FROM SURVIVAL TO DEFIANCE

Indian Hawkers in Johannesburg 1940 - 1980

ORAL HISTORY SERIES NO. 2

From Survival to Defiance

1940 - 1980

EDITED AND PREPARED FOR PUBLICATION BY COCO CACHALIA

ARCHIVES DEPARTMENT

SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS

68, DE KORTE STREET	P.O. BOX 97
BRAAMFONTEIN	JOHANNESBURG
JOHANNESBURG 2001	2000

ISBN. 0/86982/217/9 NOVEMBER 1983.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1) FAMILY HISTORY

2) PERSONAL HISTORY

3) LIVING AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

4) HAWKING: FROM SURVIVAL TO DEFIANCE (1940-1960)

5) HAWKERS UNITE TO RESIST (1960-1980)

6) CONCLUSION

Introduction

Indians came to South Africa in 1860 to work as indentured labourers on the sugar plantations in Natal. They were then amongst the poorest section of the Natal population. Predominantly, Telegu, Tamil and Hindi speaking, Indians. came from the southern parts of India where as a result of increasing pressure on the land during the course of the nineteenth century, landless labourers, who were unable to find suitable job opportunities, swelled the ranks of the unemployed. The majority of incoming Indians were employed as agricultural labourers under a system of indenture on the sugar plantations of Natal. However, some were employed as domestic servants in private residences, hotels and restaurants and hospitals.[1] Indentured Indians entered the Union bound to a labour contract which allowed for employment conditions and practices akin to slavery.[2] They were brought in somewhat reluctantly and only because the sugar magnates of Natal were unable to secure a steady flow of African labour to meet the needs of the fast growing sugar industry.[3]

The indentured Indians were followed by a small group of Indians from the trading class who came to South Africa from 1875 onwards. "Passenger" Indians, so-called because they paid their own way to South Africa and were not bound to a labour contract, entered the Union in varying capacities and among them were wealthy merchants who already accumulated substantial amounts of capital in places like Mauritius.[4] Among the wealthy merchants an intricate network of trade emerged in Natal which relied on family members or fellow

Gujeratis for its expansion. Initially, this network was confined to coastal Natal but it quickly spread to the interior of the Colony and then to the Transvaal.[5] However, other 'passenger' Indians also came to South Africa. They came in because they were being squeezed off the land in India and were unable to find suitable job opportunities. In many cases the small family holding in the village was simply incapable of meeting the needs of the people living there. All so-called 'passenger' Indians entered the Union unencumbered by a labour contract. They came to Natal and to the Transvaal, where they hoped to make good in the burgeoning city of gold which was fast developing and laying the basis of a modern capitalist state.[6]

Yet, despite the flurry of economic activity that was taking place in the Transvaal during that period, severe economic restrictions were placed on in-coming Indians. Not only were they confined to separate streets and wards in the name of sanitation, but their trading activity was continuosly curtailed by licensing policies and restrictions on ownership of real property. As early as 1885, law 3 held that Indians in the Transvaal be prevented from acquiring landed property and citizenship rights.[7] Says Tayal:

> "The Transvaal government insisted that all Indians were insanitary, and in the interests of public health all should therefore be confined to locations for business as well as residential purposes."[8]

From the 1870's onwards increasing numbers of indentured labourers completed their five year contracts. These Indians filled the openings in Natal either as free labourers or they

entered market gardening, hawking, domestic service and fishing. The majority tried to make a living through the latter.[9] Many too began drifting north to the Transvaal republic in search of higher wages.[10] For example, it has been noted that the Rand goldmines attracted Indian wage labour prior to the Anglo/Boer war but this was stopped short when the new administration began clamping down on Indian immigration in 1903 and 1904.[11] Indeed, in the post-war period, Indians found that many restrictions existed which prevented them from entering and taking advantage of the variety of job opportunities. The 1911 census shows only 3121 male and 1055 female wage workers in the Transvaal.[12] Likewise, Indian hawkers were restricted in the Transvaal with only 2,966 hawkers licenses issued to 'Asiatics' in 1905.[13]

The Indian merchants of the Transvaal who had access to capital remained within the commercial sector and selfishly guarded their own interests. Those who had no immediate access to capital found refuge in the catering industry - one of the few industries that initially allowed Indian entry - or as shop-workers in already established business, or as hawkers and petty traders.

The term 'commercial sector' is apt to give the impression of relative wealth amongst Indians in the Transvaal. Indeed, it is often stated that working-class Indians are an anomaly in the Transvaal. Yet many Indians who came from Natal to the Transvaal, entered as ex-indentured labourers - that is, they had shaken the shackles of indenture and did not enter with vast reserves of capital. Instead many came and faced with a new urban environment sought to make

a living, which in many cases involved little more than the economics of survival. At the same time, many Indians who came to South Africa around the turn of the century as 'passenger' Indians, did not enter with capital - they came to South Africa to try to make money. They tended to enter the Union as salesmen and clerks to work in already established business. A newspaper report in the 1950's reflects this quite clearly:

> "These are businesses that were started with no great reserves of capital but on the savings of poor, hardworking people. The owners themselves served over counter of shops, and are an emphatic contradiction to Nationalist propaganda that all Indians are rich."[14]

However, this does mean that all Indians were necessarily poor. Certainly in the Transvaal, a strata of wealthy merchants existed. These merchants came to Natal first where they established themselves as traders but later some moved to the Transvaal, as the need for expansion grew. Thus, the Transvaal also developed its own network of traders. Men like Dada Abdullah and Abdul Kadir had significant investments in the Transvaal.[15]

More particularly though, in comparison to Africans, Indians traders and labourers certainly occupied a more privileged position. Africans were systematically denied access to alternative means of earning an independent livelihood from the late nineteenth century onwards.[16] Indians were placed in a more ambivalent position. They occupied a structurally different position to their African counter-

parts and hence developed as an oppressed but nonetheless less underprivileged group than Africans.

It was because the economic development of Indians in South Africa was ambivalent that they were not required to go on the one way march to the working-class. Opportunities that were only afforded to Africans at the very early stages of capitalist development, continued for Indians and they were not systematically blocked off from earning an independent livelihood.[17] Hence, partly in order to escape the rigidities of wage labour, and partly because they were blocked off from entering the majority of trades in the Transvaal, many working class Indians opted for alternative means of earning an independent livelihood. These tended to take the form of hawking and street trading.

An Indian hawker in the centre of the City. (1950's.

Throughout their history, Indian hawkers have been prevented from gaining a stake in the prevailing economic order. They have tended to remain in the lower levels of economic activity, with little opportunity to break free from their restrictive economic conditions. This was partly due to the nature of their trade and partly due to the controls imposed upon them. It was hawkers and the small numbers of wage labourers that constituted the bulk of Johannesburg's poorer Indians. Contrary to widely held beliefs, a small but nonetheless substantial group of Indians did exist in the Transvaal. In 1934, the Indo European Council reported on the conditions of some Indians in the Johannesburg city centre:

> "During the last months, members of this Association have been investigating conditions among poorer sections of the Johannesburg Indian Community and are appalled by the extreme poverty and distress that exist among them.[18]

This poverty was clearly exacerbated by high levels of unemployment and by exhorbitant rents extracted by wealthy Indian and Jewish landlords.[19] So exhorbitant were the rents and so appalling were the conditions, that poorer Indians fully supported, against the wishes of the prevailing Indian organisation, the establishment of an Indian township near Diepkloof.[20] Furthermore, during the 1930's a new law was proclaimed which effectively closed-off the time - honoured career of waiter to most Indians. Indians were no longer allowed to handle liqour. It is in this context that many Indians turned to nawking fruit, vegetables, and flowers and later on, soft good and patent medicines, as a means

Indian hawkers

to earn a livelihood. The Star newspaper reported in 1934

> "Hawking and touting for old bottles is the mainstay of the Tamil man, woman and child; the vegetable and fruit seller holds his own in the town; in the native location his living is threatened by municipal by-laws which aim at driving him out of location trade. This has occured in Benoni and hawkers have lost their case against the municipality and their living.[21]

