

NATAL'S INDIANS, THE EMPIRE AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR, 1899-1902

Goolam Vayed

(Department of History, University of Durban-Westville)

Summary

Most early scholars of the South African War focussed almost entirely on the struggle between Afrikaner nationalism and British imperialism in which the role of Blacks was seen as irrelevant. By focussing on Indians, a little-studied group, this micro-study will contribute to the ongoing process of providing a more complete picture of the war years. It seeks to address why Indians, who were subject to oppression by English-speaking whites, volunteered on the side of Britain, the active and non-combatant roles they played in the war, the losses they suffered and the impact of the Indian role to the overall situation. Indians were clearly divided along class lines and these divisions were perpetuated during the war in terms of the manner in which Indians were recruited, their role in the war and their treatment at the conclusion of the war. Indians supported the British because India was part of the British empire and they felt that this would give them added leverage in their dealings with the British imperial authorities. The undisguised hostility of the Boer Republics towards them also influenced their decision. Under Gandhi's prodding, Indians contributed financially and also formed an ambulance bearer corps, which served between December 1899 and March 1900 under extremely difficult conditions. A grossly understudied area is the plight of Indian refugees from areas of Indian concentration such as Johannesburg, Pretoria, Newcastle, Ladysmith, Dundee, Colenso and Kimberley. Most refugees sought refuge with friends and family in Natal even though the Natal Government tried to prevent them coming. The invading Boers had no clear policy on what to do with Indians in Northern Natal. In most cases they arrested Indians for several weeks but then released them. Boers also used Indians as cooks and cleaners. Indian traders suffered heavy losses as their shops were looted by the invading Boers as well as by British soldiers and ordinary Indian, white and African civilians. The DTC failed to assist the 4 000 Indian refugees in Durban. Durban's Indians had to feed, clothe and support Indian refugees. While Gandhi and the NIC chose to be loyal instead of exploiting the space created by the war to challenge the Government, their loyalty went unrewarded. The Governments of Natal and Transvaal imposed further anti-Indian legislation and the position of Indians deteriorated in the post-war years as the foundation was laid for a modern South Africa based on white racial supremacy. Indians became part of a South Africa whose destiny was shaped by the war. The shapers of this new South Africa were Boer leaders like Botha and Smuts who remembered all too well that Indians had sided with the British.

Introduction

Until recently there was a virtual exclusion of Black peoples from histories of the South African War which began on 11 October 1899 when the South African Republic and the Orange Free State declared war on Great Britain. The traditional historiography has focussed primarily on the actions and sufferings of the white protagonists, both Boer and British.¹ This is not surprising given that the focus by early scholars was almost entirely on the struggle between Afrikaner nationalism and British imperialism in which the role of Blacks was seen as irrelevant. The war, however, impacted heavily on all South Africans. By focussing on Indians, a little-studied group, this micro-study will contribute to the process of providing a more complete picture of the war years. As far as Indians are concerned a number of questions are raised. Why did Indians, who were subject to oppression by English-speaking whites, volunteer on the side of Britain? In what active and non-combatant roles did Indians participate in the war? How were they affected in the theatres of war? What losses did they suffer? Where did Indian refugees flee to and who provided for them? What was the impact of the Indian role to the overall situation?

Arrival and settlement of Indians

Indians arrived in South Africa in two streams. Between 1860 and 1911, 152 641 workers arrived in Natal as indentured immigrants. From the mid-1870s entrepreneurs from Gujarat on the west coast of India began arriving in Natal.² A third social group comprised an educated elite that gradually emerged as a result of the early opportunities provided by mission schools. This small elite included lawyers, teachers, civil servants and accountants.³ This class division, very lucidly explored in Swan's seminal work, was perpetuated during the war in the manner in which Natal's Indians were recruited, their role in the war and their treatment at the conclusion of the war. There were approximately 65000 Indians in Natal at the outbreak of war. In search of economic opportunities, Indians had expanded beyond Natal's borders to other parts of South Africa and by the late

¹ A few studies make cursory reference to Indians. These include P. Warwick, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902* (1983) and I. Gleason, *The unknown force. Black, Indian and Coloured Soldiers through two World Wars* (Rivonia, 1994). Two studies focus directly on Indians. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, III, 1898-1903, (The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India) includes Gandhi's reports to newspapers on the activities of the Bearer Corps as well as letters to Government officials. P. Tichmann, "We are sons of the Empire after all": The Indian Ambulance Corps during the South African War, 1899-1902", in *Soldiers of the Queen*, 87 (1998), pp. 10-15 is a short report on the ambulance corps; The Killie Campbell collections also contain valuable information but requires careful search. See for example Lieutenant H. Hurst, "The funny side of some old Natal wars", Broadcast at SABC, 11 May 1940, KCM Dawes Collection, File B, No. 16.

² S. Bhana and J. Brain, *Setting down roots. Indian migrants in South Africa, 1860-1911* (Johannesburg, 1990), p. 23.

³ M. Swan, *Gandhi. The South African experience* (Johannesburg, 1985), p. 185.

1890s there were at least 15 000 Indians in the Transvaal,⁴ 700 to 1 000 Indians at the Kimberley diamond fields by 1880,⁵ Port Elizabeth and East London each had a few hundred Indians at the outbreak of war,⁶ while there were around 2 000 Indians in Cape Town.⁷

By 1899 Indians faced discrimination at the hands of the English settlers and the Boers. Directly and indirectly they were made to feel like an unwanted people. The English settler legislature in Natal passed a spate of anti-Indian laws in the 1890s; in the Cape there was a growing sentiment for exclusion. After Natal achieved self-government in 1893, the government passed legislation to force Indians to re-indenture or return to India upon completing their indenture and to legally subordinate non-indentured Indians so that whites would feel secure against the "Asiatic Menace."⁸ During this period Indian politics was dominated by merchants who tried to obtain equality with whites on the basis of Queen Victoria's 1858 Proclamation which asserted the equality of all British subjects. In 1894 merchants formed the NIC to protect their trade, franchise and residence rights. Each of the NIC's six presidents between 1894 and 1913 was a prominent merchant.⁹ The attitude of the governments of the Boer republics was one of undisguised hostility towards Indians; indeed the Orange Free State barred them totally. In the pre-war years British imperial authorities seemed like friends when they defended the rights of Indians. Thanks to British intervention, Law 3 of 1885 allowed only residential segregation instead of total segregation for the Indians in the Transvaal.¹⁰ When, therefore, war broke out, Indians supported the British. Besides, since India was also part of the British empire, Indians felt that this would give them some leverage in their dealings with the British imperial authorities. More than anybody else Gandhi articulated this position.

⁴ Bhana and Brain, *Roots*, p. 78.

⁵ Bhana and Brain, *Roots*, p. 99.

⁶ Bhana, *Roots*, pp. 112 and 116.

⁷ Bhana, *Roots*, p. 123.

⁸ Swanson, "Asiatic Menace", p. 421.

⁹ Swan, *Gandhi*, p. 51. For a comprehensive discussion of the NIC see S. Bhana, *Gandhi's legacy. The Natal Indian Congress, 1894-1994* (Pietermaritzburg, 1997).

¹⁰ For details see Bhana and Brain, *Roots*; B. Pillay, *British Indians in the Transvaal: Trade, race relations and Imperial policy in the Republican and Colonial Transvaal* (London 1977), and B. Pachai, *The international aspects of the South African Indian Question 1860-1971* (Cape Town, 1971).

Declaration of loyalty

The Indian elite in Natal responded dutifully to the British cause because they saw themselves as part of the British empire. Gandhi felt that because Indians were "British subjects, and as such demanded rights, they ought to forget their domestic differences, and... render some service."¹¹ On 17 October 1899 about 100 Indians attended a meeting in Durban where they "unreservedly and unconditionally" offered their services to the Imperial authorities "without pay." Gandhi informed the Colonial Secretary that Indians displayed "extreme eagerness to serve our Sovereign" and that they would be suited for field hospitals. For Gandhi the offer proved that Indians were "ready to do duty for their Sovereign on the battlefield. The offer is meant to be an earnest of the Indian loyalty."¹² It is paradoxical that Gandhi's offer was made at the very time that the Durban Relief Committee was canvassing local hotelkeepers "to employ white men in preference to coolies."¹³

This offer was made by the educated and trader elite and had nothing to do with the vast majority of indentured and free Indians. The thirty-three Indian volunteers represented twenty-five percent of the adult Indian males in Durban with a "tolerably good English education." On 18 and 19 October Dr Prince examined twenty-five of the volunteers and passed twenty-three.¹⁴ M.H. Nazar and J. Horne did not pass the initial examination. Nazar subsequently passed his examination and served as a volunteer.¹⁵ The other volunteers were mostly young Indians who became important political, sporting and

¹¹ *Times of India*, 9 December 1899, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 120.

¹² Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg (hereafter NA), Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO), vol. 1632, 8047/1899, Gandhi to Colonial Secretary, 19 October 1899.

¹³ *Natal Mercury*, 31 October 1899.

¹⁴ The following twenty-five volunteers, with profession and age, were inspected: M.K. Gandhi, Advocate, 29; H.L. Paul, Interpreter, 37; A.H. Peters, Interpreter, 30; R.K. Khan, Advocate, 26; Parsee Dhanyisha, Merchant, 27; C. Cooper, Bookkeeper, 22; J. Godfrey, Attorney's Clerk, 18; J.D. Horne, Clerk, 18; M.H. Nazar, Gentleman, Fellow of the Imperial Institute, and Member of the East Indian Association, no age; R. Bughwan, Photographer, 24; P. Peter, Printer, 19; N. Dhunde, Bookkeeper, 18; V. Lawrence, Attorney's Clerk, 26; L. Gabriel, Photographer, 27; G.D. Harry, Attorney's Clerk, 21; R. Govindu, no profession listed, 21; S. Shadrack, Clerk, 37; Ramtahan, Composer, 20; P.K. Naidoo, Merchant, 23; A. Singh, Clerk, 21; S.N. Richards, Clerk, 24; M.J. Lutchmanpanday, Attorney's Clerk, 26; J. Royeppen, Attorney's Clerk, 24; J. Christopher, Attorney's Clerk, 30; C. Stearns, 40.

