex— even before Separate Development became a politician's pipe-dream — had been, over a

period of some 50 years, the gradually emerging pattern of racial separation. Indeed, as a sociological study made in 1958 accurately observed that — and I quote — "of all the cities in the Union, Durban, through its City Council, has shown the greatest enthusiasm for compulsory segregation". This compulsion had initially been enforced by a Provincial Ordinance, which led to various Government "Pegging" Acts, and eventually to the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act of 1946. The Nationalist Government's Group Areas Act, promulgated in 1950, merely sanctioned, therefore, and lent an awesome rigidity to this process of residential segregation, whose prime motivation of course had been fear on the part of the economically dominant, if numerically inferior, White group.

Taking 1950 as the watershed, the ecological jig-saw of the Durban complex until this date revealed the Indian domiciled areas to have been mainly on the alluvial flats that stretch from the Umhlaas to the Umgeni Rivers, and in the periphereal zones behind the more favoured seaward facing slopes of the Berea and Bluff ridges. A very small minority — 7% — of the more prosperous Indians had, however, managed to penetrate this elevated, and almost exclusive preserve of the White man.

Since that significant date — 1950 — the implementation of the Group Areas Act combined with an ever accelerating process of White expansion has effectively forced the Indian community to be removed even further towards the perimeter — to the north and to the south of Durban City. Only a few enclaves of Indian settlements remain in relatively close proximity to Durban's industrial and commercial centre — and these are regarded as purely trnasitional arrangements. (The vexed and thorny question of the Grey Street area — the hub of Indian commerce— remains in abeyance.)

Typical of these so-styled transient settlements is Springfield Flats, which is situated in the lower reaches of the Umgeni River valley. Commonly referred to as "Tin Town" Springfield Flats is sited on municipal land, and therefore comes directly under the control of Durban's City Council. Many of its occupants, prior to their establishment at Springfield, had been illegal shack dwellers, who, in 1957, following the demolition of their homes, had been re-housed in this controlled slum area in houses of sub-economic construction — the erection and maintenance of which are the responsibility of the owners themselves. This was, I emphasise, 12 years ago, and today the position for these humble folk, as for the rest of Springfield's indigent community, is as untenable as it was then.

The human composition of Springfield Flats has, in fact, been drawn exclusively from the lowest income group of Durban's Indian community ,and of the approximate 400 families present in the location an estimated 80% are currently living below the breadline.

NANA SITA

MR. NANA SITA died on the 23rd December, 1969 at the age of 71. He was a former president of the Transvaal Indian Congress, a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi and a firm believer in passive resistance. He served several prison sentences for refusing to leave the house he and his family had occupied for 44 years when the suburb was proclaimed for white occupation only.

The ideals he lived for are best summed up in the words he spoke at his trial under the Group Areas Act in the Magistrate's Court in Pretoria on the 17th August, 1967.

"I stand before you for flouting the provisions of the Group Areas Act, which for the reasons stated above, my conscience does not allow me to comply with. Therefore in obedience to the higher authority of conscience I have decided not to meekly submit to the provisions of the Act. Being a follower of Mahatma Gandhi's doctrine of "Satyagraha" (Passive Resistance) based on truth, love and non-violence I consider it my sacred duty to resist injustice and oppression and in doing so am prepared to bear the full brunt of the law and am willing to face the consequences thereof.

If you find me guilty of the offence for which I am standing before you I shall willingly and joyfully suffer whatever sentence you may deem to pass on me as my suffering will be nothing compared to the suffering of my people under the Act. If my suffering in the cause of noble principles of truth, justice and humanity could arouse the conscience of White South Africa then I shall not have strived in vain. I am 69 years of age, suffering with chronic ailment of arthritis but I do not plead in mitigation. I ask for no leniency. I am ready for the sentence."

Thus this emergency transit camp bears, both in fact and appearance, all the hall-marks of a depressed area. Poorly housed, and in cramped conditions, with no security of tenure, and, for the most part, inadequate living wages, these impoverished peoples eke out a deplorable existence. The increasing number who are qualifying for State and other charitable grants is a clear indication of extreme poverty. While the extended family system, so much in evidence at Springfield, is here also largely dictated by economic circumstances.

"Tin Town's" unsatisfactory state of impermanency has not, obviously, warranted the provision of any recreational facility, and the settlement's only amenity is a school, situated on the outskirts and catering for children until Standard VI.