Indians in the Transvaal turned to hawking for two reasons. Coming off the land as many of them did in India, and without vast reserves of capital, many found the Transvaal law demanding an initial payment of twenty-five pounds for trading rights, too high a price to pay. Likewise, ex-indentured labourers could not afford this exhorbitant sum. In this context, street trading was seen as viable option. Literature on informal sector activities lists four basic points about itinerant trades. Firstly, people involved in this kind of trade tend to operate outside the mainstream of economic activity as well as without the system of government benefits and regulations. Secondly, it is characterised by labour intensive provision of goods and services and requires little or no fixed capital or formal business organisation. Thirdly, hawkers and pedlars tend to be self-employed and in this context, assistance from family members assumes critical importance. Finally, despite its 'illegal' status, it can become economically viable.[22] Traditionally, Indian hawkers have always been active in the Transvaal. By the 1930's it was estimated that there were approximately 802 hawkers licences that were issued to Indians. These people tended to make a living by selling either fruit, vegetables or flowers and the estimated income of an average hawkers in 1930's was thought to be between £100-£150 per annum.[23] Various rules and regulations relating to street traders have been drawn up by the Johannesburg City Council over the years. Hawkers have variously been considered cheats, students of crowd psychology, public nuisances, and serious competitors to already established business. As such, an ongoing battle between the hawkers and the City Council has ensued. As early as 1926 the Government Division of Economics of requested the

abolition of hawking altogether as a means of solving the 'Asiatic' question.[24]

By-laws regarding hawking have been amended and changed quite drastically over the years. However, three basic conditions have remained consistent. Firstly, all hawkers are required by law to be licenced with the City Council. The fee of the licence has varied over the years and is also dependent on the quality and quantity of the goods carried by each individual hawker. Secondly, hawkers are required to remain constantly mobile - that is, they are required to move at least seventy five feet every twenty minutes. This was the most strigently applied law on behalf of the City Council and it was devised to lessen competition between hawkers and already established business. Finally, hawkers are not permitted to trade at certain times in certain areas.[25]

Hawkers and pedlars throughout the times have been governed by these by-laws. From time to time, the City Council has attempted to gain more control over hawkers and as such, have amended and changed the by-laws as they saw fit. However, hawkers did not simply sit back and accept the changes that were affecting the basis of their livelihoods. Historically, Indian hawkers have played a prominent role in the various campaigns initiated by Gandhi. From 1906 onwards, hawkers and petty traders began to play a more prominent role in the political activities of the Transvaal. The reasons for their increasing involvement in Indian politics of the Transvaal which previously was dominated by merchant interests is twofold: on the one hand petty traders basic interests were the same as the merchants. Their livelihood derived from commercial investments, however small. Secondly

both hawkers and labourers were linked to the merchants by a credit network. Tayal points out that it is reasonable to assume that merchants could demand the presence of their employees and debtors at meetings.[26] Ginwala goes further to say that it was the small Indian hawker and petty trader who had not yet managed to gain a stake in the prevailing economic system, who resisted most forcefully in the Passive Resistence campaing of 1907-8.[27] This to some extent held true for the Passive Resistance campaign embarked on by the Transvaal Indian Congress in 1946.[28]

During the 1940's the City Council promulgated new regulations to further control hawkers. As the new regulations came into being, so did the hawkers seek a way of circumventing those laws through either legitimate or illigitimate means.[29] For hawkers in the Transvaal this became a style of doing business.[30] This booklet draws on oral evidence in order to illuminate the conditions of hawkers and the particular social conditions that existed for them. The value of oral history lies in its ability to extract detail from its informants that otherwise could not be gotten. This is particularly useful in regard to the instances and forms of resistence that hawkers resorted to in their fight against the City Council, especially since they have tended to go unrecorded in the past.

The interview method employs the life-history style of interviewing and what will follow are various life-histories interwoven together which will tell the story of Indian hawkers in Johannesburg. The names of the informants have not been revealed, at their own request.

Footnotes for introduction

1 Tayal: 'Gandhi' the South African Experience'. D. Phil, University of Oxford, 1980 p.33
2 Tayal, 'Indian Indentured Labour in Natal. 1890-1911', Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol. XTV, No.4, p.159
3 Africans resisted the process of prelatarianisation and it was not until they were forcibly separated from the land through a series of extra economic measures that they worked for White farmers. For full discussion of this see C. Bundy, 'The Emergence and Decline of a South African Peasantry', African Affairs, October 1972.
4 Tayal 'Gandhi' p.5
5 Ibid p.58
6 Van Onselen, C. 'Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand (1886-1914) 2 New Nineveh, p.74
7 Tayal 'Gandhi' p.117
8 Ibid p.118
9 Ibid p.32
10 Ibid p.32
11 Ibid p.60
12 Ibid p.61
13 Ibid p.61
14 NEW AGE, October 11th 1956
15 Tayal 'Gandhi p.117
16 Van Onselen, C 'NEW Nineveh', p.74
17 Indians in South Africa were not legislated against in the same way as Africans
18 SAIRR - Rheinallt Jones Papers - Indian Affairs. A782 - Church of the Province library, University of Witwatersrand
19 Ibid
20 Star Newspaper, July 1949
21 Ibid, 20th October, 1934
22 H. Suchard, 'Informal Sector Development'.
23 Memorandum submitted to the Chairman and Members of the Free Hospitalisation Commission, Transvaal by the Transvaal Indian Congress, (n.d., SAIC Provincial Congresses and other Organisations' Papers. UNISA) p.2
24 Star Newspaper, 8/1/1936
25 R. Tomaselli, 'Johannesburg Indian Flower Sellers: A History of People on the Street' (Paper presented to History Workshop, University of Witwatersrand Published in B. Bozzoli Town and Countryside, 1983).
26 Tayal 'Gandhi' p.206
27 F. Ginwala Class Consciousness and Control (1860-1940) p.276
28 Y.M. Dadoo, 5 Months of Struggle: A Brief Account of the Passive Resistance Struggle from 13 June to 13 November, 1946, (New York: Delegates of the South African Passive Resistance Council, 1947, in Karis-Carter Collection, UNISA).
29 R. Tomaselli p.1
30 Interview conducted with an Indian Flower Seller, housed at SAIRR, Oral History Project, 1983.

Family History

For the purposes of this booklet, two diverse sections of the Indian community have been chosen to illuminate the conditions of hawkers. Firstly, interviews were conducted amongst fruit and vegetable hawkers from the Diagonal street area, in the centre of the city. Diagonal Street and its immediate vicinity has long been an area of Indian settlement in Johannesburg. In 1968, it was estimated that 402 Indian families were living in the Diagonal Streetcomplex, consisting of some 2,405 people and 310 Indian business.[1]

The composition of the community who settled there included Indians from villages in Gujerat who came to South Africa as 'passenger' Indians. Amongst these, the most dominant group were gurejati speaking Hindus. However, a number of Muslims from various villages also settled in the area. Predominant amongst these were Kanamias who came from the District of Baroach in India.

The Kanamia community that came to South was diverse. Among them, were reasonably well-off members as well as those who left India as peasants. It was the peasants who on their arrival in South Africa, sought to make a living through the hawking of fruit and vegetables. The Diagonal Street area was well suited in terms of access to the market which was situated in Bree Street, a few blocks away. Other Indians from other villages also settled in the area. The 'barber'

families referred to below, relates to a specific caste of people.

Diagonal Street, Johannesburg

Secondly, interviews were done amongst Tamil speaking Indians in Johannesburg. Tamils came from the southern parts of India to South Africa as indentured labourers to work on the sugar plantations of Natal. After the completion of their terms of indenture, some began moving north to the Transvaal in search of higher wages. The hawking of fruit, vegetables and flowers was widely used as a means to earn a livelihood.

Initially, Indian hawkers and wage labourers settled and lived in the Johannesburg location. However, with the expansion of Johannesburg, wealthy whites who lived in the centre of the city began moving out as the feasibility of suburban living became more apparent. With their exodus from areas like Doornfontein, incoming working class immigrants from eastern European settled in the area. Indians represented the second wave of penetration into the area - the 1941 Penetration Commission reported that out of 111 cases fifty occured in Doornfontein. The reported reflected that in the main, penetration occured for the purposes of trade.