¹⁵ CSO 1632, 8047/1899, Gandhi to Colonial Secretary, 19 October 1899. Nazar was heavily influential in Indian politics in Natal. He was an agent acting on behalf of business firms, secretary of the NIC and first editor of *Indian Opinion*. He died prematurely in 1906. See S. Bhana and J. Hunt, *Gandhi's editor. The letters of M.H. Nazar, 1902-1903* (New Delhi, 1989).

community leaders over the next three to four decades.¹⁶ Gandhi himself noted that the "plucky youths are clerks, and well brought up, and by no means inured to a hard life."¹⁷ Two whites joined the Corps, Canon Booth and Herbert Kitchin.¹⁸ While Muslim merchants did not serve on the battlefield they provided financially for the maintenance of the dependents of volunteers.¹⁹ Bernard Gabriel typified the new educated class. He worked as a clerk for Mr Brokensha in Dundee who paid him £8 per month. While there, he was 'coached' for the civil service examination by W.D. Turnbull, a solicitor. After passing his examination he began studying for his law degree at Cambridge University. Towards the end of October he was captured by the Boers in Dundee and sent to prison in Pretoria by train on 3 November 1899. He was released after a few weeks and served with the corps. Thereafter he moved to Durban where he remained until his return to Dundee on 30 July 1900. In 1902 he went to Cambridge and completed his law degree in 1905. Turnbull described Gabriel as "a well educated Indian who dressed as well as any European... he rather fancied himself in dress and I should think that his suits would not cost less than £5.5 each; he was in fact a swell. He used to wear rings, none of which were worth less than £2." In 1899 Gabriel owned five tailor-made suits, a silk coat and vest, twenty pyjamas, and a set of three-gold buttons with gold chains attached. Gabriel also owned a camera, had a collection of rare stamps, owned a pair of swinging clubs, and numerous articles of jewellery.²⁰

The Government thanked Gandhi for the offer but advised that their services were not required; however, "should the occasion arise, the Government will be glad to avail itself of these services."²¹ Gandhi informed the Colonial Secretary that "all of us regret that our

¹⁶ Bernard Gabriel, son of indentured immigrants, studied at Cambridge University and was the first colonial-born barrister; Joseph Royeppen completed a law degree at Cambridge University; R.K. Khan was the secretary of the NIC and a major benefactor of the Indian community. Lawrence, Christopher and the others were instrumental in forming organisations like the Natal Indian Patriotic Union (1908), the Colonial Born Indian Association (1911) and South African Indian Committee (1911) in opposition to the merchant dominated NIC.

¹⁷ *Times of India*, 9 December 1899, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 120.

¹⁸ NA, Public Works Department (PWD) 2/79, 2458/1900, Chief Engineer's List of Indian Ambulance Corps Leaders, June 1900. It is unclear how Kitchin became part of the Corps. The Chief Engineer merely noted that he was a "European electrician but identified himself with the Indians." In subsequent years Kitchin joined Gandhi in the Phoenix community and was editor of *Indian Opinion* for a brief period in 1906. Booth, a medical practitioner trained in Durham, arrived in Natal in 1876. He took charge of the Indian mission in Natal, built the St. Aidan's Church in Cross Street in 1883 and a clinic and dispensary in 1898.

¹⁹ *Times of India*, 9 December 1899, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 120.

²⁰ NA, PAR, CSO 2916, 9 December 1901, Evidence of B. Gabriel and Affidavit of W.D. Turnbull before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

²¹ CSO 1632, 8047/1899, Principal Under-Secretary to Gandhi, 23 October 1899.

services cannot be accepted. We however earnestly hope that the authorities will see their way to command them.²² There was a reluctance to use Blacks in any capacity. This even extended to the use of Indian troops from India. Two reasons were advanced within India as to why Indians should not participate: a "civilised Power should not employ Black and savage allies against white and civilised foes" and England would lose her prestige amongst the natives of India if the impression was created that she was incapable of fighting her own battles.²³ For the *Natal Mercury*, while the Sikhs and Gurkhas would be excellent "there is a natural disinclination to use Coloured soldiers to fight the Boers. The conditions of the present war practically preclude all idea of using Gurkhas...."²⁴ Britain went to war to ensure that "all white men in South Africa be treated as equals." This was necessary because "we live in a country thickly populated by races still to a large extent steeped in barbarism." Unless there was a strong white race, there would be "pandemonium" and "chaos." The war had to remain a "white man's war" so that the victorious British could impose order.²⁵

Indians also raised funds for the Durban Women's Patriotic League. W. Palmer, Treasurer of the League, complained to Gandhi on 13 November that while "Coolies" had contributed in street collections, the "Arabs" had not rendered any help.²⁶ Gandhi informed Palmer that "the existence of a few selfish persons need not cause us to think uncharitably of the whole class to which they belong" and personally collected £62 from merchants which he sent to the League. He explained that merchants were unable to contribute larger sums because they had to feed and house Indian refugees from the Transvaal and northern Natal. The irony is that the League was collecting monies for wounded soldiers and volunteers who were virulently anti-Indian.²⁷ For the *Natal Mercury* this gift of money was "a token of Indians' devotion to the Queen-Empress and to the country in which they have come to reside. It is not enough for them to succour the large mass of Indian refugees, as they are doing in an open-handed manner but they must bestow this added display of loyalty."²⁸

²² CSO 1632, 8047/1899, Gandhi to Colonial Secretary, 24 October 1899.

²³ *The Times*, 28 January 1900.

²⁴ *Natal Mercury*, 16 January 1900.

²⁵ *Natal Mercury*, 13 October 1899.

²⁶ Whites used "Arabs" to refer to Muslim merchants while "coolies" referred to indentured Indians.

²⁷ Gandhi to William Palmer, Secretary, Durban Women's Patriotic League, 17 November 1899, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 121.

²⁸ *Times of India*, 14 March 1900, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 141.

Formation of First Bearer Corps

While the Government was reluctant to use Blacks, there were numerous requests for Indian medical assistants. In November 1899 Major Hyslop, Principal Medical Officer (PMO), Volunteer Forces, informed the Colonial Secretary that he had been "very impressed with the expeditious way" that Indian dhoolie-bearers removed the wounded from the field and asked for twelve Indian bearers and two hospital orderlies.²⁹ Dhoolie-bearers had been brought from India and were engaged in the hospital camp. The *Natal Mercury* concurred with Hyslop; the editor wrote that their "courage and fidelity have been of the utmost value." At the Talana Hill battle

... during the heaviest fighting, when bullets were scouring the air, and men were falling dead and wounded in terrible numbers, these stoical and stolid Asiatics went about their business with heroic indifference to the leaden rain. It is due to them very largely that so many wounded were not afterwards numbered among the killed.³⁰

The Colonial Secretary warned that "not every Indian makes a suitable dhoolie bearer. This latter is generally drawn from the Kahar caste. I mention this in case the men selected do not come up to scratch."³¹

Colonel Gallwey requested for 60 Indians for conservancy work at Fort Napier Hospital in Pietermaritzburg.³² The Protector of Indian Immigrants sent twenty-eight men on 7 December and promised that a further thirty- two would follow the next day. An indication of the extent of the refugee problem in Durban can be gleaned from the fact that eleven of these twenty-eight men were refugees from northern Natal. Of this first lot, sixteen men were returned on 10 December as "undesirable." According to Gallwey fourteen of them refused to work on Sundays while two had taken their wives along, for whom there was no accommodation. The returned men informed the Protector that they had not refused to work on Sundays; rather that Madoorhya, "a Madras man" who had been appointed Sirdar of the group, had told them that as they "were Calcutta men they were of no use and had better go..." The men also complained that they had received insufficient food, "one pancake three times a day." A further seven batches of men were sent between 8 and 19

²⁹ CSO 1632, 8390/1899, Major Hyslop to Colonial Secretary, 31 October 1899. A dhoolie referred to a covered stretcher.

³⁰ *Natal Mercury*, 30 October 1899. The Battle of Dundee took place on Talana Hill on 20 October 1899. On the British side 51 men died, 203 were wounded and 207 taken Prisoners of War, 145 Boer soldiers died.

³¹ CSO 1632, 8390/1899, Colonial Secretary to Major Hyslop, 4 November 1899.

³² CSO 9294/1899, G.D. Plowman to General Officer Commanding, Lines of Communication, 5 December 1899.

December until the requirement of 60 was met.³³

Although the Government had reservations about using Indians, its hands were forced by circumstances. The Boers invaded Natal on 12 October with around 25 000 troops. They captured Newcastle, Dundee, Colenso and Elandslaagte, forcing the British to retire to Ladysmith. From 2 November 1899 Ladysmith was cut off from the outside world with 13745 and 7 812 civilians trapped in the town. The focus of General Buller, commander of the British forces in South Africa, was to relieve the besieged town. With Kimberley and Mafeking also besieged, Buller's forces were stretched and he needed as much assistance as possible. Rosa Lina Shappere, an Austrian nursing sister who served in Ladysmith, reported that "we nurses had to go from tent to tent under the enemy's fire, because there were so few orderlies to attend to the men."³⁴ Buller wrote to the Natal Government at the end of November to recruit Indian bearers.³⁵ In response to Buller's demand F. L. Barnes, Chief Engineer, Public Works Department (PWD), appointed Percy Clarence Superintendent of an Indian Ambulance Corps. Donnelly, District Engineer in Durban, was instructed to recruit men. Clarence and Donnelly gathered 543 men; 105 of the recruits were from Reynolds Brothers (Umzinto), 67 from Shires & Co., 68 men from Elandslaagte Colliery, thirty-seven from Saville Bros., forty-five free Indians employed in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, 80 from Cornubia, twenty-five from Milkwood Kraal, eighteen from Sutton, thirty-one from Sacharine Hill Estate, forty-one from Mount Edgecombe and twenty-six from Blackburn Factory.³⁶

For Barnes the cooperation of sugar owners "is to be the more appreciated seeing that this is the busy season of the year, cane crushing being in full swing."³⁷ The contribution of planters surprised even the Protector who had reported that in thirty-eight years "I have never known the demand for indentured Indian labour to have been so great... Almost every post brought letters from farmers begging for Indians."³⁸ Most of the men were employed between 10 and 20 December for which they each received £1-11- 5. Indians

³³ NA, PAR, II, Protector's Letter Books: General, 15 August 1899 - 7 May 1900, 1921/99, Correspondence between Protector of Indian Immigrants and Galloway, Sen. Medical Officer, 7-20 December 1899.