Insecurity and deprivation breed their own social problems, and "Tin Town", like most slum spots, is not immune from the devitalising evils of juvenile delinquency, alcoholism, crime, unemployment, apathy and the psychological ill-effects of children (there are about 1,600 of them) reared in an environment bereft of any advantages whatsoever. Malnutrition too is apparent with all its recognised symptoms of degeneracy. Springfield Flats is, indeed, fast becoming a place unfit for human habitation, and which in itself constitutes a health hazard not only for those immediately concerned, but for the adjoining districts as well.

Improved housing and higher wages are essential pre-requisites if Springfield Flats is no longer to remain a blight area, and a disgrace to the City of Durban.

This sorry situation has been further compounded by the recent injection of 149 families from the Bayhead area, whose homes (which had been in their possession for 80 odd years) have been reclaimed by the South African Railways Administration. These uprooted persons represent a small proportion of the approximate 150,000 Indians, who, it is estimated, are likely to be affected either by the Group Areas Act, or by further expropriation and development schemes.

These Bayhead Indians come also from the lower income group bracket, but hitherto not only had their rental costs been low — a rand per month, but having the sea within easy access, and land suitable for cultivation, the majority had contentedly made a livelihood either as fishermen or as market gardeners.

Now, common to all displaced persons, they feel rejected and bewildered — uncertain of the future, and resentful of their enforced upheaval.

Nor do they feel justly compensated by the Department of Community Development's decision to give them priority over Springfield's resident tenants in the proposed re-settlement scheme at Chatsworth.

CHATSWORTH

CHATSWORTH is an Indian Township some ten miles from the centre of Durban, on Corporation ground, commenced in 1960.

Row upon row of houses, like concrete boxes, stand on the barren hill side. It is planned to accommodate 150,000 people. By the middle of 1968 approximately 11,000 houses had been occupied by over 80,000 people. The Township is divided into ten Units and the houses stand on plots of one-sixth of an acre or less.

Community facilities are completely lacking but one cinema is being built. There are no temples or mosques, and telephones are almost non-existent. I quote from Fatima Meer's books in which she says: "People who once lived in small compact communities with well-defined public roles and recognised neighbourhood status, find themselves in a multitude which questions their bona fides."

Transport is poor. Buses are privately owned and run irregularly. Drainage is non-existent on the newer roads . Flood water runs through the houses. Street lighting is limited and this encourages crime.

One man describes how easy it is to be robbed even in broad daylight. "At 3.10 p.m. on the afternoon of 5th July 1969 I boarded my bus, and took my seat at about the 6th row from the front. A man with a knife came and sat next to me. He pointed his knife at me and demanded money. His friend sat behind me with a gun. I, being shocked at the sudden move, took all my money and gave it to him. He wanted to stab me because I refused to let him have my watch. Fortunately he managed to break my watch from my wrist so I was not hurt. All this happened in a very short time and they jumped off the bus whilst it was still going slowly."

Rentals vary from R3 per month for a room, kitchen, shower and toilet up to R28 per month for a three bed-roomed house. Rental covers the house, sewerage, water and outside painting. Rents must be paid in person in

Unit 10, a long way from some of the other Units. House repairs are done by the Corporation and are charged to the occupants, and electricity is charged for.

The higher income groups live in Units 1 and 7 and ground can be bought in these areas. Houses on 1/8 acre cost approximately R2,000. Rents vary from R20 to R28 per month. In Units 2, 3 and 5 the rentals have been increased from R5 to R10, leading to much bitterness and in many cases to real hardship.

Well-built schools in all Units are adequate for the present population, bearing in mind that Education is not compulsory. The teachers take two sessions daily and are paid by the Government. They voluntarily contributed 10% of their wages towards the building of the schools. There are playing fields but these can only be used by the schools.

The R. K. Khan Hospital with 453 beds and a Nursing College is a Goverment Institution. It is dedicated to the memory of R. K. Khan who left his fortune to health services. Of this fortune R400,000 was donated to this building. It stands in Unit 5. Unfortunately only two wards are in use owing to shortage of staff. This is a paying hospital, non-paying patients are still sent to King Edward VIII hospital in Durban.

In the Township there is a Child Welfare Society which employs 6 Social Workers.

The only Shopping Centre is in Unit 2. There is also an hotel which is used by Welfare and other organisations on Sundays. Two private doctors practise from this area.

The women work mostly in factories in Pinetown and Durban. Those who work in Pinetown leave at about 4 a.m. and return about 7 p.m. They earn between R5 and R7 per week. The men earn between R10 and R12 per week. The daily return bus far is 20c and to Durban 22c. Most of the domestic shopping is done in Durban or Clairwood in spite of the expense of travelling.