However, Doornfontein gradually an area of Indian settlement. It was predominantly populated by Indians of the poorer classes in many of whom hawked for their living. They continued to live in Doornfontein until the majority of people were forced to move out as a result of the growing industrialisation of the area.

We always lived here, from my grandfathers time. Kanamias just settled here. Lets say the whole of the Market place was quite famous for Kanamias. Only Kanamias were living around. I remember there were two or three 'barber' families. Ja, I think they were the only people who weren't Kanamias otherwise it was mostly Kanamias and Hindus.

My father came from India in 1929. He came here from the Kanamia section. When he cam here he found my grandfather was a hawker. My father went into the hawking business with my grandfather. Then my father went out on his own to become a fancy goods hawker while my grandfather hawked with fruit.

A.V.

I was born in India, in the Kanamia village. I came to South Africa in 1922. I came from Lourenzo Marques (Delagoa Bay) first and from there, I came to the Transvaal. I came to the Transvaal on my father's passport - my father was already living here.
My father was a fruit and vegetable hawker in the Transvaal. I worked with my father. I was sixteen years old when I started hawking and working with my father.

P.V.

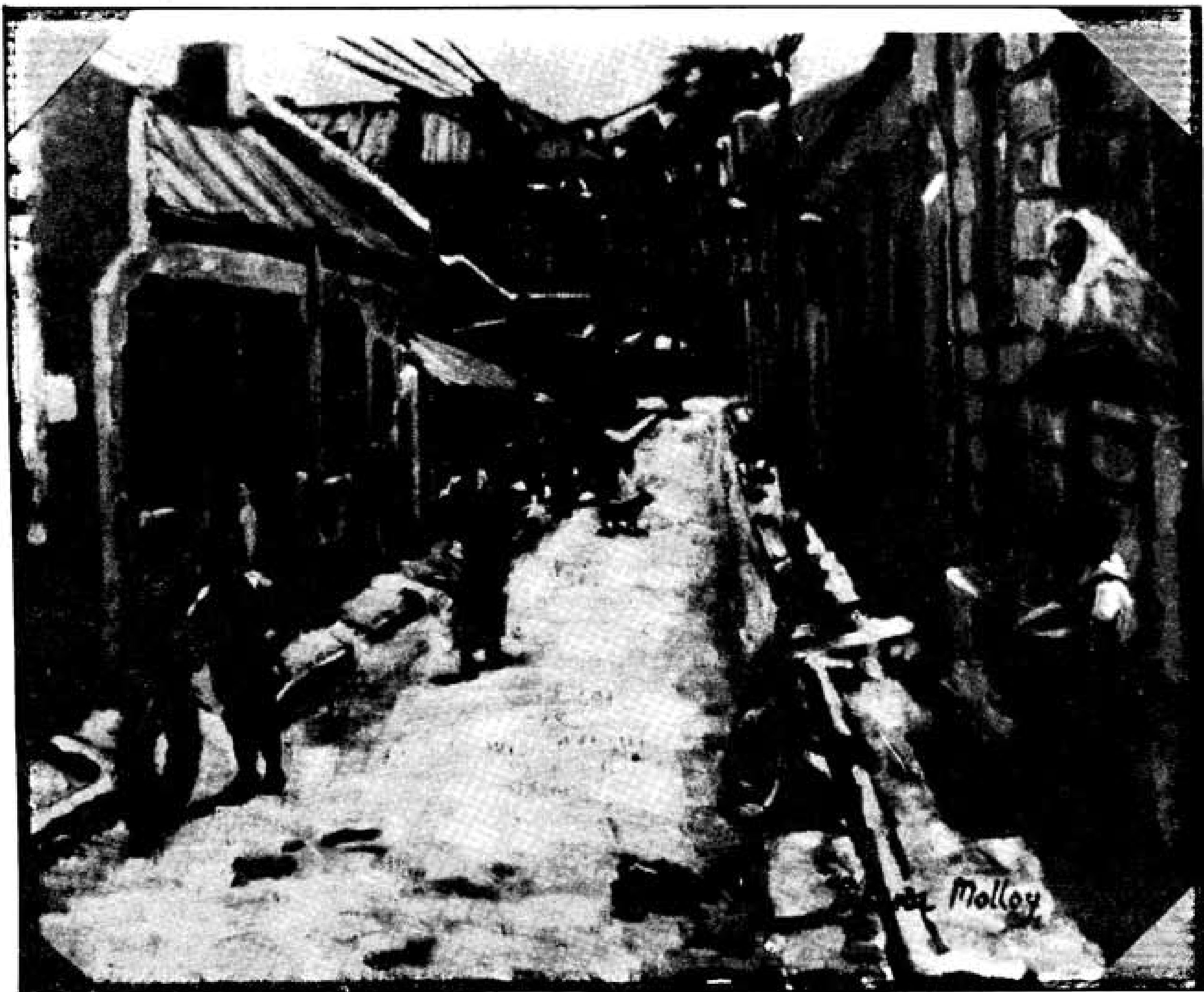
My father, before my time, I'm told was an agent in the fruit and vegetable market in Johannesburg. He was born in Johannesburg and although I can't remember where he was born for sure, I think he was born in Doornfontein.

He ran his business in the fruit and vegetable market in Johannesburg - the old market in Jeppe or Bree Street. To the best of my knowledge, I knew that my father was not educated. He had only gone up to standard one or standard two. When I'm told about the breakdown of his business, I realise that it must have come about as a result of his inability to control the administrative side of his business because I'm told that he ran a fairly big business in the market where he was doing a fairly big turn-over at that time. B.A.

Doornfontein

Personal History

I was born on the Sixteenth of February, 1934. I've lived in Johannesburg for most of my time, up to the present day. I was born in Doornfontein and as I recall it, it was an industrial area. In this industrial area there were lots of people living in between the factories that were there. And thats where I was born.



An artist's sketch of early Doornfontein

I went to school in a place called Beaconsfiled. There was an Indian government school there and the principal I remember, was the Reverend Sigamoney. Thats where I first started schooling. From there we went to Gold Street School.

In my primary schooling I was doing exceptionally well. But when I got to high school, I found myself at a total loss. I found the whole environment of the school I went to totally different from the conditions I'd lived in and gone through. And the reason for that is because I came into contact with a new society of people in those schools, in the high schools. You know, I found that socially I had difficulties. I couldn't adapt myself to their social levels.

Those children were from Fordsburg and from all other areas. But they seemed to be of a higher economic level than I had been. They were definitely socially in a better position them I had been. I mean the clothing they wore - there whole material existence was different to that of mine. I went to school there for one year and I found I had great difficulty.

Then I left school at about the age of fifteen. I told my mother and father that I was going to find myself a job as an apprentice as a mechanic. And i worked for sun-crush - the cold-drink manufacturers. I apprenticed as a mechanic on the cold-drink machinery but I wasn't

happy there.

I can never remember my family being wealthy. I remember in my early days that I had to go around and help my mother. I must have been about eight or nine years old. And I had to help my mother sell curry and rice in Jeppe to the European people that use to live there. We use to buy fish in Braamfontein and we use to sell fish and curry and rice to these people. I use to have a little cart that I made myself - a four wheel cart that I made with pram wheels. And I use to go with her and we use to do business there.

I had to become part of the income of the family at the very early stages of my life. And this changed my thinking. I became more orientated towards wanting to make a bit of money, wanting to do business, wanting to possess some of the luxuries that other people possessed that neither nor my family possesse I joined my father.

At one time I thought I would go and do private studies. And I enrolled with Union College - somewhere in Marshall Street. I enrolled with them but that was only some sort of dream in me. It seemed that I wanted to do law at that point in time although I lived and I came from that kind of background. I enrolled but I wasn't successful. You can understand that I sold flowers in the street and when you had to do things at that young age, you have to have tremendous determination. Apparently, I did not

have this tremendous determination to want to go forward and educate myself because I didn't come from a background of educated people.

But I was never really given the opportunity to make a decision as to what I really wanted to be. I said that I wanted to be a lawyer. Now how could I become a lawyer when I had the background of having to sell flowers in the street, having to go to a home where there was no educational background, having to go to a house where there was one room and I had no facilities to read or learn or write It was absolutely impossible if I look at it from a practical point of view. Unless I was a tremendously determined individual, which I can't see that I was at that time because of the fact that I had to keep this body of mine in tact. I had to find food to feed it. I had to work for it at that early age. I had to go and sell fish, go and sell curry and rice and sell all these little items that could bring in an income to support my family.