³⁴ Quoted in R. Mendelsohn, "The Jewish War – Anglo-Jewry and the South African War" (Paper presented at Conference on South African War, UNISA, 3-5 August 1998).

³⁵ *Times of India*, 14 March 1900, in *Collected works of Gandhi*, p. 137

³⁶ PWD, 4694/99, Donnelly to Barnes, 21 December 1899.

³⁷ PWD, 4694/99, Barnes to Col. Johnston, 13 December 1899.

³⁸ *Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants* (1899), p. 10.

were paid 20 shillings per week as against the 35 shillings per week paid to whites.³⁹ Barnes also wanted Clarence to "take advantage of the Indians from Canon Booth's Ambulance classes" based on the recommendation of Colonel Johnston.⁴⁰ As far as these men were concerned Canon Booth wrote to the Principal Under Secretary that he found the volunteers "intelligent about the work, lighthanded and quick, and deeply in earnest about the whole matter..."⁴¹ Booth accompanied Gandhi to Pietermaritzburg in the first week of December where they met the Colonial Secretary, Barnes, and Colonel Johnston, the Senior Medical Officer. After Booth explained the capabilities of the men, Colonel Johnston thought that they would make excellent leaders for the indentured leaders being engaged as bearers.⁴² On 4 December 1899 Gandhi informed the Colonial Secretary that he had told the volunteers to be in a state of "readiness." They had received lessons in hospital work nightly from Dr Booth and "it would be great disappointment if after all arrangements government would not accept us."⁴³ Shortly thereafter the volunteers received word that their services were required.

It is ironical that at the very time that Gandhi was striving to "prove" Indian loyalty, the "Indian Question" was central for candidates contesting a seat for the Natal Legislative Assembly on 16 December 1899. On the very day that Gandhi was telling volunteers to be in a "state of readiness", "A Working Man" complained in the newspaper that whites did not object to Indians as long as they "keep to their place", for Natal was a "white man's country."⁴⁴ Dr C.H. Hoggard of the Natal Progressive League, one of the candidates in the election, stated at a public meeting that Indian immigration "was a social crime." He called for the immediate stop of indentured labour and the return of all time-expired Indians. As far as he was concerned "if an industry did not pay a white man a wage fit for a white man to receive it was not fit for a white man's country."⁴⁵ Another candidate, Mr Poynton of the Natal Progressive Association, also argued that indentured Indians should be compelled to return to India. He also opposed the employment of Indians to "responsible posts" on the railways, saying that "if the Government refused to engage Indians in positions such as ought to be taken by white men, the inducement for the Indian

³⁹ PWD 2/71, 4964/1900, F.W. Barnes, Chief Engineer, to A.L. Griffin, Accounting Department, 30 January 1900.

⁴⁰ PWD 2/72, 4964/1899, Barnes to Gallwey PMO, 13 December 1899.

⁴¹ CSO 1632, 9294/99, L. Booth to Principal Under Secretary, 4 December 1899.

⁴² CSO 1633, 9588/1899, Gandhi to Colonial Secretary, 15 December 1899. Letter written from Estcourt.

⁴³ Gandhi to Colonial Secretary, 4 December 1899, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 127.

⁴⁴ *Natal Mercury*, 4 December 1899.

⁴⁵ *Natal Mercury*, 4 December 1899.

to remain would be considerably reduced."⁴⁶ Although the election was won by B.W. Greenacre with 1 220 votes, Hoggard and Poynton obtained 934 votes between them.⁴⁷

Gandhi also started a Patriotic League Fund to collect funds from Indian merchants. The list of contributors included major merchants such as G.H. Miankhan, Musa Haji Cassim, Amod Jeewa, H. Joosab and Aboobakr Amod. These funds were used to support the families of "such leaders as needed it" and to equip volunteers.⁴⁸ Merchants also supplied leaders with "large quantities" of cigarettes, cigars, pipes and tobacco for the wounded. These items were appreciated as "no cigarettes, etc. could be had in or near the camp." Indian women prepared pillowcases and handkerchiefs out of cloth provided by Indian merchants. This was given to the ambulance corps as well as the Women's Patriotic League.⁴⁹ Prior to their departure the leaders were invited to the residence of Harry Escombe, the Premier of Natal, where Escombe, the Mayor of Durban and other whites gave words of encouragement. When it was his turn to speak Gandhi mentioned that Indians would have been able to show their worth as fighters if the "Ghurkas or Sikhs" had been in Natal. However he hoped that they would "discharge their duties well" and "prove their loyalty."⁵⁰ This was followed by dinner at the home of Parsee Rustomjee and departure to Frere at 2:10 a.m. on 14 December 1899. Gandhi was supplied with five first class, twenty second class and twenty third class train tickets. Eleven tickets were unused and returned, thus a total of thirty three leaders left with Gandhi. Of these, three joined the group in Pietermaritzburg.⁵¹ The class divide is very apparent in the manner in which leaders and bearers left for the front.⁵² Gandhi and the leaders received first and second class tickets, the free Indians engaged as policemen by Gandhi had to travel third class.⁵³ The men reached Estcourt at 3:00 p.m. on the 14th. They were met by Clarence and departed for Chieveley.⁵⁴

⁴⁶ *Natal Mercury*, 6 December 1899.

⁴⁷ *Natal Mercury*, 18 December 1899.

⁴⁸ *Times of India*, 16 June 1900, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 141.

⁴⁹ M. Gandhi, "Indian Ambulance Corps in Natal", *Times of India*, 14 March 1900, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 140.

⁵⁰ *Natal Mercury*, 14 December 1899.

⁵¹ CSO 1633, 9588/1899, Gandhi to Colonial Secretary, 15 December 1899. Letter written from Estcourt.

⁵² The volunteers were referred to as leaders while paid Indians were referred to as bearers.

⁵³ Gandhi to Donnolly, District Engineer, 13 December 1899, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 130.

⁵⁴ CSO 1633, 9588/1899, Gandhi to Colonial Secretary, 15 December 1899. Letter written from Estcourt.

The departure of the bearers was less elaborate. The men arrived at the railway station in Durban from various plantations. They were met by Clarence who provided them with third class rail tickets. Clarence was accompanied two white overseers, C. Scheffer of Reynolds Bros., Umzinto, and Mr Manning.⁵⁵ The men were supplied with Red Cross arm badges. They were to have left at 5:40 p.m. on Monday, 11 December but only left at 11:00 a.m. on Wednesday morning due to difficulties in getting the men together. Unlike the leaders who left amidst much fanfare, bearers experienced a long and tiring journey from the time they left the plantation to their arrival in Estcourt, which they reached extremely hungry.⁵⁶ They had not had anything to eat for many hours and were given a loaf of bread.⁵⁷

Gandhi has written extensively on the experiences of this corp. He and the volunteers reached Chieveley at about 3.30 p.m. on 15 December. They were handed Red Cross badges and marched to the field hospital about six miles away, which they reached during the Battle of Colenso which marked the first attempt to relieve Ladysmith. They assisted in carrying 50 wounded men to Chieveley station and only ate at 11:00 p.m. They began work at 6:00 a.m. the following morning and carried over 100 stretcher cases. At noon they began to retreat to Chieveley as the British attack ended in failure.⁵⁸ According to Gandhi: "It was an extremely hot day for marching - this portion of Natal is treeless as well as waterless." They reached the railway station at 3:00 p.m. As only one train was available the white ambulance men departed while Indians spent the night at the station where they slept in the open field. They were "tired, hungry, and thirsty" and had to use dirty water from a pool near the station to cook rice. The following morning they were crammed in the "carriages - I mean open trucks in which the men were packed like sardines." They waited in the train for five hours before departing for Estcourt. They remained in Estcourt for two days in the open, exposed to the "storm, sun and wind." The corps was disbanded on the 19th.⁵⁹ In a report to Colonel Johnstone, Barnes reported on the many problems experienced by the corps. Conditions were extremely difficult for bearers. The army did not provide tents and the men were forced to sleep in the

⁵⁵ In August 1900 Schiffer was charged with culpable homicide of two indentured Indians, Papadu and Ramsamy who were under his charge. In October Schiffer was found not guilty but he left the employ of Reynolds Brothers. Source: *Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants* (1900), p. 15.

⁵⁶ PWD 2/71, 4964/1900, F.W. Barnes, Chief Engineer to A L Griffin, Accounting Department, 30 January 1900.

⁵⁷ PWD 2/71, 5117/1899, Percy F Clarence to Chief Engineer, PWD, 23 December 1899.

⁵⁸ The Battle of Colenso, fought on 15 December 1899, marked the first attempt to relieve the besieged British garrison at Ladysmith. With 20 000 men the British made four attempts to cross the Tugela river but were driven back by General Louis Botha. One thousand one hundred and twenty-seven British soldiers were either killed, wounded or taken prisoner. The Boers lost thirty-eight men wounded or killed.

