

CELEBRATING

# 150

YEARS

OF INDIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

## THE EASTERN MOSAIC SPECIAL 150 YEAR COMMEMORATIVE PROJECTS DRAW TO A CLOSE

**Eastern Mosaic commemorates 150 Years since the first indentured Indian labourers arrived in South Africa**

How does one do justice in recollecting, and honouring, the journey through one and a half centuries of an Indian community who has been viewed, for the greatest part of that period, as a minority and as insignificant to the country they've adopted as home – a country far removed from their motherland, and alien to their culture, religion and ways of life? How does one not only commemorate but also empower the memory of such a people, and address their unique contribution to such a country, in the most solicitous and worthy of terms?

Paying true homage to people of Indian origin's contribution towards South Africa can never be fulfilled in a just and complete manner – there are too many stories, individual legacies, and significant moments in this history that have either been repressed by past regimes, or that have gotten blurred in the desert landscape of emotional memory.



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And herein lies the challenge for any media that claim to have an earnest interest in such a people – and that claim to hold the greater attention of such a people. A wholehearted attempt needs to be made – and the story of Indians in South Africa, from inception to this day, needs to be told – albeit abbreviated, incomplete, and for a television show with a lifestyle, magazine format.

Over the last year and a half, *Eastern Mosaic* took on this challenge in a hands-on manner, and made it the show's goal to use the platform of television to address the story of indenture, the legacy of Indian settlement as accumulated throughout 150 years, and the unique contribution, past and present, of people of Indian origin to the country they've fought so hard to call home. For *Eastern Mosaic* it's been a journey of re-awakening the past, and in the process elucidating the hold that this past has on the current meaning of Indianness in the South African context. And lest the show's ambitions allowed itself to run away with the fascinating and distinctive subject matter it encountered, *Eastern Mosaic* fully understood that it's impossible to create a pan-Indian identity, or to precisely define Indianness. All it could do in the end was to celebrate a cultural diversity as vast and multilayered as that found in the motherland, and to offer the kind of colourful justice that only a tv show with an energetic heart can achieve.

This pilgrimage into the past sought to bring to all South Africans a number of vignettes providing a window into the story of Indians in South Africa, thereby recording but a few of the most significant themes in this history.

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Some of the stories we did focussed on the history and relevance of indenture, on Salisbury Island, arranged marriages, streets named after struggle heroes and Durban's real fisherfolk. We had lunch with the Bodasings, and with Zuleikha Mayat, and we also visited Mosie Moola, The Naidoo's (Ramni, Shanti, Prema and Murthie), Ronnie Govender, and Dr TP Naidoo, to name but a few. However, for Eastern Mosaic the story of Indians in South Africa formed but one part of the show's 150 Year commemorations, as it was also decided to initiate a 26-week project – the goal of this project was to target underprivileged communities, schools that are situated in poor areas, the elderly and infirm, and those who generally are in need and surviving on the fringes of society.

The show's message was clear: all South Africans, no matter what their race or culture, are as much a part of this significant year. Eastern Mosaic didn't embark on this initiative without assistance, and the largest disaster relief organization of African origin, Gift of the Givers, was approached to become its partner. Subsequently, there was a commitment to give no less than 150 items to the needy and in each of the 26 weeks. Thus far we've handed out tracksuits, shoes and socks, raincoats, blankets, fruit packs, food hampers that feed a family for a month, health and hygiene packs, cosmetic packs, educational toys, children's books, stationery packs – and that's just to name some of the items. When the final handout takes place in the 26th week the sum total of aid given will border on R1 000 000.