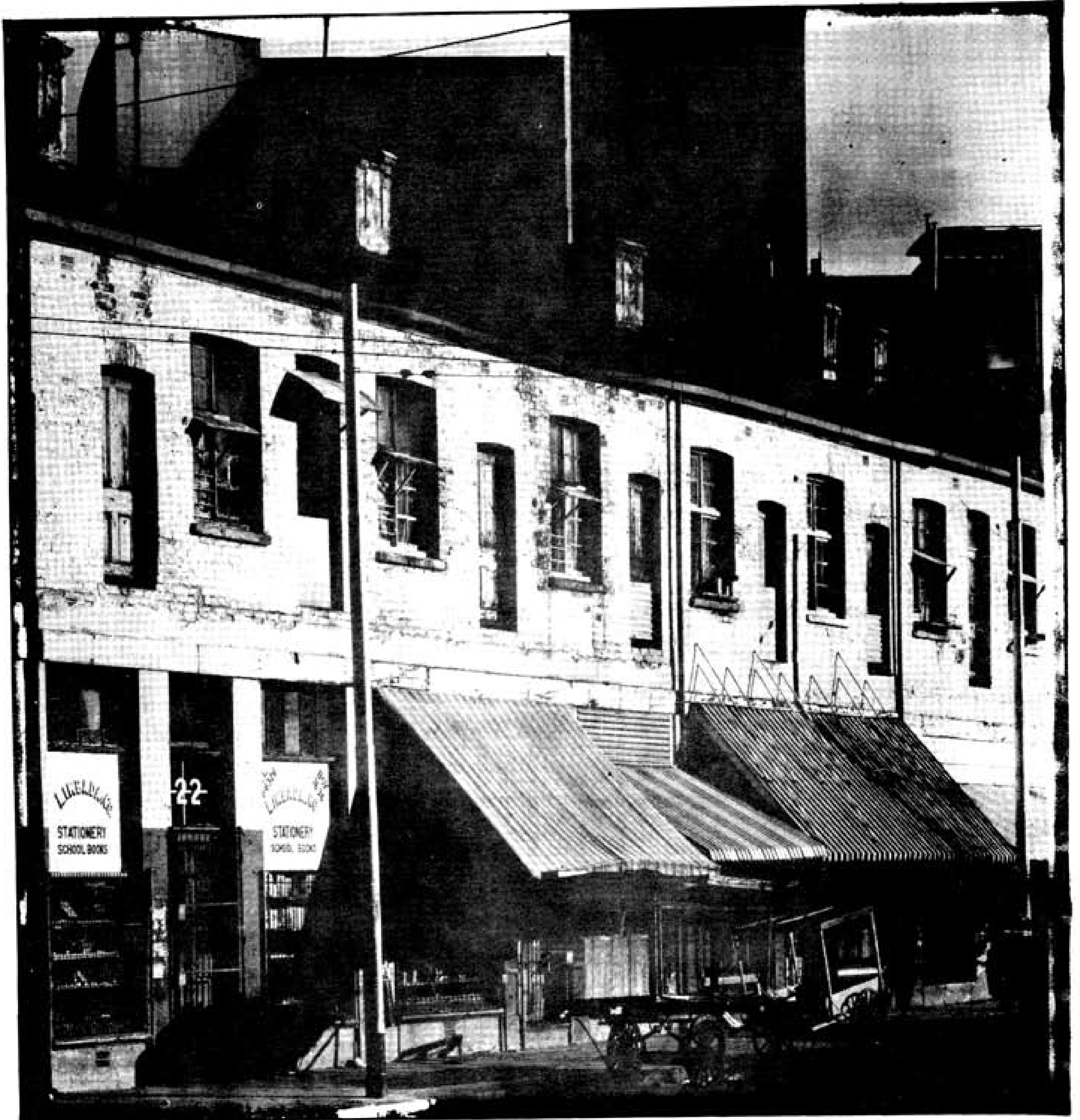
And you know, at those times you couldn't afford to even get sick. When you lived the way we lived in those early days, you couldn't afford to get sick. Because if we did, my mother had to leave us with the neighbours, with those people who lived with us. And they had to look after us.

But as a result of the economic development in me as I went along, I had a few more comforts, a few more luxuries

in life. And I had a little bit more time to think and a more better home to go to. A place where I could sit down and do something. Not just a hovel where I had to go in to sleep at night and get up in the morning and go on like that.

B.A.

Typical hovels that people lived in.
Doornfontein



Diagonal Street, Johannesburg

I was born on the twenty-fifth of January, 1949. I was born in Diagonal Street and we lived here until nineteen sixty nine. When the whole family shifted off to Lenasia. There were eleven of us in the family.

I went to Ferreirastown Primary School. I never attended high school. I was fourteen years old when I left school. I did like school very much but I had to give it up to help my father and my mother with her kids and all that housework.

I used to help my mother in the house and I opened the stand for my father in the morning. When my father came to the stand, I would go home and help my mother. At twelve o'clock, when my father went to mosque, I would be at the stand until two o'clock. Then I use to come back and help my mother and then go back to the stand at four o'clock and help my father till six. It was a long hard day for me.

My mother was always a house-wife. She did nothing besides staying at home and looking after her kids. She never worked because she could never speak English, you know. She used to be just in the house. And my father was that old-fashioned type who believed that a woman's place was in the home. It was the kids who used to go there and help him on the stand. I would have liked to gone to school further but I had no choice. My mum suggested that I leave school. She said with all the small kids and things she

couldn't cope. That time, well my mother use to feel that a girls place is in the kitchen. I didn't mind so much at the time but now that I'm married, I feel sometimes and I tell my mother that it is through you that I'm stuck where I am.

I got married when I was twenty-two years old. It was then that I stopped working for my dad but I use to come every Thursday to help him after I got married. Then after that you know, I was having my own problems in marriage - my husband wasn't working. Thats when I started off a little fruit business of my own. My mother-in-law looked after the kids for me and thats when I thought I might as well go and do something. I felt that is was wrong that my uncle should pay my rent and my mum having to send me groceries and things like that. Thats when I spoke to my dad and he said okay, he will help me to open up that hawkers business. My father never took that money back from me.

I found that working the whole day meant that I had very little time. Lets say I missed out on the best part of motherhood, you know. I never actually saw my child crawl for the first time. Or I never experienced, you know, my child walking or things like that. And those are all the good parts of motherhood that I missed out on. And in away I am sorry because when you sit with other mothers and they tell you how exciting it was then you feel that those were the things you heard from either the woman that

works for you or from your mother-in-law.

I would really like my children to have a better life than I have got, you know. I always tell them that education is the most important thing in life. I mean look at the way we are living - our living conditions are so cramped. I would like my children to have a decent home. If they are educated they can earn better money and they can live a better life. They can have what they really want. Whereas with us it is completely different. We can't because we are not educated.

A.V.

Indian housing in Johannesburg

I was born in the Kanamia village. I came to South Africa in 1922. I came to South Africa to try to make money. Only my father and I came here, the rest of family was all in India.

At an early age my father sent me out to work. I went to work in a shop in Lichtenburg. The shop was owned by our kind or people (Kanamias) - a man by the name of Vally Essack. I worked for him for about four years. I worked for him for about four years but my board and lodge was free. I generally started work at six in the morning and I use to finish work at nine at night. I thought the working hours were too long but I had to work - there was nothing I could do about it.

All the time that I was working in the Transvaal, I used to send money back to the village in India. I didn't like working for people but I didn't have any choice. There were many young boys like me in the area - some of them worked for a while and then became hawkers. Others kept on working in Indian shops.

I started hawking, my own business, in 1940. I saved up money from when I was working and it was with that money that I starting hawking. I hawked because it became difficult for me to find other work.

I always wanted to go back to India but I never got the chance. I preferred India because I was young and in India I could lead a care-free life, whereas in South Africa I had to work so I couldn't enjoy my youth. But in India, I couldn't make money. The only kind of work was to cultivate the land.