⁵⁹ *Times of India*, 16 June 1900, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, pp. 138-139.

open: "fortunately we had no rain" and the "coolies do not object to the open." Further, 600 bearers had to share 137 blankets. Ten tents were provided for the Superintendent and Indian leaders. The shortage of water was a major problem at Chievely and the Field Camp Hospital, particularly as they did not have a water cart.⁶⁰ Gandhi himself wrote that "the Chievely district is extremely dry, and there is hardly any water to be found within easy distances."⁶¹ The men were given rice, dhol, ghee, oil and fish to last a week, and supplied with one pot per twenty men. At dawn they prepared a "pot full and each man had his breakfast and filled a small tin with food for the day." The shortage of stretchers meant that full advantage was not taken of the high number of volunteers.⁶² Barnes suggested that the next corps have a wagon to convey utensils, food, etc., a water cart "to avoid the loss of a large proportion of labour in water carrying", tents, and at least one stretcher per eight bearers. He also requested that the men be given a loaf of bread for the railway journey.⁶³

Colonel Gallwey was very pleased with their work and wrote that "this corps performed excellent service, carrying wounded to the hospitals and from hospitals to ambulance trains."⁶⁴ Barnes was also pleased with the leaders: "these men, at but trifling expense, took the place of, and to us are more useful than, white officers. I presume therefore that I have your full approval to again make use of their services."⁶⁵ Clarence agreed that Gandhi and the leaders "are just the men required to take charge of the bearers as they speak English and are tee-totalers. In the event of the wounded having to be carried 12 to 15 miles these officers take brandy and milk and water mixed for their use." A further advantage was that each bearer carried a small tin of food that lasted the whole day: "Therefore the coolie becomes the most useful carrier to be obtained."⁶⁶

⁶⁰ PWD 2/71, 5117/1899, Percy F Clarence to Barnes, 23 December 1899.

⁶¹ *Times of India*, 16 June 1900, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, pp. 138-139.

⁶² PWD 2/71, 5117/1899, Percy F Clarence to Chief Engineer, PWD, 23 December 1899.

⁶³ PWD 2/71, 5117/1899, Chief Engineer Barnes to Principal Medical Officer Gallwey, 23 December 1899.

⁶⁴ PWD 2/71, 4694/99, Gallwey to Barnes, 22 December 1899.

⁶⁵ PWD 2/71, 5117/1899, Chief Engineer Barnes to Principal Medical Officer Gallwey, 23 December 1899.

⁶⁶ PWD 2/71, 5117/1899: Percy F. Clarence to Chief Engineer, PWD, 23 December 1899.

Second Bearer Corps

On 25 December Colonel Gallwey instructed Clarence to organise another corps comprising of a superintendent, four overseers, forty-eight sirdars and 1 152 bearers.⁶⁷ Clarence communicated with employers to establish the number of men that each could supply, at what notice the men could depart, and whether the employer could supply rations for the railway trip to Durban.⁶⁸ In addition, Clarence visited Isipingo, Bellair and "other thickly populated districts" to take down the names of free Indians willing to enlist and appoint an individual to assemble the men in the event they were required.⁶⁹ On 29 December Gandhi received a letter from Colonel Gallwey informing him that another corps was being formed. He replied in early January that 500 free Indians, who had registered their names at his office since October, were ready "to start at instant notice" while Dr Booth would again act as medical officer.⁷⁰ The corps was re-formed and proceeded to Estcourt from 7 January 1900. The men were provided with a loaf of bread and quarter pound sugar to "carry them to their destination."⁷¹ Over 1 000 men were at the Front by the second week of January.⁷² This corps assisted General Buller who left with 24 000 men for the upper Tugela on 10th January in a second attempt to force a way to Ladysmith. It was a fortnight before battle commenced. During this period Dr Booth gave the men training on how to lift the wounded, and place and carry them on stretchers. For Gandhi the strenuous training "was found to be of inestimable value and none too strict."⁷³

To avoid the problems encountered on the first occasion, Barnes wanted Clarence to "verbally explain to employees the purposes and working of the Corps, the terms of pay, labour and other conditions. Armed with men so prepared future action would be greatly facilitated."⁷⁴ Despite this preparation some of the problems of the first corps resurfaced. Clarence wrote to the Protector on 16 January that the new group of men did not have "tins for carrying food" or blankets, both of which "I cannot supply now."⁷⁵ On 19 January

⁶⁷ PWD 2/71, 5117/1899, Col. Gallwey to Clarence, 25 December 1899.

⁶⁸ PWD 2/71, 5117/1899, Clarence to Employers, 25 December 1899.

⁶⁹ PWD 2/71, 5117/1899, Percy F. Clarence to Chief Engineer, PWD, 23 December 1899.

⁷⁰ Gandhi to Gallwey, c. 7 January 1900, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 133.

⁷¹ PAR, II, Protector's Letter Books: General 15 August 1899 - 7 May 1900, 6 January 1900, Mason to Donnelly.

⁷² PWD 147/1900, Chief Engineer to Minister, Lands and Works, 13 January 1900.

⁷³ *Times of India*, 16 June 1900, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, pp. 140-141.

⁷⁴ PWD 2/71, 5117/1899, Chief Engineer Barnes to Principal Medical Officer Gallwey, 23 December 1899.

⁷⁵ NA, PAR, II, I/97, Clarence to Protector of Indian Immigrants, 12 January 1900.

Clarence wrote to the Protector that Ramsamy, Munsamy and Arunachellan returned home as they were "missing their families." He urged the Protector that the functions of the Corps be explained properly to the new men being engaged. They should be told that they had to remain with the Corps until it was disbanded "as just when they are becoming efficient and begin to know their stretcher drill they leave." Another bearer Firman insisted on leaving because he had been promised £1 per week whereas the pay was 25s. Clarence refused because others employed as "camp cleaners, waiters, and cooks" earned 25s. Clarence suggested that the rate of pay be put next to the name of the employees. This correspondence suggests many Indian bearers did not know why they were being recruited and that loyalty to the British was not necessarily a motivating factor. The correspondence also shows Indians were used to bake bread, grow seasonal vegetables and cut grass for horses.⁷⁶

On 24 January the Corps received orders at 2 a.m. that they had to leave for Frere at 6 a.m. They broke camp, loaded two wagons and marched to the station within three hours. From Frere they walked twenty-five miles to the military headquarters at Spearman's Camp. The correspondent of *The Natal Witness* described the trials of this journey as follows:

The start was not auspicious. At the first dip between the station and our camping ground, the leading wagon stuck fast and half an hour elapsed before it could be extricated ... In less than three-quarters of an hour, the wind suddenly veered, bringing the storm with tremendous force, and hail along with it ... Ovens were made out of anthrills, at which we endeavoured (for the most part, unsuccessfully) to dry our sopping garments ... At 8 o'clock, just as we were becoming partially dry and recovering our spirits under the influence of the fires, down came the rain again in tropical torrents. All the time, a bitter wind blew, and for discomfort our situation could scarcely have been excelled.⁷⁷

When they reached Spearman's Camp, fifty stretchers went out to the temporary hospital. According to Gandhi this second stint was "more exacting and more risky." Although they had been told that would not work within range of fire, they had to fetch the wounded from within the range due to the "unexpected reverse" at Spion Kop.⁷⁸ A Reuters correspondent wrote: "I regret to record that civilian stretcher-bearers were fired on by the Boers."⁷⁹ Describing the bearers, General Sir William Olpherts wrote that "under the

⁷⁶ PAR, II, I/97, Clarence to Protector of Indian Immigrants, 12 January 1900.

⁷⁷ *Times of India*, 16 June 1900, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, pp. 140-141.

⁷⁸ "Indian Ambulance Corps", in *India*, 18 April 1900, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 146. British casualties amounted to 200 captured, 350 dead and 1 000 wounded.

⁷⁹ *Natal Mercury*, 18 December 1899.

heaviest fire they seek the wounded, fearing nothing, although without means of defence."⁸⁰ On 24 January the British captured the highest hill in the area, Spion Kop. However, the Boers counter attacked and forced the British back across the river. By evening of 24 January almost all the wounded were brought to the stationary hospital about five kilometres from Spearman's Camp, the bearers often having to make three or four journeys from the temporary hospital to the base. Some bearers and leaders served for another three weeks and were involved in the Battle of Vaalkrans (5-7 February 1900), which was the third attempt to relieve Ladysmith. This attempt also ended in failure. There was continuous work during this period. Five journeys were made to Frere. On three occasions the bearers carried the wounded the whole distance of twenty-five miles in a single day.⁸¹ According to *The Natal Witness*:

One hundred miles in five days may be accounted fairly good walking for a man unburdened with any weight but that of his own carcass and clothes. When the wounded have to be carried on stretchers for nearly half that distance, and the greater portion of the remainder is traversed by men laden with heavy kit, such marching, I think, will be acknowledged as very creditable work. Such is the feat lately performed by the Indian Ambulance Corps, and one that any body of men may be proud of.⁸²

Between December and 14 February, when the Corps was finally disbanded, a total of twenty-nine Indians volunteered as leaders. Fourteen served at Colenso and Spearman's Camp, nine at Colenso only, while six served at Spearman's Camp only. Gandhi himself served at both Colenso and Spearman's Camp.⁸³ One of the issues that came up was the "Queen's Chocolate" that had been given as a gift to soldiers. Gandhi wrote to the Colonial Secretary on 22 February to request this item for Ambulance Corp leaders who had "volunteered without pay", and who would "prize it as a treasure."⁸⁴ The Colonial Secretary turned down this request because the chocolate was for non-commissioned officers and men only. Gandhi should have seen this as an omen that Indian loyalty was to count for little after the war.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ *Times of India*, 14 March 1900, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 187.

⁸¹ PAR, II, I/97, Clarence to Protector of Indian Immigrants, 12 January 1900.

⁸² *Times of India*, 16 June 1900, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, pp. 140-141.

⁸³ PWD 2/79, 2458/1900: Chief Engineer's list of Indian Ambulance Corps leaders, June 1900.

⁸⁴ CSO 1641, 1462/1900, Gandhi to Colonial Secretary, 22 February 1900.

⁸⁵ CSO 1641, 1462/1900: Colonial Secretary to Gandhi, 9 March 1900.