There is an interesting group of about 100 families known as the Zanzibaris, recently in the news, who live in Chatsworth. The story of their travels goes back to 1873 when a British man-of-war intercepted a cargo of slaves bound for Zanzibar in Arab dhows. This small Urdu speaking Islamic community who speak Arabic and study the Koran was settled on Muslim Trust Land on the Bluff, but in 1930 they were re-classified as Africans. In 1961 they were again re-classified as Asiatics and were settled in Chatsworth. They are a problem group, living in the direst poverty in the poorest Unit in Chatsworth, where their children attend the Indian schools. They have their own mosque. Recently they have been re-classified again. Can you imagine the feelings of a people in this crazy country of ours who look like Africans, live amongst Indians, and are now classified as Coloureds? We were quite chilled by the bitter resentful faces we saw amongst them.

I would like to close with a quotation from Fatima Meer's book "Portrait of Indian South Africans."

"There is on the one hand the mowing down of communities which have taken ninety to a hundred years to mature and on the other. the expectation that new neighbourhoods will arise in the physical shells provided for those displaced. Little attention is paid to the deeply traumatic effects of sudden uprooting, and a nelson eye is turned to the overwhelming problems which face the displaced and the dispossssed."

RESERVOIR HILLS

RESERVOIR HILLS is an Indian residential suburb, to the North of Westville.

The area was originally planned as a white suburb, on land owned by a private Development Corporation. Development started in 1947, and ½ acre plots were marked out.

However, the area turned out to be unpopular with white buyers. (It is a rather bare, stony, wind-swept hillside rather far off the main road, and dominated by the enormous superstructure of the Durban Reservoir.)

No plots were sold to whites, and in 1958 it was declared an Indian Area.

At this stage the Development Corporation decided to sell ¼ acre plots.

Plots were sold for about £1,000 (R2,000) and some Indian families of the upper income groups, including professional people, doctors, lawyers and teachers, decided to move out to this new country area. They came from places like Asherville, which were getting very crowded, owing to the shortage of land avail able for Indian housing.

The Development Company was anxious to attract new residents, and so they partly subsidised a privately owned bus service, and the roads which were on the bus route were tarred. (These are still the only tarred roads in the area.)

The bus service still operates, with half hourly buses in the early morning and late

afternoon, hourly for the rest of the day. There are no buses into Durban after 8 p.m. or out of Durban after 8.30 p.m.

No provision was originally made for schools, but the Natal Indian Teachers' Society raised funds ,and put up a building on a piece of land bought at a low rate from the Development Company. (The company was still trying to attract residents.)

Eventually, when Indian Affairs took over Indian Education, the government granted a subsidy towards the further development of the school ,and has now taken over the running of it.

When the Greyville area of Durban was declared white, many of the better-off families from this mainly Indian area, which included Avondale Road, Madras Road and Cowie Road, were forced to move, and a large number of them settled at Reservoir Hills.

There were many distinguished Indian families amongst those who lost their homes at this time. Many of them were well-to-do merchants, whose families had owned and lived in their town houses for 80 or 90 years. They were a stable community with deep roots and a stake in their town. They had a sense of service to the community, and financed many amenities, such as schools and colleges.

They were conveniently near their businesses, schools, cinemas, and all the amenities of town life, including the beach.

Now that there was an enforced move, the Development Company was able to take advantage. Plots were smaller, and prices higher.

A plot in the best part of Reservoir Hills costs at present around R12,000, and the annual rates on these properties are R400, payable to the Durban Corporation.

Plots in the nearby White houses of Westville North cost only about R3,000 or R4,000 with correspondingly lower rates, (this is owing to the shortage of land allocated to the Indians.)

What do the residents of Reservoir Hills get for the high rates they pay?

No pavements, narrow, winding, un-made roads, poor soil, no storm water drainage, no main sewerage system.

A poor telephone service, with a great many people still waiting for phones.

No cinemas, no swimming pool, no High School, no daily postal delivery, inadequate street lighting and poor maintenance of lights, inadequate police protection.

No Civic Centre, no Public Library, no Parks.

All religious groups have now been allocated sites, and are building up their congregations.

When large areas in Durban, traditionally Indian, and occupied by the poorer Indian families, were declared White, Reservoir Hills began to fill up rapidly with cheaper houses, closer together, and blocks of working-class flats.

Residents of the original section are afraid of over-crowding, and a change in the character of their suburb.