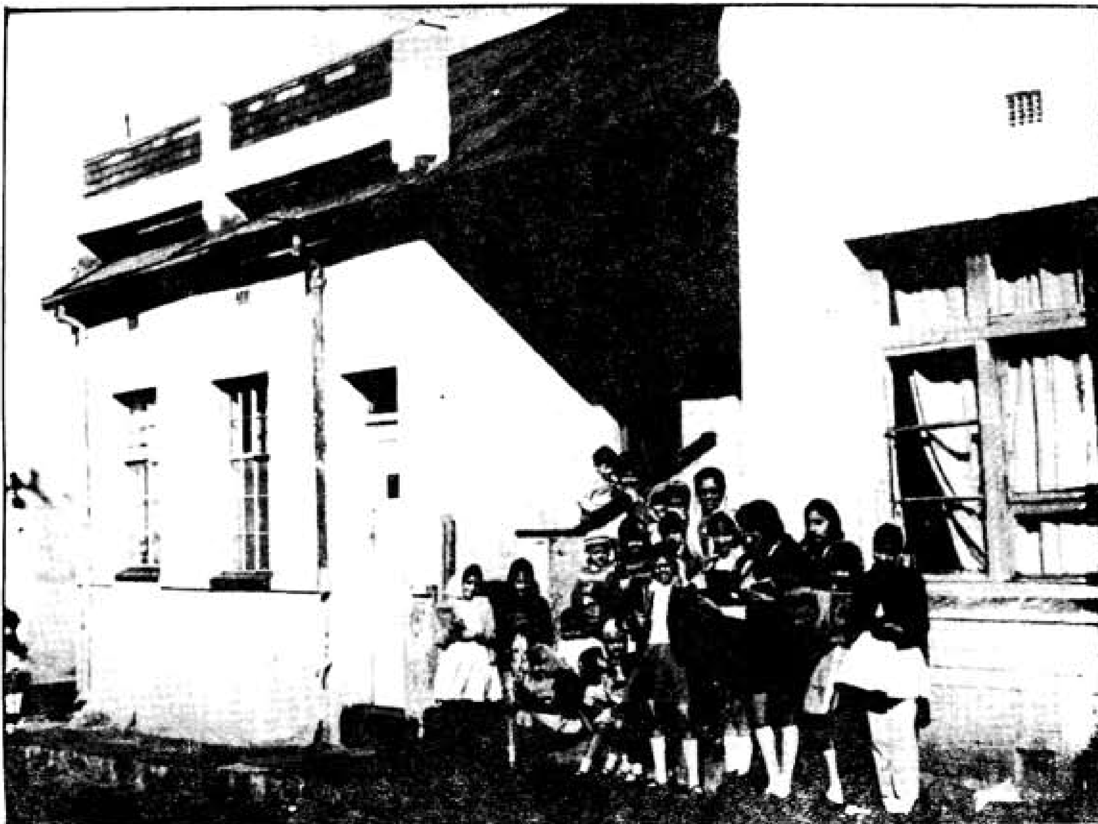
P.V.

Living and Social Conditions

Hawkers in Johannesburg were amongst the poorest section of the Indian community. Often they resorted to hawking as a means to earn a livelihood because few other alternatives existed for them. Their general living conditions were poor. Most tended to live in one or two rooms, regardless of the size of the family. This was partly as a result of the low income people earned and partly as a result of the acute housing shortage which many Indians faced in Johannesburg.

Perhaps because living conditions were so appalling, people were forced to interact with others who lived in a similar way. Areas like Diagonal Street and Doornfontein reflect a community spirit which is reminiscent of most working class areas and cultures. People, through for of circumstance, relied on each other for both material and moral support. In Doornfontein in particular, this community included Africans and coloureds. Hence, these areas are testimony to the fact and contrary to apartheid ideology, that people can and did live together.

Let me tell you about Doornfontein. We lived next door to my granny. My granny lived in a cottage. We lived in a room in the yard at the back of cottage. Now this was called Sivewright Avenue, this area, and there were about twelve houses running up Sivewright avenue, back to back. And there was a long lane that ran through Charles Street right into Sivewright Avenue that sort of linked these places up. And id these areas you found people living there of all races. We had Africans, coloureds, and Indians. Also around Doornfontein there were a number of Chinese people, a few white people living in between, quite isolated from us.



Doornfontein in the 1950's

I remember that when we were about four children in the family we lived in one room and I'll say the size couldn't be more than about ten by eleven (feet) or something like that. And we had to do everything in that room. Everybody had to bath there, and everybody had to sleep there, and everybody had to eat there and everybody had to do everything in that one room.

We then moved into a cottage on the corner of Sivewright and Charles Street. We moved out of the one-roomed house and we moved into the cottage. There was about six or seven rooms in this cottage. And we let part of this cottage to families - two families - a coloured family and single African people. And they lived with us for a number of years. As a matter of fact, they lived with us until we were forced to move out as a result of the industrial development of that area. When we moved from the one-room into the cottage, we then had a kitchen, we had a dining room, and one bedroom. Well that was a bit more. It was better than what we had, it was better than living in one room. But you realise that even then, economics were not all that wonderful. We were just climbing the ladder, we were coming up a little bit.

In Doorfontein of course there was a much more human attitude between people. And I say the human attitude from the one to the other is that your problems became the problems of others and others problems became your problems. There was a greater spirit there, you know.

A greater family spirit, a great spirit of neighbourliness.

The only facilities that we had in those times to play was that we played in the streets. You played football in the streets, you played cricket in the streets, you played top, you played kennekie. We flew kites - we did all - you name it. You know life was different. Children were different then. We played, we did everything that was to be done at the time. Although the economic conditions were not there. I mean when I look back to the economic conditions, and I look back to the actual life that was lived there - maybe economically we were not living on such a high level, but I mean there was a much more human existence. And we took part in every kind of sport and all kinds of activities. And I was never conscious of the race structure of this country. I didn't even realise that I was living in a country that had these enormous race problems.

In Doornfontein society there was no political awareness - no awareness of the kind of structure in which we lived. I didn't come across anybody that was politically aware at that time - you know, people who could make me aware of the forces in society. The whole surroundings in that area was dominated by the shebeens and all sorts of other things, you know. There were a number of shebeens - African women ran the shebeens and they were quite common to us. Very poor people. There were also many

ho-boes and all those drunks that use to lay around in the streets. I didn't realise it at the time, but now I realise that it is those social conditions, those conditions were the result of the structure of this country. Now I am aware of that but at the time I lived there, I wasn't aware of that.

The Africans, coloureds and Indians used to get along very well at the time. We were their friends - we lived next to them. And they were our friends. But I want to tell you that when we moved from these areas and we realised then - I realise it today because I speak to some of these people and they are still alive and I look at their families and what has happened to their families as a result of where they had to move to. The one family had to move to Kliptown. The other chap had to move to some place in Soweto. Now, the coloured family that had to move to Kliptown - there's been a total break down in the life of that family. Two of the children have been murdered. Children that I grew up with, children that I know.

And if I speak to their father - I still meet him once in a while - and if he tells you of the terrible things that happened to him and his family when he moved from Charles Street to Kliptown. You can cry when you hear this. This system that moves and up-roots people, to dump them into areas where they say one race must live. Its the biggest crime that can

be perpetrated or committed against any people. And when I hear their problems, I can't help but feel this terrible sense of depression going through me. When I realise what they are trying to do to these people by having to move them and segregate us as races and trying to artificially separate us as human beings and create this racism within us. And it is unfortunate that the weak don't get the opportunity of associating with stronger people and sort of being drawn into the stronger circle of life. B.A.

Indians living in the centre of the City

Where we stayed in Diagonal Street, we lived in two rooms. We had this room and a little kitchen on the otherside. My mother used to have a bed in there - in that kitchen where she slept with my younger brothers. And in the other room, all the older children slept. It was very cramped up, very, very cramped up, you know.

And there was - lets say we were about fourteen or fifteen families using two toilets. The toilets were outside and it was about fifteen families that used to share that lousy two toilets. And there was just one bathroom in the building that everyone had to share. No hot water, just cold water. You had to make hot water on a prima and we use to put the prima in the bathroom and then have that drum, where we use to boil our water and take it in a bucket to bath. It was very hard, you know.