Indian refugees

The war had a severe impact on Indians in northern Natal where the republican commandos had laid siege to Newcastle, Charlestown, Elandslaagte and Dundee before the end of October. Ladysmith was only relieved on 28 February 1900. This affected all classes of Indians in the areas north of Colenso, who were "scattered in all directions."⁸⁶ Gandhi reported in December 1899 that "the British Indians, merchants and others, leaving all their belongings, vacated those places with quiet resignation. All this shows intense attachment to the Throne."⁸⁷ On 18 October the *Natal Mercury* reported that "two trains crowded with Natives and Indians" had arrived in Durban from Dundee.⁸⁸ The experience of Indian refugees was diverse. There was no single pattern of migration. Some of the refugees went to Durban; others went to Ladysmith. In some instances the men sought work with the British in Ladysmith while they sent their families to Durban. The attitude and reaction of Boers was not uniform. From the records it seems that initially they left Indians alone; after a few weeks they began attacking them and looting their stores. Some Indians were imprisoned, others were allowed to leave; some were kept imprisoned for a short while and released when supplies ran out. Finally, Boers also kept Indians to do their chores without pay. The individual experience of Indian refugees illustrates their diverse experiences.

In some cases white employers left Indian workers in charge of "their farms and property in the hope that the invading armies would respect the occupation of the farms by these people. The enemy, however, failed to do so, the Indians were turned adrift and employers' homesteads and property looted and destroyed."⁸⁹ For example, Lutchan Singh, a free Indian who worked as a cook for Mr Grant near Newcastle was left in charge of the house when Grant left for Durban. When the Boers reached Newcastle they destroyed the property and Singh left for Ladysmith.⁹⁰ Ghirdaly, indentured to Mr Thomas at Charlestown, was sent by his master with the stock to Newcastle. He was attacked by Boers who took all the cattle. Ghirdaly moved to Durban where he remained until August 1900.⁹¹ It was reported that four Indians were shot by the Boers and a number were

⁸⁶ Report of the Indian Immigration Trust Board of Natal, 1900, p. 1.

⁸⁷ *Times of India*, 9 December 1899, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 119.

⁸⁸ *Natal Mercury*, 18 October 1899.

⁸⁹ Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, 1899, p. 19.

⁹⁰ PAR, CSO 2916, 8 October 1901, Evidence of Lutchan Singh before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

⁹¹ PAR, CSO 2916, 12 April 1901, Evidence of Ghirdaly before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

missing, allegedly taken to Pretoria.⁹²

The majority of Indians were forced to flee even if they wished to remain under Boer occupation. According to Ramatar Indians who remained in Dundee after the Boer occupation were told to leave as it had become "Transvaal territory." Ramatar moved to Durban where he remained until the British reoccupied Dundee.⁹³ Refugees vacated under trying circumstances and often left behind all their possessions, including their documents. For example, Ghoorahoo (Free Indian 13320) did not leave Dundee when the Boers arrived. However, they took his possessions and ordered him to leave his house. The Boers also "tore up my papers. When I asked them not to do this they thrashed me with a wagon whip."⁹⁴ When it became possible to return the authorities were unsympathetic and made it difficult to obtain passes. Bandhu, a free Indian (no. 52370) evacuated Dundee with the British. When the siege of Ladysmith was over and he wanted to return to his home, there was a delay of two months as "I had great difficulty in getting a pass." A number of witnesses testified to this effect.⁹⁵

Northern Natal contained the coal-producing districts of the Colony, and contained large numbers of indentured Indian workers who came under Boer rule.⁹⁶ The fall of the coal producing areas into Boer hands resulted in "great inconvenience" and a rise in prices because of scarcity. The Mayor reported in July 1900 that although British troops had reoccupied the territory "for some time now... the price is still high and the market insufficiently supplied."⁹⁷ The Government was not sympathetic to employers whose indentured Indians had fled during the invasion and demanded the annual payment of installments of passage for which they liable. The Indian Immigration Trust Board (IITB) was determined to claim this money. The Dundee Coal Company, for example, wrote to the Polkinghorne, Secretary, IITB, on 12 February 1900 that since the whereabouts of indentured Indians was unknown, nor was it certain that they were alive, "you can hardly expect payment at the present time." Polkinghorne replied on 17 February 1900 that the installment merely recouped expenses incurred by the Board and the Board's solicitors advised that employers were "not entitled to repudiate payment." Further, interest of eight

⁹² Report of the Indian Immigration Trust Board of Natal, 1900, p. 1.

⁹³ PAR, CSO 2916, 14 December 1901, Evidence of Ramatar before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

⁹⁴ PAR, CSO 2915, 18 March 1901, Evidence of Ghoorahoo, Free Indian no. 13320, to the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

⁹⁵ PAR, CSO 2915, 7 February 1901, Evidence of Bandhu before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

⁹⁶ Mayor's Minute, 1899, p. 1.

⁹⁷ Mayor's Minute, 1900, p. 2

per cent would be charged on overdue amounts. On 11 April the Company paid its due installment of £73.⁹⁸ Such claims were also pursued against individual employers. The IITB's Solicitors, Shepstone, Wylie and Binns were tasked to collect outstanding amounts from other employers of Indian labour in the invasion area. They successfully procured monies from A.B. Vanderplank, R.O. Biddulph, J.C. Donovan, J. Henderson, and C.V. Hosken while summons were issued against defaulters like J.W. O'Reilly, P.A. Cheron, H. Maurage, Stranack Brothers and A.R. Holme.⁹⁹

A well chronicled story is that of 230 Indians from the coal mines who were instructed by the Boer Commandant Erasmus to leave for British territory. One hundred and thirty-seven were indentured while 93 were free Indians. Eighty-five men, twenty-five women and nine children were from Elandslaagte, two men, two women and two children were from Natal Navigation Collieries, four men and one woman were from Dundee Coal Company while two men, two women and two children were from Vanderplank Colliery in Newcastle.¹⁰⁰ According to Lutchman (no. 41571), a free Indian who was sirdar at Elandslaagte, he and the other Indians were detained by the Boers for about a month. Thereafter they were released at Modderspruit and told to go to Ladysmith.¹⁰¹ They tried to get into Ladysmith towards the end of November 1899 from the Boer Camp at Bulwana.¹⁰² However, they were refused permission by the British officer Sir George White and forced to return to the Boer camp. A second attempt was also repulsed. The *Natal Mercury*, noting that the Boers had encouraged the Indians to leave, reported: "Happily, Sir George White refused to receive them."¹⁰³ After two weeks the Boers took them to Colenso and told them to make their way to Frere, warning them that they would be shot if they returned. They reached Frere on 9 December.¹⁰⁴

When the group reached Durban on 11 December, D. Morgan, one of the "rejected" Indians, told the *Mercury* that they were accepted by Buller at Frere who treated them in a "kind manner" and gave them six boxes of biscuits as they had not eaten for "some days." Morgan thanked Hunter, General Manager of the Railways, who not only conveyed

⁹⁸ PAR, II, I/96, I1807/1900, 7 February 1900 - 11 April 1900, Correspondence between Polkinghorne and Dundee Coal Company.

⁹⁹ PAR, II, I/96, I2034/1900, 13 November 1900, Shepstone, Wylie and Binns to IITB.

¹⁰⁰ PAR, II, I 1926/99, I/97, 14 December 1899, Protector of Indian Immigrants to Colonial Secretary.

¹⁰¹ PAR, CSO 2925, 18 October 1901, Evidence of Lutchman before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

¹⁰² *Natal Mercury*, 11 December 1899.

¹⁰³ *Natal Mercury*, 11 December 1899.

¹⁰⁴ Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, 1899, p. 19.

the group to Durban gratis but also allowed six members to visit family in Illovo without charge. According to Morgan, a further 100 Indians were held captive by the Boers as servants.¹⁰⁵ For example, Dawdi Kamadu (no. 69637) worked for the Boers at the railway station where he was held for two months.¹⁰⁶ It was also reported that there was tension between Boer farmers and Commandants as the former wanted the Indians to work for them, but the Commandants refused.¹⁰⁷ The free Indians went to live with their friends or relatives in Durban. As far as indentured Indians were concerned, 63 single men volunteered as stretcher-bearers while the married men and their families accepted temporary accommodation at Tongaat Sugar Estate.¹⁰⁸ By April 1900 most of the workers of Elandslaagte had returned to the mine. Many of those who had returned were in poor health and medical assistance was requested from the Protector.¹⁰⁹ Further, approximately ten Indians from Elandslaagte had died during the Boer occupation while a further twenty-three were 'missing' and could not be traced. All had been in the employ of the mine for over two years.¹¹⁰ A further 126 displaced indentured Indians were assigned temporary employment elsewhere in Natal between October and December 1899.¹¹¹

Families were split by the invasion, either by circumstances or choice. Sometimes the men remained in the invaded areas and sent their families to safety in Durban; at other times the men were forced to seek work in Ladysmith. For example, Cormarasamy, a free Indian who worked for the NGR in Ladysmith was captured by Boers and taken to Frere. He escaped to Escourt where he remained until the siege was lifted. He was reunited with his wife and two children after about four months.¹¹² Boers used Indians for their chores as well. Kadir Adam who worked for the Central Hotel in Harrismith he sent his family to Ladysmith, from whence they were ordered to Intombi Camp. When Kadir tried to join them he was arrested by the Boers at Albertina and made to work at the hotel without pay

¹⁰⁵ *Natal Mercury*, 14 December 1899.

¹⁰⁶ PAR, CSO 2915, 28 September 1900, Evidence of Kamadoo before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

¹⁰⁷ *Natal Mercury*, 11 December 1899.

¹⁰⁸ Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, 1899, p. 19.

¹⁰⁹ PAR, II, I/96, I 475/1900, 7 April 1900, David Harris, Manager, Elands Laagte Collieries Limited to Protector.

¹¹⁰ PAR, II, I/96, I 475/1900, 7 April 1900, David Harris, Manager, Elands Laagte Collieries Limited to Protector.

¹¹¹ Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, 1899, p. 21.