On the other hand, the White houses of Westville North are creeping closer and closer, as Westville grows and spreads Reservoir Hills residents are beginning to feel a little anxious at the thought that they might be forced to move again, to make way for the Whites.

What worries the residents most of all is that the Durban Corporation makes decisions about the planning of the Township, without consulting the rate-payers themselves. They have no representation on Durban Corporation. Decisions are made over their heads about matters which are of great importance to them, and vitally affect their living conditions.

CONCLUSION

FROM THESE PAPERS we have a picture of people, people whose forbears began to arrive over a hundred years ago, as indentured labour with no assets except their labour, or later as passenger Indians to develop commerce. By 1913 the Whites had decided that they were becoming a problem, and immigration was generally prohibited, with further restrictive legislation following over the years.

We have a picture of people being moved. The Department of Community Development reckoned that by mid-1966, about 41,000 people had already been re-settled ,and that there were *still another 86,000 to be moved from* these same controlled and proclaimed areas, plus over 9,000 to come from other controlled areas such as Mobeni and Clairwood. This means that very nearly the whole Indian population of Durban will be moved. Waiting lists are understandably very long — 10,000 odd families in 1966, 40% of whom were being moved because of the Group Areas Act.

We have a picture of extremes — of abject poverty and considerable wealth — of a township such as Chatsworth where Mrs. Fatima

Meer considers that not enough sub-economic housing is provided. She believes that about 80% of Indians in Natal earn less than R54 a month, whereas less than half the houses built are sub-economic. Mrs. Ramasar in a paper on "Emerging social problems among the Indian People" in 1967 pointed out the growing number of indigent Indians, stating that in 1953 "1,800 families in Durban depended on grants and social pensions alone", but in 1966 up to 11,000 families received State assistance.

For this group life is a struggle and social workers find their problems increasing, due to such factors as desertion and no support by husbands and fathers, unemployment, and sickness. Even the handing of grants to the women can cause problems as it gives them independence for the first time. Religion is losing its hold, there is a breakdown in the system of joint families, and the lack of land ownership has deprived them of a status symbol as well as a means of subsistence.

The wealthy group have contributed greatly to the economic development of the area, but have been sadly rewarded. The great demand for land has led to fantastic prices, and at the same time the homes which they have had to vacate were often valued years before they were moved out, and they were sometimes paid as little as one-third of the real value. Further the "Grey Street complex" future plan is undisclosed, and this means there is no development or investment in this part. Another worry for property owners here is that it is expected that Indians who now shop in Grey Street will eventually shop in the Townships.

The wealthy Indians have a highly developed sense of service to others and charities exist for the benefit of Africans as well as Indians. Examples are the Shifa Hospital which was built with money donated by Indians and is run by a group of Indian doctors, the Islamic Institute which is a school for 1,000 primary and secondary school children, built by the Institute and sharing running costs with the Government, and the Womens' Cultural Group which raises money for charities at Kwa Mashu, amongst others.

They are a very cultured and intelligent group, and it is they who suffer most from the restrictive legislation and inequalities, forcing some of them to leave the country. One of them told me recently that she only realised how stunted was her personality once she lived in the United States. These are the people to whom we should be giving responsibility, and whose advice we should be seeking.

On the question of unemployment, Mr. G. Maasdorp and Mr. L. McCrystal in a paper in 1967 found that the rate of growth of the economy was being restricted mainly by the colour bar, and very little by job reservation. Perhaps even the colour bar is breaking down now, as seen in the growing number of Indians, including women, employed in shops. We only hope that the Government will not pass any legislation to prevent this growth.

On the subject of housing, having looked at some of the townships recently, we question the wisdom of providing housing for thousands of people without providing corresponding amenities. We think the time has come for a meeting of township planners, social workers, Ministers and others to discuss the whole problem, and if necessary to change policy and plans. At present, we appear to be creating vast, anonymous masses of discontented people instead of stable, happy communities. and our problems are only likely to increase.

CABBAGES

I cannot stand these long flat days,
My mind was stuffed too full in youth —
It hunts incessantly for news
And likes to weigh falsehood and truth.

Must oldsters thus be mummified
Like cabbages in kindly ground
Who are no good to anyone
But cabbagers who wealth have found?

Surely God does not want our lives
In muffled stupidness to float,
When half the world is needing help
And agony's a common note.

I know not what I'm going to do,
How break the cage in which I'm bound;
But cabbage culture wins my wrath,
I'll hunt a cure until it's found.

Jessie Hertslet (89).

Jessie Hertslet died in January 1970 just after this poem had been received. A tribute to her was published in the August, 1969 issue of Sash.