There was no privacy - we were four brothers and two sisters that shared a room. We rented the rooms from Parekh brothers. I think we paid six rand a month for each room. There was electricity in the one room. In the other room there was no such thing Also, we had to go and fill water in buckets from the bathroom and carry it to the house. We used that water for washing, cooking and drinking.

We used to squeal everyday with my father: daddy, find. us a house, daddy find us a house, you know. But I mean he had fourteen kids to support. He was the sole

supporter and he was doing fancy goods hawking. So it was very difficult for him, you know what I mean. He wasn't earning so well on his fancy goods hawking so that he could go and look for a better house for us and things like that.

Diagonal Street, Johannesburg

When we lived in Diagonal Street, there wasn't always a fantastic atmosphere. You find somebody swearing most probably if you're doing - like we use to do our home-work here in this passage. Outside the room because there was no place inside. So what happened was that my eldest brother made a light here outside and we had a table outside. So on that table we use to sit and do our home-work. And then it would affect the other people. Our light would shine into their house and they would swear us and complain. At one stage they got the landlord to come and say we must take the light off. There was a lot of misunderstanding, you know.

Also you know probably, if you wanted to play, somebody wouldn't let you play. If you wanted to use the toilet somebody else was using the toilet. You got to wait in the queue, you know. Well, you came before me so I have still got to wait. And things like that. Our housing conditions - well, we all lived in small homes so you couldn't say that you had a better house than I did. We all lived the same way.

Other than that you know, if there was any kind of problem, the one would stand with the other. You know, if you had a funeral or somebody gets sick in the house then the whole flat cramps up into your place and comes to look after you and help you and things like that. Neighbours always helped out.

Also, as a group Kanamias stick together very much. Like say, with problem of gangs. Kanamias would stand

up for each other. They would help you if they felt you were in the right. For instance, if you find that your kid was harmed by another gang, then obviously everybody would come together. The old people would all get together and say - well, I'll give you R100, or I'll give you R50, I'll give you R20. Whatever you could afford. And they would stand together and fight this whole thing. There were a lot of gang fights in those days.

We use to enjoy ourselves too, you know. At night all the kids use to get together and we would play on the streets. Sometimes in the day also, we would play in the yard together. But I mean, if you come to look at it, we don't really miss it because now our living conditions are better. But you miss that little bit of - how can I say - that fun of it all. Sometimes when you sit and think of your own children then all the memories come back. But moving out has opened up everybody's minds you know. You are not so congested anymore. You can do what you want to. Before, if you cut your hair everybody would say you look like 'Bushman'. Those were the kinds of things people use to worry about.

In that area, there were people that were worse-off than us. Kanamias. There was somebody that use to live next door to us - the father never use to work, he always use to loaf around. He alway depended on his wife, you know. Whatever she and her daughter could make from doing dress-

making. They used to hawk only have one meal a day. Would settle for one meal a day and then in the evenings they would have sandwiches, butter-bread or jam and bread with tea. My mother always shared what she had with these people. Whatever fruit and vegetables or anything, we always shared with our friends and neighbours.

A.V.

A woman selling fruit and vegetables in Diagonal Street

Hawking: From Survival to Defiance

The history of hawking amongst the Indian community in Johannesburg has at best been turbulent. The City Council has continuously promulgated new laws and by-laws in its attempt to control hawkers and hawkers for their part, have tried through whatever means possible, to circumvent those laws in order to continue to earn a living. They did no simply sit back and accept the changes that were affecting the basis of their livelihoods.

The City Council harassed hawkers for two reasons; firstly unlicenced hawkers were hounded by police squads and were then either fined or arrested. Secondly, even hawkers with licence, were prevented from selling their wares at certain times and certain places. Other than that, hawkers were charged for not moving every twenty minutes, for littering the side-walks, and for causing obstruction. These by-laws were created on the part of the City Council to increase their control over itinerant traders.

Yet, despite the harassment and attempts at increasing control, hawkers continued to sell in the streets of Johannesburg. Dodging inspectors and police became a style of doing business. Says one hawker: "At that time we learnt to survive and the ways of learning to survive involved having to size the enemy up."

But learning to survive did not simply involve running

away from the police from time to time. Hawkers generally operated on low profit margins - fruit and vegetables sellers for example, had to sell their goods cheaper than shop-owners did. The reason for this was that they stood in the sun all day - the fruit got rotten and hot so it was incumbent on the seller to sell his wares as quickly as possible, not withstanding the price. The average income of a hawker during the 1950's was between R200-R250 a month. Survival in this context, meant being able to eke out a decent living.

A fruit seller in the centre of the City

Let me tell you when I was a small time flower seller. You know, when I started selling flowers. I use to come from school at two O'clock. My father use to buy flowers and I had to walk from Doornfontein right up to Malay Camp in Ferreistown. I walked up there and I use to get the flowers. And I use to go to the stock-exchange and that whole Holland Street area, Fox Street, where all the offices were. And I use to go and sell flowers there. I would stand on the corner there with my basket and when the office workers go out, I would sell to them. That time of-course, we had to carry a basket and sell them.

I was conscious ofcourse the difficulty about not having a licence and about not being able to sell at certain places and when you saw an inspector or a policeman, you must run. Because if you don't run, you find yourself in Marshall Square. I was arrested several times, you know, and taken to Marshall Square and paid bail and paid a fine.

I had all the experiences of hawker doing all that type of thing. I also had the experience of selling flowers to people in motor cars. In the afternoons in peak periods. Having to run between the motor cars and sell as a hawker. And I also had the experience, when at the end of the day, when I couldn't sell my wares out at five or six o'clock and I had to go to the bars because I had a few flowers left. 'Till seven or

eight o'clock in the night. I use to go and sell flowers in the bars just to try and clear up and sell out these flowers.

And then after doing that, I went to a hand-cart. My father gave me a hand-cart to push because I could carry more wares in a hand-cart. Then I use to push this hand-cart and we use to go and sell flowers in town. And then they (inspectors) used to come there and lock us up and take the hand-cart and confiscate the flowers. But we were very defiant. There was something in me that said what I was doing was not wrong, that I was selling just like everybody else was doing. And because of that, I got into all kinds of difficulty with them.

And there developed in me a dislike for any officer of the law when I was a young chap, hawking on my own. I saw these guys with resentment and I usedto direct my frustration against them as individuals. I didn't see them then as I see it now, I didn't see them as part of a system. But I became very strong and very determined. I never ran away, I never ran away from anything. If they said don't go there, I went back. But I use to watch them. When they come, I use not to be there. Certain times they are not there, I must go and sell and get away. We use to learn - at that time we learnt to survive. And the ways of learning to survive involved having to size the enemy up. We knew his tactics exactly. We knew what to do, when to run, how to run. Now this became a kind of life - it

became a style of doing business. We accepted it, we did it. With resentment, but we did it.

But the persecution became more and more, and the pressures became more and more because they found the fellows were coming back and back, they couldn't get rid of us. You do realise of course that the medicines they gave us were rougher and rougher everytime. The people we were dealing with became harder towards us. They use to beat us around. Policeman use to come and kick us, smack us. They treated us badly and that brought even greater resentment within us.

Then I was being charged for not moving every twenty minutes. I was being charged for not being in possession of a licence. I was being charged for trading thirty foot from an intersection. I was being charged for trading in a restricted area. I was being charged for littering the sidewalks. I was being charged for causing obstruction. I can think of many, many more of those things they called by-laws.

When you were hawking and peddling and pushing your barrel, and carrying your basket, they weren't so concerned about you. When you carry it in your hands, you're fine. But when you go to a hand-cart, you're a threat. You need a licence - you must be watched and controlled. And when you go to a van, you must be restricted.

I found the system at that point in time wanted to keep

me back. It didn't want me to get bigger, it wanted me to remain like I was, a small trader. A pedlar who use to carry his wares in his hands and sell them out - and carry his basket and sell them out, and go and sleep and get up the following morning and do what he had to do and go on like that. And the reason why they did these things, why they legislated against me like that, was because they didn't want me to progress. And thats what started the awakening in me, that I now have to look at the whole structure of the system against me. B.A.

