

CELEBRATING

150

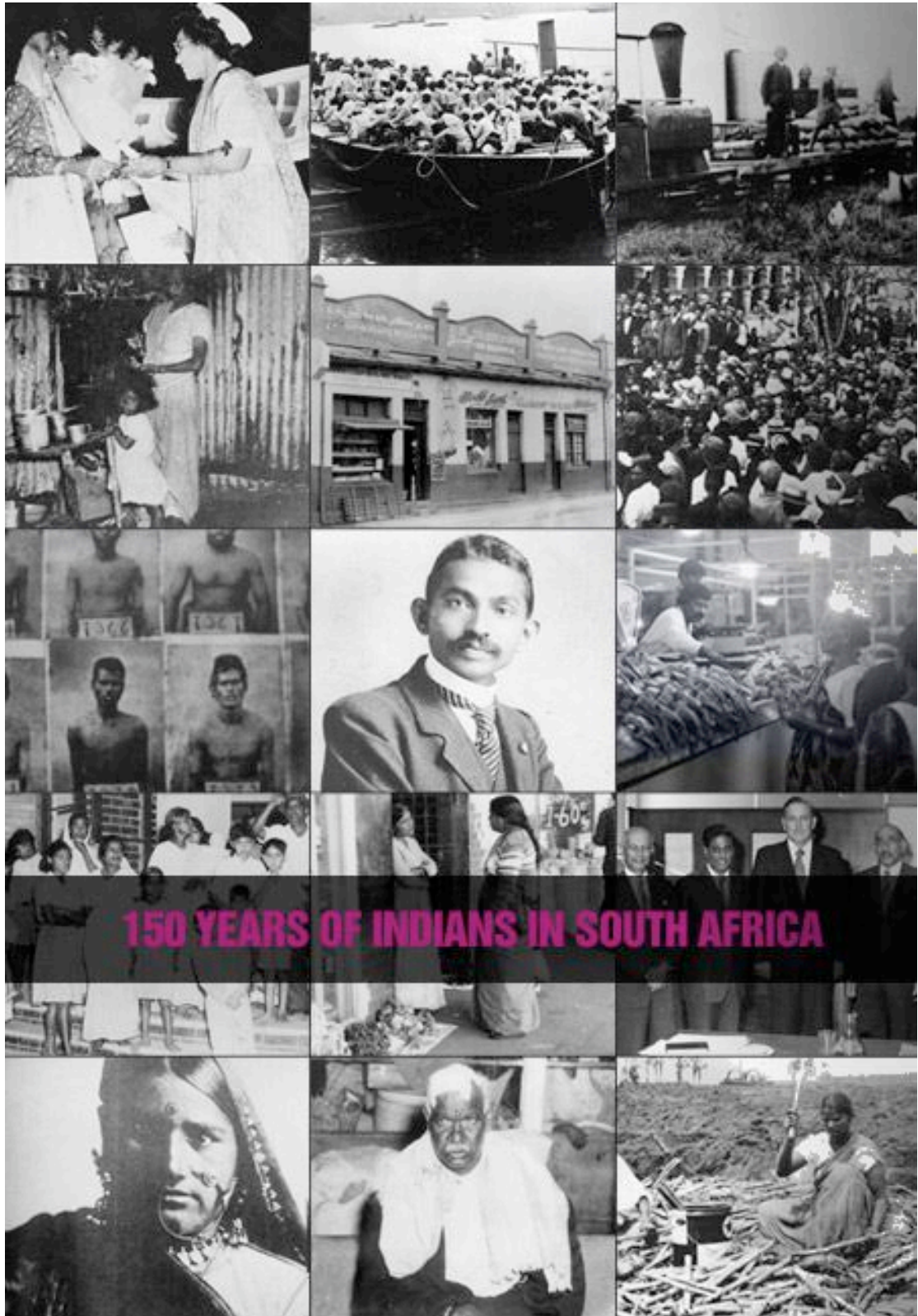
YEARS

OF INDIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

THE EASTERN MOSAIC SPECIAL 150 YEAR COMMEMORATIVE PROJECT

16 November 2010 marks the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Indian indentured labourers in South Africa. For Eastern Mosaic, this is a momentous year and we've been active in these commemorations, producing, since 2009, a number of features that provide a window into the story of Indians in South Africa – thereby recording some of the most significant themes in this history. Furthermore, Eastern Mosaic has also initiated a project that runs for 26 weeks – the goal of this project is 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. But first, some background history...

The earliest Indians arrived during the Dutch colonial era, as slaves, in 1684. However, it's commonly accepted that the birth of the South African Indian community was in 1860 when, courtesy of an agreement between Natal English colonial authorities and the British in India, Indian workers were imported as indentured labourers to serve the economic needs of the colony. Between 1860 and 1911, over 152 000 Indian labourers arrived in Natal. Their descendents developed a common identity as "Indian" South Africans.



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The story of indenture is both shocking and gripping, and the story after indenture is no less fascinating. While colonialism and apartheid bit hard, the legacy of Indian settlement is one of courage and stout-heartedness; it is also one in which a communal strength of character developed against all odds and in the face of the greatest adversity imaginable. It was only after Gandhi arrived in Natal that the process of abolishing the indentured labour practise was initialised; and final abolition eventually became a reality 57 years after that first arrival of Indians. 150 Years down the line, and the subsequent role that people of Indian origin have played and still continue to play in South Africa is unequivocal. Today Indians make contributions to every facet of life in South Africa and their heritage is woven into the very fabric of our cultural, political and social landscape.

In its decision to launch the 26-week project whereby Eastern Mosaic commemorates 150 years since the arrival of the first indentured, inspiration was found in the idea of extending a helping hand to disadvantaged communities and to show that they are important and appreciated, and as much a part of this significant year as the rest of South Africa. But Eastern Mosaic didn't embark on this initiative without assistance, and the largest disaster relief organisation of African origin, Gift of the Givers, was approached to become its partner. Subsequently, Eastern Mosaic has committed itself to giving no less than 150 items to the needy in each of the 26 weeks. In this regard, the show has visited some of South Africa's poorest areas. Thus far, a helping hand has been extended to schools in Phoenix, Chatsworth, Tongaat, Damat, Igugulethu, to the ladies of Cato Manor, to a crèche in Welbedacht East, an orphanage in Malagasi, and a special needs school in Phoenix.


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We also paid a visit to the deep rural KZN area of Hammersdale, empowering 150 women from a women's organization that does sewing & beadwork. For Father's Day, we spoilt fathers who come from poor areas such as Rietriver, Mt Moriah and Motala Farm, and for Mother's Day, we pampered and brought some joy to the lives of 150 mothers who come from these same areas. Until now 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, 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 be in excess of R1 500 000.

For Eastern Mosaic, this initiative was an incredible eye-opener, and once again made us aware of the challenges that the greater South Africa faces. Going forward, and in completion of Eastern Mosaic's 150 Year campaign, we shall continue seeking out communities in desperate need of aid, and we shall do our best to have them know that they are in our thoughts and vital to this year's commemorations.

For those wishing to trace their roots, they should contact:
SA Indian Archives, Pietermaritzburg
Anil Maharaj
Office: 033 387 – 7431