¹¹² PAR, CSO 2915, 2 October 1901, Evidence of Cormarasamy before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

until the British relief. His task was to take care of Boer soldiers.¹¹³ Cuthvaroolala, who was employed by NGR at Glencoe, was sent to Dundee when war broke out. He was captured by the Boers during the Battle of Talana and made to work as a herd boy without pay until the British arrived.¹¹⁴ L. Singh was taken prisoner at Dundee and taken to Volksrust where he and his wife were made to cook for the Boers.¹¹⁵ According to Birogi (no. 45066), after the Battle of Talana Indians were allowed to return to their homes in Dundee and carry on normally for about a month. Thereafter the Boers wanted Indians to work for them. When they refused they were put into prison for nine days and then released. Birogi went to Durban and returned to Glencoe in March 1900.¹¹⁶ Narainsamy, a sirdar at Campbell Colliery, was arrested with the rest of the men and their families and imprisoned at Dundee for a week with their families. According to Narainsamy his wife was "indecently assaulted while in gaol by the Boers."¹¹⁷ According to Indian refugees, after a few weeks the Boers took items like cows, donkeys, oxen, goats, fowls, vegetables, blankets, jewellery and other household goods.¹¹⁸

Many of the refugees obtained work with the British in Ladysmith in a variety of occupations. Some worked in the hospital, others were commissioned by Major Wickham to cut grass for the livestock, some baked bread, and one was a signalman. Shortly after Ladysmith was besieged the Town Council requested permission from the Boers to remove non-combatants and injured soldiers from the town. When Piet Joubert refused this permission, a camp was established six km from town near Intombi spruit for non-combatants and a field hospital for soldiers. The hospital initially had 300 beds but this increased to 1900 by January. Two hundred and fifty Indians were employed at the hospital. They were kept busy by the unhygienic conditions and lack of nutrition. By early February the death rate had risen to fifteen per day. Between November and March 11135 soldiers and civilians were admitted to hospital.¹¹⁹ Ramadin, a stoker at the Newcastle Colliery, moved to Ladysmith on 13 October and lived in a "kaffir kraal" at the edge of the

¹¹³ PAR, CSO 2915, 4 October 1901, Evidence of Kadir Adam before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

¹¹⁴ PAR, CSO 2915, 17 December 1901, Evidence of Cuthvaroolala before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

¹¹⁵ PAR, CSO 2916, 8 October 1901, Evidence of L. Sigh before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

¹¹⁶ PAR, CSO 2916, 17 December 1901, Evidence of Birogi (no. 45066) to the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

¹¹⁷ PAR, CSO 2916, 25 July 1901, Evidence of Narainsamy before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

¹¹⁸ PAR, CSO 2915/2916, 1899-1901, Indian Testimony to the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

¹¹⁹ S. Watt, *The Siege of Ladysmith* (Johannesburg, 1999), pp. 13, 19.

town, working for the British until the Colliery reopened.¹²⁰ Cormarasamy, a free Indian who worked for the NGR in Ladysmith went with his family to Intombi Camp where he was employed at the hospital.¹²¹ An "Indian Bakery" provided bread that was about the only item reasonably priced. The most famous Indian refugee was probably Parbhoo Singh of the Dundee Coal Mine who obtained employment as a signaller in the camp of the Gordon Highlanders. His task was to climb up a tree and look out for Boer cannons being fired from Mbulwane towards Ladysmith. It took twenty seconds for a shell to reach the camp. When he saw a puff of smoke from the Long Tom would give an alarm by ringing a bell and shouting "L-O-N-G T-O-O-M." For this Singh was given a set of Kashmiri garments by the Mayor of Durban, while the viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, showered him with praise.¹²² Some of the work, especially that of cutting grass, was dangerous. Lieutenant Colonel H. Hurst described one incident as follows:

One day about 30 Indian grooms of the Military Officers of the garrison were sent to cut mealie stalks and grass for the Officers' chargers. I was after the same on this day. I had crossed the Klip River and made my way to the wagon, standing about 50 yards from the bank. I saw all the coolies away ahead of me. They did not seem to have any fear, and went on with their cutting and talking as though no enemy was near. Suddenly, and just as I was about to join the party of cutters, several Boers stood up in the long grass and opened fire on the coolies. This is what I overheard: "Nih, Sahib; No shootee me! Me no make fighting! Me Indian coolie man! Me no say "Helbagari!" Dutchman, me say "Helbagari" Englishman! "Helbagari Skoshman! Nih! Sahib! Nih! Ahrrrrr...!" A couple were wounded and captured, while the remainder bolted for it. The line of fire was straight for the wagon I was standing behind, and of course all the coolies made a bee line for it. Bullets were whizzing over me and around me, so I joined the stampede. The first question I was asked by the officer was, "Where's the buck and the birds? I should have thought you would have brought in quite a brace of partridges and a buck or two, judging from the amount of firing I heard in the mealie field."¹²³

While this recollection may be an hyperbole, it shows the derisive terms in which the British referred to Indians to show them up as cowards; but it also shows that Indians, with the exception of volunteers, did not particularly care to be loyal to the British. There are several reported cases of Indian deaths in Ladysmith. For example, Bhola (no. 66340) and

¹²⁰ PAR, CSO 2916, 13 May 1901, Evidence of Ramadin before the Invasion Losses Enquiry.

¹²¹ PAR, CSO 2915, 2 October 1901, Evidence of Cormarasamy before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

¹²² *Leader*, 26 March 1899.

¹²³ Hurst, "Funny side of some old Natal wars."

Lutchmie Singh (no. 66607) who had arrived in Natal in 1896, were indentured to the Dundee Coal Fields where Lutchmie was a sirdar. When the Boers invaded they left as refugees and proceeded to Ladysmith where they worked as stretcher bearers. Lutchmie died while Bhola subsequently obtained employment with the military at No. 1 Hospital Middlespruit.¹²⁴ Another who died during the siege of Ladysmith was Muthan (no. 74272) who was indentured to the Natal Navigation Collieries in Dundee. According to Amachellan, when the Boers took over Indians were detained in Dundee for about "15 or 20 days." Thereafter he and his fellow workers were allowed to go to Ladysmith which was under siege. They were employed by the military to cut grass for the horses. While cutting grass they came under fire and Muthan was struck by a shell. The lower half of his body was torn and he was taken to hospital where he died. This story was corroborated by the PMO, Ladysmith, who informed the Protector that Muthan was attached to the Cavalry Brigade. His number was 25 and he was around twenty years old. He received multiple shrapnel injuries on 26th December 1899. Although his right leg was amputated he died on the same day.¹²⁵

Indians storekeepers were also severely affected by the war. In the major towns virtually all the stock in trade was removed; buildings were not damaged but doors and windows were broken. The reaction of Boers was not uniform. For example, Mahomed Akojee of Driefontein remained at his store when the Boers arrived. For several weeks they left him alone. From 20th November there was a change of policy and the Boers "were all about, and took a lot of goods from me. They did not give me payment for any."¹²⁶ Mahomed Ebrahim of Estcourt locked his store and went to Durban in mid-November when the Boers arrived at Chieveley. Although he had locked his store, when he returned after six weeks the store had been broken into and looted and "rice and flour scattered about on the floor."¹²⁷ When the Bester brothers were caught looting an Indian store in Dannhauser they told the magistrate that they were removing the goods to prevent Africans from stealing the goods. An African accomplice told the court that the Besters had told them that Natal was Boer territory and they could take what they liked. Magistrate Hugo found them guilty.¹²⁸ In Newcastle, a store opposite Duncan Brothers in the main street, belonging to an Indian, "was fired by some of the drunken rabble and burned to the

¹²⁴ PAR, II, I/97, 10-17 May 1900, Correspondence between Protector and Magistrate, Klip River.

¹²⁵ PAR, II, I/97, I588/1900, 30 April 1900, Report of Protector of Indian Immigrants.

¹²⁶ PAR, CSO 2915, 6 October 1900, Evidence of Mahomed Esop Akojee before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

¹²⁷ PAR, CSO 2916, 6 June 1900, Evidence of Mahomed Ebrahim before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

¹²⁸ *Natal Mercury*, 19 October 1899.

ground.¹²⁹ D.A. Lala owned a store at Vank Drift near Helpmekeer. When war broke out he left Laloo Nager in charge of the store and proceeded to Durban. On 30 October local "Dutchmen", Dirk van Rooyen Senior and his four sons and Zutzman, arrived at the store with white women, fifteen Transvaal Boers and a number of African workers. They packed the goods from the store and loaded it into an ox wagon and cart that they had brought along. They warned Nager to cooperate because the area belonged to the Transvaal. The following day the men returned and cleared the furniture, chairs, ladders and anything else that they could lay their hands on. They forced Nager to sign a document stating that he had sold them the goods and gave him £5 to get out of the area. Mr Cods, the postmaster, witnessed the incident. Nager went to Durban via Zululand.¹³⁰

Amod Ismail Essack of Charlestown sent his wife and children to Durban on 27 September. On 30th he and the other Indian traders went to Ladysmith. They returned to their stores on 4th October because they heard that their stores were being looted by local Africans. Essack sent whatever he could to Durban by train and went himself to Durban where he remained until 11 July 1900. When Essack returned the balance of goods had gone.¹³¹ Mohammed Sulaman left his store in Railway Street on 29th October 1899 when the first shell was fired on Ladysmith. He left Dawood Osman in charge. However, Osman left in the first week of November. Sulaman stayed in Durban with his wife's brother, Mamoo Essack, for about a month. Thereafter, he went to live in Stanger with his father-in-law Amod Essack. Sulaman returned to his store on 15th March 1900. He found that his store had been broken into and his goods stolen. He reported this to Inspector of Licences William MacDonal.¹³² According to Macdonald he remained in Ladysmith and visited the Indian stores regularly. All were "more or less broken into and looted" with the exception of three: Sheik Amod, Moola Mahomed Amod and Sheik Rasool. In their case the military took goods from these three stores. An inventory was kept of the goods taken and the goods paid for when the traders returned. Looting was carried out by British soldiers and Indian, African and white civilians. "I know the soldiers were concerned with it, because several of them were caught and punished." The stores were thoroughly "ransacked." Macdonald also reported that several traders had left "kaffir boys" to look after their stores but that these boys had been chased by the looters.¹³³ In its final report, the Invasion

¹²⁹ *Natal Mercury*, 2 December 1899.