An Indian flower seller

My dad use to buy from R.D. Wholesalers. At that time too, there were some travellers that use to come to him, and if they offered him a cheaper price, he would buy in bulk. And, well we used to pay these travellers weekly a certain amount. We carried the stock with a push-cart from where it was stored at R.D. Wholesalers. It was about thirty or fourty boxes of goods that my father use to pack there every evening. And then early in the morning before seven, we had to take the stuff out otherwise its in their way in the shop. Then I use to help my father load it on to that push-cart and push that cart from Kort Street right to Diagonal Street. The cart was on wheels - We made the

A Hawkers cart

ourselves. Then you've got to take those goods off, you know. Then you've got to pack them on to the stall. And then in the evening you got to repack into boxes and unload it in the shop. There was a lot of hardwork involved in it.

Business was not all that good. I'll tell you, my father use to take out the fifty cents pieces - whatever is in the business of fifty cents and he would put it away. He would never use that. He would use that to provide for the clothing and for the extra things we would need in the house. Because it was quite difficult on that hawking and yet we never went hungry. End of the month was alright and other times, sometimes it would be a good day and sometimes it would be a bad day. End of the month and the first Thursday of the month, my father would make up to R180-R200 and that way we use to hawk. But I mean lets look at it, if you make R200, what can your profit be out of that? With fourteen kids you know, wife and husband to support. It wasn't easy.

And we use to get robbed also and that use to be quite serious for the business. We use to hang our hankies up. A guy just comes and grabs all those hankies and his gone. Thats about ten or twelve dozen hankies. And that time it use to work out to about R2,40 a dozen. So that was quite a lot of hankies because you had to sell so many hankies in return to make up what you lost, not even talking about profit. This use to happen twice, three times a week.

At the time that I started hawking on my own, I was illegal. I had no licence, you know. I asked a few people to have my licence passed and a lot of people refused. And initially, there was a Hindu man in Ophirton, he said to me, "Okay, I'll have your licence passed provided you give me R35." For that little store-room just to pass that licence but I was not going to rent the store-room from him or anything of the sort. And then I said okay Kaka (Uncle), I will pay that monthly rent to you, you know. And thats how I got my licence. I chose to do hawking because as I said, I didn't go to school. I mean with standard four pass nobody wants to hire you, you know what I mean. And I felt if I was in a hawking business, I could open when I felt like it, I could close when I felt like it. You know, even if I worked as a sales-lady, it would be quite difficult with the kids. I would have to start at a certain time and I would have to knock-off at a certain time. I preferred the freedom of hawking.

My dad provided me with the initial capital and a man by the name of Manilal helped me. He was really the one who stood by me and helped me. He gave me stuff worth about R700 that very day. Tomatoes, potatoes, cabbage, and all those sort of things.

When I started hawking we use to leave the house at fourty-thirty or five o'clock in the morning for the market. I had a friend that used to have a shop and use to give me a lift to the market. I did my buying and then he would load me off at the stall.

I was lucky if I made R200 profit. Generally. I would make about R100 profit because we were selling cheaper than the shops. And we had to be cheaper because we were in the sun - out fruit would get rotten quicker than people in the shops. Because tomatoes get over-ripe very quickly and bananas go black. And the fruit gets hot. So we had to work on small profits. On a box of bananas, if we were working on seventy cents, it was considered good. Because if your bananas got rotten you are not even going to see that seventy cents. You are going to loose even what you paid for. That't why we use to work on small profits, our profits were very small.

I was a hawker. Tha meant that I had to move seventy-five away from the spot I was standing every twenty minutes. But that was a very impossible law and I never used to do it. Its impossible because it takes you longer than twenty minutes to pack your stuff into boxes. By the time you get to a spot, you haven't packed out a quarter of your things and your twenty minutes is expired. So when are going to sell? In other words you are going to keep on moving. And then at the same time they had this law about restricted areas, urban areas, and failing to move. That was the three laws they had against us. So if you failed to move, you would get a ticket of R30.00, but if they got you in a restricted area then its R50.00 and if they get you in an urban area, then its R500.00.

And I remember I was asked for my hawkers licence once when my brother was with me. And there was an African chap that was working with us - he was like a brother to me. Anyway, the traffic cop came up to me and asked for my licence and then he wanted to know why my brother and this African chap were there. So I said well, he was waiting for a taxi and my brother was unemployed so he came to the Labour department. So he says if he can catch them selling, I'll get a ticket of R50.00. I must get a permit for the two of them. They use to help me but I never got a permit for the two of them.

A.V.

Fruit vendors in the City

Hawkers Unite to Resist

During the 1960's, the struggles of Indian hawkers (particularly flower sellers) shifted from the streets to the courts. Police harassment in the form of fines and arrests continued a pace - but at the same time, hawkers were increasingly drawn within the realm of the courts. More than simply being fined, hawkers were now being interdicted from selling in certain places. Indeed, some flower sellers were prevented from selling at all in the centre of the city.

The fight between the City Council and the hawkers went on and on in the courts. Sometimes the hawkers were successful in setting aside the by-laws, at other times the City Council was successful in interdicting hawkers. However, from the point of view hawkers, the most striking fact was the vindictiveness on the part of the city council towards some of the hawkers. A fight developed which was centred around personalities: members of the city council disliked individual hawkers and likewise, hawkers resented the people who were legislating against them. Indian hawkers were clearly at a disadvantage because they had no direct representation at City Council level.

Hawkers did try to unite as a group to fight the City Council. For fruit and vegetable hawkers in the Diagonal Street area, the building of the stock exchange and the consequent effect that it had on hawkers, did bring them

together. However, the unity of both fruit, vegetable and flower hawkers did not result in instant gains for them. Hawkers were split amongst themselves; the need to sell in order to continue to earn a living was of primary importance. The split was further exacerbated by the City Council's decision to introduce a lot system for the issuing of stands to hawkers. The vying for the stands that ensued created untold dissension within the ranks of the hawkers. More importantly though, the only logical struggle for hawkers was the fight in the courts, a fight which was becoming increasingly expensive and with little sign of victory.

> We then decided to establish a fight against the system. And the fight we established against the system was to challenge the law. We got together - a number of us together and we established ourselves as a unit. And we started challenging these by-laws and laws. There was a technical basis on which we were able to set-aside these by-laws and enjoy freedom for two or three years. Once the by-laws were set aside we proclaimed them ultra vires. And in those two or three years - 1958-1961 - we had complete freedom of the town. We could sell anywhere. We could pack the hand-cart or carry the basket or put the flowers anywhere. During those years we progressed and we were able to buy a better van.

You know, my father and his clan - the earlier people - also fought these people. There is quite a bit of history about the fight of the older flower sellers. They also encountered the kinds of problems I was talking about. But on different levels and their attitude towards these things was different. They were people who went along and had discussions with these people. They made deals with the authorities - "Look here I'll stop, I'll stop trading illegaly here, allow me to trade there. Alright, here I have a big right, give me a lesser right. They moved me from there - alright I'll move. I'll move man. I won't oppose you. But when I come here, give me a right to sell here then." And he was given a lesser right. And when he came here, after five years, they came for him here. And then again he submitted. And he was accepting this lesser and lesser right all the time, you know. And this lesser and lesser right was destroying him. And he didn't realise it.

But we came into conflict with the City Council of Johannesburg because we set aside their by-laws. We caused them numerous difficulties in the up-keeping of their control over the flower sellers in the City of Johannesburg. The City Council had to legally find a means of stopping what they called this 'evil'. Now I'm using the term 'evil' - I'm quoting papers that were drawn up by the

legal department of the City Council.

The City Council then realised that the fighting force behind the flower sellers was a group of people and they had to find those people and bring an end to them. They couldn't amend the by-laws because that would have taken them three years and it would have given the traders a greater opportunity to sell. So they went to the courts and asked the court to interdict the group of flower sellers. And they built a case against these flower sellers based on what they said was unfair competition to the legal trader. And the legal trader they say was the shop-keeper and the stand-seller. There was at that time the flower seller who had a fixed stand. You must realise that when we came into the business, we did not have the opportunity of getting fixed stands. And they were not giving more fixed stands than what were there. If we wanted to enter the business, we had to enter the business as hawkers and pedlars. That means we use to go all over the show and thumb it.

