

## From Pariahs to South Africans: Commemorating 150 years

2010 marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the first indentured labourers from the Indian sub-continent arrived in South Africa.

The story of indenture is both shocking and gripping. The story after indenture is no less fascinating. While colonialism and apartheid bit hard, the story of Indian settlement is one of grit and determination. It has its heroes and anti-heroes, its collaborators and resistance fighters, its lovers and rogues...

Eastern Mosaic seeks to bring to all South Africans a number of vignettes that will provide a window into the story of Indians in South Africa. Already we have recorded some of the most significant themes in this history.

Our team has travelled to the Badsha Peer tomb in central Durban. Peer arrived in 1860 as an indentured labourer on the Truro. He is revered as a saint and till today people pay homage to the man who inspired Sufism in South Africa. We have also traced the history of the Shree Emperumal Temple in Mount Edgecombe. The temple has collected the most stunning photographs from its humble early beginnings to its evolution as a vital social centre for indentured labourers and their descendants. *(We aim to cover many more sites of religious worship. Write and tell us about a special religious place in your town.)*

We are also tracking the importance of education in the history of Indian South Africans. We have taken the ferry across the Durban harbor and visited the university set up for Indians on Salisbury Island in the early 1960s. In the process, we tracked down the ferry pilot Harry Rampersadh who at the age of 77 took the wheel one more time. Accompanying us were former students who allowed us some amazing insights to the university and we were privy to photographs of administration staff as well as group photographs of students who stayed in the hostel. In one of them is a very young Zak Yacoob, who sits as a constitutional court judge. *(Do you have photographs to share with us?)*

We want to cover our storytellers and playwrights. The team has talked to Ronnie Govender as we joined him on the streets of Durban's Casbah. Once again we were able to hear the voices of classic plays like Lahnee's Pleasure and Swami. *(Are there storytellers and playwrights we are missing? Make your case.)*

There are still sportsmen like golfer Papwa Sewgolum and soccerite Dharam Mohan's exploits to relate as well as the latest stars like Hashim Amla.





There are lives of politicians to be covered too. 2009 was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Yusuf Dadoo. 2010 is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his comrade Monty Naicker. We will cover their story together with their old Edinburgh pal Dr. Goonam. These three medical doctors were central in building a non-racial alliance that was to inspire the drawing up of the Freedom Charter.

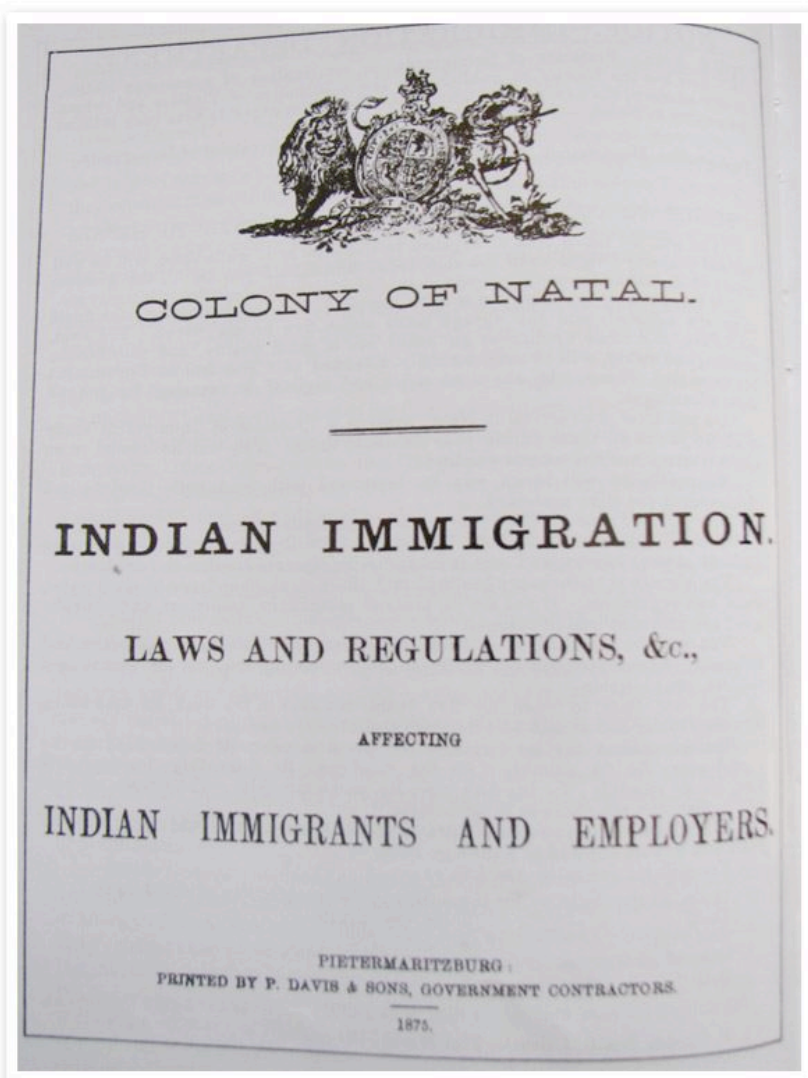
There are family histories to cover. We have covered the Naidoo's of Johannesburg and the Nagdees. (*Who are we missing?*) We have also wandered into the homes of people like Zuleikha Mayat. She is famous for editing *Indian Delights*, and, more recently, for a book of correspondence with Ahmed Kathrada. For ten years this remarkable woman wrote to Kathrada on Robben Island and then Pollsmoor. Hark the words of her last letter: "I hope you are released even before this letter reaches you. However, I make haste in adding that having been wrenched away from the outside world for 27 years, the entry into it will be traumatic. Adjustment problems will be tremendous. Party and people will want you to do what they

decide for you. Through the 10 years of our correspondence and from that brief meeting, I have personally no doubt that the quality of resilience, also that of self-reliance and confidence that you exude, is for me sufficient guarantee that you will be your own man, that you will take obstacles in your stride."

We must also allay fears that this series is about those who are already footnoted in history. It is also about those ordinary people who refused to be defeated by a vicious and brutal system of racial discrimination and exploitation. Those people who were bulldozed out of Clairwood and Cato Manor and rebuilt their lives and their community in places like Chatsworth. (*Help us with these stories of ordinary people doing extra-ordinary things. Those who founded the very first soccer and cricket clubs in Phoenix and Chatsworth for example, and who built the very first temple, church and mosque.*)

'History' wrote James Baldwin 'does not merely refer to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and it's literally *present* in all that we do.'





In travelling backwards and forwards through 150 years we hope you get a sense of our history. To get a feeling that you are looking through an old family scrapbook and being told the tales of decisive forbears whose good and bad choices have created the world in which we now live. There is a challenge in this history too, for every one of us, as we make our own generation's choices.

Above all we seek to present this history with the message that 'the past no longer belongs to those who once lived in it; the past belongs to those who claim it, and are willing to explore it, and infuse it with meaning for those alive today. The past belongs to us, because we are the ones who need it.'

Now, in this 150<sup>th</sup> year of the arrival of the very first indentured labourers is that time. So we invite you to join us in making this series the most comprehensive and stimulating to hit the screen. To help us bring history alive so that it can become an educative tool as we chart another 150 years in this land of our birth and our futures.