¹³⁰ PAR, CSO 2915, 22 November 1899, Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission, Evidence of Laloo Nager.

¹³¹ PAR, CSO 2916, 8 March 1900, Evidence of Amod Ismail Essack before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

¹³² PAR, CSO 2916, 1 October 1901, Evidence of Mahomed Sulaman before the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

¹³³ PAR, CSO 2916, 1 October 1901, Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission, Evidence of William Macdonald.

Losses Enquiry Commission also noted that in many instances “the evidence was sufficient to connect the military with the damage.”¹³⁴

Aside from the Boer invasions traders also left because rumours created panic. A very good example is Estcourt which the Boers never captured but where traders closed stores and left. As Amod Haffejee pointed out “I did not expect that the Boers would enter the town, but we left because we were panic stricken.”¹³⁵ Frederick Sander, Licensing Officer, Estcourt, told the Commission that “all the Arab stores were shut whilst the Boers were in the neighbourhood, except the store of Abdoorahaman.” All the whites stores remained open.¹³⁶ Haffejee, who owned two stores in Estcourt, “locked and secured his place of business” and went to Camperdown on 3 November to stay with relatives. He returned to Estcourt on 22 December. He discovered that in one of his stores, all the goods were removed, the store was converted into a bakery by the British soldiers who were sleeping on the verandah and in the store. Haffejee had left an African, Mageke, in charge on the store who told him that the soldiers had looted the store.¹³⁷ According to Mageke, soldiers entered the store by breaking the lock on the back door and stole galvanised iron, hats and clothing to the value of £240. While the Commission compensated Haffejee for his losses it did not proceed against the soldiers. Henry Bale, Attorney General of Natal, opined that “although there is evidence that soldiers looted it is insufficient to pursue proceedings”¹³⁸ Theo Hallet, solicitor representing Haffejee, was disappointed that no action was to be taken against the soldiers as “this is not the only instance on record. In some cases there have been convictions, and in others the offenders have escaped through not having been caught in the act.”¹³⁹

Indian refugees from the Transvaal also made their way to Durban. Being close to the tension they began leaving before war broke out. They sought refuge elsewhere in Southern Africa, particularly with private friends in Natal. Natal was the most suitable option because Delagoa Bay was the hotbed of malaria, while the Cape was too far away and the number of Indians there too small. The Immigration Restriction Act prohibited the entry into Natal of those who had not been formerly domiciled here and did not know any

¹³⁴ PAR, CSO 2978, 2 August 1900, First Report, Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission.

¹³⁵ PAR, CSO 2916, 5 January 1900, Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission, Evidence of Amod Haffejee.

¹³⁶ PAR, CSO 2916, 7 January 1900, Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission, Evidence of Frederick Sander.

¹³⁷ PAR, CSO 2916, 5 January 1900, Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission, Evidence of Amod Haffejee.

¹³⁸ PAR, CSO 1637, 150/1900, 20 January 1900, Henry Bale to Colonial Secretary.

¹³⁹ PAR, CSO 1637, 150/1900, 30 January 1900, Theo Hallet to Colonial Secretary.

European languages. A deposit of £10 was required to visit temporarily. In July 1899 Gandhi asked the Government to suspend this deposit during the "period of tension" to facilitate the entry of Indians. The Government replied that it did not have the power to do so but changed its position under pressure from the High Commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner. A second problem was that because the railway line between Durban and Johannesburg had been closed, Indian refugees had to go to Durban via Delagoa Bay. The Natal Government had instructed shipping lines in Delagoa Bay not to take Indian passengers to Natal. Under pressure the Government suspended this instruction.¹⁴⁰ Although, the NIC tendered its "best thanks" to the Natal Government on 16 October 1899 for this "gracious" act,¹⁴¹ Gandhi questioned why it was that relief committees made special arrangements to receive white prostitutes and criminals from the Transvaal, and made them comfortable, while Indians were subject to difficulty. Gandhi thought it beyond comprehension that "British subjects could not find shelter on British soil."¹⁴²

Refugees, Indian and white, poured into Durban, many in destitute condition. To cope with this influx the Durban Town Council (DTC) formed a Refugee Committee under the chairmanship of Deputy Mayor J. Ellis Brown. There were sixteen other members, including Councillors Evans, Poynton, Greenacre, and Acutt. There were ten women members including the wives of Ellis Brown, Greenacre, and Poynton.¹⁴³ The Committee arranged accommodation, clothing and food for the refugees. Twelve thousand white refugees stayed at the grounds of the Durban Society of Agriculture and Industry while another 4 000 stayed at the Drill Hall from October 1899. Companies like the African Boating Company and S. Butcher and Sons, and private individuals like Councillors Acutt and Evans offered premises to house refugees.¹⁴⁴ The Corporation also started relief works to provide employment for white refugees to ease the burden on the funds of the Relief Committee. Between October 1899 and July 1900 the Relief Committee spent around £50,000 in feeding and clothing refugees. Part of the money was raised by the Women's Patriotic League in Durban and the balance provided by a fund created by the Lord Mayor of London in response to a plea for aid from the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope. The fund became known as the Mansion House Fund and was disbursed by a Central Committee in Cape Town.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Letter from Gandhi to selected persons, 16 September 1899, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 111.

¹⁴¹ *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 113.

¹⁴² *Times of India*, 9 December 1899, in *Collected works of Gandhi*, p. 120.

¹⁴³ Mayor's Minute, 1900, p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ Mayor's Minute, 1900, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ Mayor's Minute, 1899, p. 3.

While the DTC went out of its way to see to the needs of the white refugees, the white-conscious authorities in Durban did nothing for Indian refugees who numbered approximately 4 000.¹⁴⁶ In fact, when Indian Muslims expressed their loyalty to the High Commissioner, he replied that the best way for them to assist the Government is providing "for distressed British subjects of their own faith who have been compelled to leave the South African Republic."¹⁴⁷ Durban's Indians took on entirely the responsibility of maintaining thousands of Indian refugees from Transvaal and northern Natal. At a meeting in March 1900 John Nicol, the Mayor of Durban, thanked Indians for their loyalty. He stated that "many of their people had been compelled to leave their abodes in the upper parts of the Colony and to come to Durban for refuge. These they had taken amongst themselves, and borne the burden of maintenance at their own expense." For that the Mayor thanked Indians "sincerely".¹⁴⁸ Some refugees went to East London. The Mayor's Minute for 1899-1900 notes that there were "about 1 000 coolies and natives were located near the East Bank Location." Even when the bulk of the refugees returned to the Transvaal after the war, about 300 to 400 remained in East London.¹⁴⁹ A camp used by Boer refugees was converted into an "Asiatic Location" when the latter departed in the second half of 1902.¹⁵⁰ In 1904 the location superintendent reported that Indians "appear to be contented and well behaved, paying their rates regularly." They worked on the wharf or hawked fruit.¹⁵¹

Relief of Ladysmith

When General Buller ended the siege of Ladysmith on 28 February 1900, Gandhi offered his "respectful congratulations" on this "brilliant victory" on behalf of Indian elites.¹⁵² There was a great deal of celebration and festivity in Durban where Indians "vied with the Europeans in their patriotic zeal to celebrate the occasion by decorating their stores, etc."¹⁵³ A mass meeting was organised by Deputy-Mayor Ellis Brown in front of the Town

¹⁴⁶ Medical Officer's Report, in Mayor's Minute, 1899, p. 28. The actual number of refugees was probably much higher as this figure only applies to Indians in Durban. The actual boundaries of Durban were only about a third of what it is today. Boundaries were extended in 1933. Since Indians lived with relatives it is possible that many of them lived in surrounding areas.

¹⁴⁷ *Natal Mercury*, 1 November 1899.

¹⁴⁸ *Natal Mercury*, 15 March 1900.

¹⁴⁹ Bhana and Brain, *Roots*, pp. 116-117.

¹⁵⁰ Bhana and Brain, *Roots*, p. 117.

¹⁵¹ Bhana and Brain, *Roots*, p. 118.

¹⁵² *Times of India*, 14 March 1900, in *Collected works of Gandhi*, p. 141.

¹⁵³ *Times of India*, 14 March 1900, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 141

Hall at which over thirty white dignitaries sat on the pedestal. Despite their loyalty and service, not one Indian was included.¹⁵⁴ For the *Natal Mercury* the event that "proved the greatest attraction" was a procession by Muslims. Led by Osman Ahmed, assistant priest of the Grey Street Mosque, the procession left the mosque at 2:00 p.m.

Crowds of Indians in their picturesque costumes made up the procession. They carried flags, and wore bands of the Union colours, and sang their sacred music to the accompaniment of the Oriental tabours. The playing of these instruments, and the peculiar rhythmic action of the performers, was a novel feature and attracted considerable interest. The procession wound its way along West Street through large crowds of Europeans who cheered again and again.¹⁵⁵

Near the Queen's statue, Osman Ahmed delivered addresses in Arabic, Hindi and English. He said that they had met to mark their joy at the brilliant victories of the British army and hoped that the day was "not far distant" when the whole South Africa "united under the good old Union Jack." The crowd gave three hearty cheers for the Queen Empress, Lord Roberts, General Buller, General White and "our Governor." The procession returned via Pine Street after "thanksgiving cheers to the Almighty."

The NIC arranged a public meeting at Congress Hall on 14 March 1900 to "demonstrate their loyalty to the Crown." Sir John Robinson, former Prime Minister of Natal, presided. The building and vicinity were decorated with "bunting and national colours."¹⁵⁶ The letters of invitation bore the heading "Long Live Kaiser-I-Hind" and pictures of Queen Victoria and three British Generals who were taking part in the war.¹⁵⁷ The 60 white guests included B.W. Greenacre, Member of the Natal Legislative Assembly, W. Broome, borough magistrate, and J. Nicol, Mayor of Durban. The National Anthem was played when Robinson entered the hall.¹⁵⁸ Robinson thanked Gandhi and the volunteers for their "timely, unselfish, and most useful action... It redounds to the credit and patriotism of all of you." Ironically, Robinson added that "the grand old flag of England - (applause) - beneath whose folds every man commands and enjoys full and equal security... must in future float unchallenged from Cape Town to Zambesi."¹⁵⁹ Given the discrimination legislation in place against Indians in Natal the applause that accompanied these remarks was ironic.