You must understand that at that time, this kind of civil action was the beginning of something different for the flower seller. Previously, we had been acquainted with police arrests, summonses, tickets and fines. Now we were confronted with a kind of civil action which brought us into the arena of

Supreme Courts.

The procedure they adopted was a short cut to tell the judge that they were in power and they were asking the courts to go beyond these laws and take into consideration that as a ruling power, the court should give them this immediate special right to go beyond the legislation. The controlling legislation which was out of order. Which was proclaimed ultra vires. They asked the court to go beyond that. They went to court and they were successful in doing this. At that point of time I wasn't aware of the method which they used. I think of all of the wrongs they have done now and I see at their very roots they are wrong. And nothing they can do now can be different from what they did then because their very intentions were not good. They were not fair, they were not just. And they managed to interdict us. We then were interdicted - it myself, my father and three or four others. We were interdicted so that we couldn't sell flowers in the central city area of Johannesburg.

The fight with the flower sellers went on and on. What is important for me and what I began to realise that part of the licencing operation is the fact that there was a whole conspiracy by these chaps in the City Council against the fellows who had vigorously fought - these illegal street traders - who had given

them all the difficulties. And there grew a group of people within these bureaucracies, who had a natural dislike for these people. You remember we use to call these fellows and tell them everything under the sun. We use to tell them what we thought of them. And it brought about bitterness in these people - there was a vindictive attitude by these authorities towards this group of people who had been harassed. And when this opportunity arose, what they did was without applying the law as the law should have been applied they took the law into their own hands.

Eventually we got to the stage of asking for a Commission of Enquiry into flower-selling. We got the PFP and we ask them, look here, arrange that we have a Commission of Enquiry. The Management Committee then agrees and a Commissioner is appointed. The Commissioner being a chap by the name of Wessels. We then submit memoranda and we give evidence before the Commission. And when we do this we ask this Commissioner - we ask him that before he makes his final recommendation to the City Council, he must tell us what his findings were. And on that basis we gave evidence and memoranda openly. There is something you must understand - that we as Indians now have no trust in the law. We don't trust these guys, we don't trust them at all. So when we give evidence before this Commission, we are frightened. Are they going to use these honest problems of ours

to supress us further.

So anyhow the Wessels Commission comes out with a report but at a certain stage of this commission we walk out. The Indian flower sellers walks out but we try to get a report of the Commission. We ask them to give us a copy of it because it wasn't finished. A copy of the Wessels report because on the basis of that report, they will re-amend the by-laws. So we say, before you re-amend the law, give us a copy. We have no direct representation on the City Council or on the law-making machinery of the City Council. We have none. We ask you before you are going to make representation and amend the law, show us what you are going to do. Tell us, discuss it with us. But they wouldn't. Eventually we see a synopsis of the report that was prepared by the bureaucrats.

Everytime they amended the laws, we fought them. We fought them in the courts. But if you look at the legal problems of flower sellers, you'll find that certain guys have been instrumental in bringing about the kind of legislation and they have been directly involved with the flower sellers. And if you realise the difficult time that the flower sellers have given these guys in relation to their legislation, you will understand their attitude. You will find vindictiveness.

In the City Council, it is the bureaucrat who makes the recommendation as a result of his contact with people who are subjected to the law. We find in terms of the law, the City Council of Johannesburg - the management committee, the full City Council of Johannesburg is merely a puppet body. The guys who are running the Citv Council are the bureaucrats. And these guys only come to meetings to sign. Rubber stamps - its just rubber stamps. These are a group of men who are bureaucrats living within four walls without knowing what the real problems of people are. And we ask - is this the kind of justice that we should get? We will never, get an answer. That's where we stand.

B.A.

When the stock-exchange came up in that area, thats when they started giving us a lot of hell. Then the traffic cops took over from the police and then they came there and they started raiding us, you know. The traffic cop told me when I asked him. He said, no my dear, its not us. Its the man in a suit and tie and posh car. And when I asked him whose that, he said it was the people from the stock-exchange who are complaining. They say everytime they look out of their windows, they see a sorry sight hawkers standing downstairs. And I asked him - why don't you people build us stalls, you know. We are prepared to pay a certain amount of rent. Then you know that you have given us a stall to your satisfaction which is not going to hurt anybody's eyes. It is something beautiful. They promised us that they are going to give us Pimm Street to hawk in, but four years have past now nothing has been done. We all got together - we got ourselves a legal advisor but up until now, nothing has happened.

Then they started fining us. I got two tickets and after that I closed down. If I was going to get tickets a week of R50,00 - thats a hundred rand for the month. I mean I'm going to work for the council, I'm not going to work for myself. What am I going to feed my kids on? You know, that R100, I'd earn that for a week to run my kitchen. To actually run my house expenses. So in other words, I'm going to earn for them. I won't even be able

to pay the guys I'm buying from. I thought it was useless.

No.11 Diagonal Street after demolition under the Group Areas Act

The majority of us closed down because of this. We use to be a lot of hawkers - there was something like 150 hawkers from Westgate up to Diagonal Street. And I think there is about three left. Everybody closed down because they just couldn't afford it. You know in Westgate sometimes they use to come and give these people two, three tickets a day of R30,00. I mean you are not even going to earn a profit of R30,00 for the day.

I think in South Africa they are just dead against the blacks. You know, whenever an Indian makes a living, they are dead against it. Whether you got money, or you got no money, you'll find that if you try to open up a business in Diagonal Street, they are going to tell you its a white area. You have to get a nominee. So even with your money, you are practically useless.

They just wanted to stop us from trading. I spoke to John Pearce, the Chief traffic officer, and I said to him, look here: 'Meneer jy sit in jou kantoor wat so lekker warm is, ne. Is jy buitekant is sal jy voel hoe bitter koud dit is. Jy sal verwonder hoekom bekly die mense om in die verkoue gaan staan in die straat in die straat en verkoop" But we are not educated people - we can't contact jobs. That is why we are doing this to support our families - It is our livelihood.

Anyway, I tried to organise all the hawkers in the area.

I spoke to everybody. They all agreed and then at the last minute, they all backed out. Initially, it was all the men who backed out. They just didn't come. We were only three women that went there and the women I went with were practically useless. The other two were too shy to speak. They were too scared. But I'll tell you something, with our men, they are too scared. You know, those are types of people that never got involved in troubles or struggles. They just wouldn't get involved.

When we were hawking, we use to stand fifteen feet away from one another. And that was not a far distance but we reached an understanding between ourselves. There was an African woman that was selling fruit and we had a good relationship between the two of us. If I was selling four bananas for twenty cents and that African woman was selling for twenty five cents, then I was going to put my bananas up by five cents. And if she found that she would come to me and say why are selling yours so expensive today. Then we would come to some kind of understanding.

I enjoyed hawking. It was quite nice. You would meet a lot different kinds of people. But it was a very tough thing to do. A lot of people won't go out - say with todays generation - they won't really go out unless they are really hard up to do it. Because you know, you must stomach that sun the whole day. If its raining, you get soaking wet. Then when its cold, you got to stand that

cold. Its not really easy - it finishes you because it put a lot os strain on you. And I think all those types of weather that gets into you, gives you all that type of funny sickness that you start developing afterwards. When you are fit young you can take it. But once you're old, you can't take it. And if you're running a hawkers business you can't say you're going to hire somebody to carry your goods because how are going to afford to pay him. You know, you have got to do it yourself.

A.V.

Conclusion

The difficulties and problems of Indian hawkers in Johannesburg are by no means over. Many have given up the battle with the City Council and the traffic department because in the end, the fines imposed were too much too sustain. Hawkers were forced to seek alternative means of earning a living. For the Diagonal Street area, this has been particularly sad because hawkers were an intergral part of the atmosphere and colour there.

Likewise, the flower sellers of Johannesburg have been forced out of the city centre and now tend to operate from the suburbs surrounding Johannesburg. Those who have been moved out are bitter because not only has it meant increasing hardship for them, but they cannot understand why they are being prevented from earning an honest living. Their struggle in against Johannesburg City Council in the courts has brought much expense and little gain. What emerges most clearly from this is that Indian hawkers in Johannesburg are fast becoming a dying breed.