¹⁵⁴ *Natal Mercury*, 2 March 1900.

¹⁵⁵ *Natal Mercury*, 3 March 1900.

¹⁵⁶ *Natal Mercury*, 15 March 1900.

¹⁵⁷ *Collected works of Gandhi*, pp. 183-184.

¹⁵⁸ *Natal Mercury*, 15 March 1900.

¹⁵⁹ *Natal Mercury*, 15 March 1900.

Abdool Kadir, president of the NIC, proposed a resolution congratulating the British generals on their success. It was seconded by Louis Paul and adopted by the meeting. The meeting also adopted M.C. Anglia's resolution, seconded by S. Doorasamy Pillay, thanking the generals for their "brilliant victory in the face of insurmountable difficulties, ... thus vindicating the might of the British Empire and valour of the British soldier."¹⁶⁰ R.K. Khan opined that the "distinguished representatives of the West assembled on a common platform with the sons of the East to respond to a call of duty owed to a common Sovereign... showed that the proud boast of an Empire in which many millions of Her Majesty's subjects lived in harmony and contentment was being realised." Gandhi thanked whites in Durban for attending in such large numbers. He stated that Indians "would have failed in their duty to themselves if they had not given expression to their feelings... It was the Indians' proudest boast that they were British subjects. If they were not, they would not have had a footing in South Africa." The meeting concluded with Dawood Mohamed's son presenting Sir John and Lady Robinson with a garland of flowers "which were donned amidst enthusiasm."¹⁶¹

Indian motives questioned

When the Ambulance Corps was disbanded for a second time, Gandhi wrote to each of the volunteers to thank them for serving "your motherland at a critical junctur."¹⁶² For Gandhi, "it was rightly considered a privilege to be able to succour the wounded."¹⁶³ On 11 June 1900 Gandhi wrote to Barnes that some Indians had requested 'discharges' similar to those given to whites because they wanted something in writing "to show that they had the privilege of serving the Queen during the war. It will be to the men a happy momento." Gandhi attached a specimen of the "Discharge Certificate" that he thought appropriate. It read "This is to certify that Mr was a member of the Indian Ambulance Corps and acted in the capacity of Leader from 10th December 1899 to 14th February 1900 and was duly discharged on the Corps being disbanded." Gandhi wanted the certificates printed with a red cross in the left hand top corner. Similar certificates were also to be given to bearers with the word leader omitted.¹⁶⁴ Barnes sought the opinion of Donnelly who feared that Gandhi "may make political capital out of this, and point out how the Indians volunteered for service whereas I distinctly state they never did; they could not possibly avoid going according to their terms of indentureship; ..."¹⁶⁵ Clarence

¹⁶⁰ *Natal Mercury*, 15 March 1900.

¹⁶¹ *Natal Advertiser*, 15 March 1900.

¹⁶² *Letters to Leaders and Stretcher-Bearers*, 24 April 1900, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 148.

¹⁶³ *Speech at Albert Hall, Calcutta*, January 1902, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 219.

¹⁶⁴ PWD 2/79, 2458/1900, Gandhi to Chief Engineer Barnes, 11 June 1900.

¹⁶⁵ PWD 2/79, 2458/1900, Donnelly to Barnes, 12 July 1900.

considered the request "absurd, the indentured Indians were not volunteers but were sent by their masters." Clarence also felt that "political capital will be made of it, and business advantages accrue.... I am sure of one thing: it will be used as a lever." Clarence also mentioned that "the majority of them [Indians] don't care and would not place any value on them. It is quite unnecessary."¹⁶⁶ While Barnes agreed with these sentiments he decided to offer certificates to the volunteers.¹⁶⁷

Barnes advised Gandhi that the government was not obliged to provide certificates to bearers who were "lent" to the Imperial Government by sugar estates and were paid. However, a "special certificate" would be given to volunteers.¹⁶⁸ On 4 August 1900 Gandhi supplied Barnes with a list of the volunteers who qualified for the certificate and suggested that bearers be given a "statement that they served."¹⁶⁹ Barnes refused this as well.¹⁷⁰ The idea that Indians would make political capital of their involvement in the war extended to many whites and was a source of vigorous debate in the local press. "Perambulator" felt that "should we employ Indians, there would never be an end of writers pointing out that the Indians conquered the Boers and saved Natal from extermination..."¹⁷¹ "Colonist" felt that Indians went to the front "purely from mercenary motives" and that Africans would have gone for half the pay.¹⁷² Volunteers were belatedly given silver medals. Not all the leaders received medals. Thus Nazar wrote to Gandhi that "those who did not get any [medals] are feeling bad about it. When thousands of these were presented, would it not have been better if eight or ten more had been given? Talewarsingh has not received one. Lazarus says that we ought to ask for the balance also."¹⁷³ On 13 May Nazar informed Gandhi that another member of the Corps, Lachman Panday, was grumbling about not receiving a medal: "All these men seem to think that we are more or less responsible."¹⁷⁴ Gandhi himself wrote that the "whole of the medal-giving

¹⁶⁶ PWD 2/79, 2458/1900, Clarence to Barnes, 14 July 1900.

¹⁶⁷ PWD 2/79, 2458/1900, Barnes to Donnolly, 17 July 1900.

¹⁶⁸ PWD 2/79, 2458/1900, Barnes to Gandhi, 26 July 1900.

¹⁶⁹ PWD 2/79, 2458/1900, Gandhi to Chief Engineer Barnes, 4 August 1900.

¹⁷⁰ PWD 2/79, 2458/1900, Chief Engineer Barnes to G.O.C., Lines of Communication, 20 August 1900.

¹⁷¹ *Natal Mercury*, 3 February 1900.

¹⁷² *Natal Mercury*, 14 December 1899.

¹⁷³ Nazar to Gandhi, 7 May 1903, in Bhana and Hunt, *Gandhi's editor*, p. 77.

¹⁷⁴ Nazar to Gandhi, 13 May 1903, in Bhana and Hunt, *Gandhi's editor*, p. 85.

regarding this Corps has been unfortunately bungled-up."¹⁷⁵

At the end of August 1900, while the war was still in progress, *The Natal Witness* warned that the services given by Indians during the war should not "be allowed to blind the Colonists to the necessity of keeping an ever-vigilant eye on the Indian question." The paper was especially concerned that Natal was under the military occupation of Lord Roberts, who had a strong Indian connection and pro-Indian views, and might "encroach upon the position Natal has hitherto maintained successfully in restricting Indian immigration and enterprise." For the editor, the participation of Indians in the war was an acknowledgement "of the justice of Natal's position."¹⁷⁶ Another blatant example of anti-Indianism is provided by the editor of the *Natal Mercury*. Commenting on the departure of Indian volunteers for the front in December 1899, he advised his readers not to forget the "loyalty and patriotism" of Indians but that, after the war, "it is to be hoped that for that portion that will hereafter become unnecessary, means will be found to relieve the country of their presence" because Indians "are not all that is desirable as inhabitants of Natal."¹⁷⁷ The situation was no different for Indians in other colonies. For example, a "Refugee Briton" explained to the *Natal Mercury* that the war brought "joy to every Indian trader in Durban." Indians, who were not permitted to open stores in the OFS and most parts of Transvaal, were "rubbing their hands with glee as he thinks of the happy time in store for him and his countless cousins when the British flag is hoisted in Pretoria." It would be a "crime" to allow Indian traders into the Transvaal. It would "ruin" white storekeepers who were giving their "blood" in defence of the Empire.¹⁷⁸

Conclusion: Unrewarded loyalty

The Indian response to the war must be viewed in terms of the entrenched class differences amongst them. As far as the majority, indentured Indians and their decedents, are concerned they were directly affected in a number of ways. But there is little evidence to suggest that although many served as bearers they particularly cared to be loyal to the British. In fact, the evidence suggests that they were not even certain as to where they were going and what their duties would be. Free Indians, on the other hand, joined because the bearer corps represented a valuable source of employment. The situation was different for the elite merchant and trader classes who had always fought against anti-Indian legislation on the grounds that they were British subjects. Gandhi hoped that participation in the war would "bind closer still the different parts of the mighty empire of

¹⁷⁵ *Indian Opinion*, 13 May 1903.

¹⁷⁶ 'Notes on the present situation of the British Indians in South Africa', in *India*, 12 October 1900, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 159.

¹⁷⁷ *Natal Mercury*, 13 December 1899.

Natal Mercury, 8 December 1899.

which we are so proud.”¹⁷⁹ His experience in Natal should have cautioned him that this was a forlorn hope. For whites Indians were “uncivilised” and could not be woven into the Imperial or national fabric. The Government of Natal did not wait for the war to end but continued to introduce discriminatory legislation during it. Yet Gandhi remained loyal. According to him, Indians wanted to address a memorial to the Colonial Secretary and hold public meetings to voice their grievances but this plan had been put on hold because of the war.¹⁸⁰ Notwithstanding their grievances the NIC tendered “humble condolences... in bewailing the Empire's loss in the death of the Greatest and Most Loved Sovereign on Earth.” The NIC organised a march on 1 February 1901 from Grey Street to the Queen's statue where a wreath was laid. The flowers were carried by Gandhi and Nazar on their shoulders, while Indian businesses were closed throughout Natal.¹⁸¹

According to Gandhi, “what we want in South Africa was not a White man's country; not a White brotherhood, but an Imperial brotherhood”¹⁸² in which “British subjects of all nationalities will be allowed ... to remain in harmony and peace.”¹⁸³ During Gandhi's stay in South Africa Indians continued to believe that their status as British subjects and India's position within the British Empire gave them leverage in the South African situation. But as Bhana and Hunt point out, this strategy failed because “the development of inter-racial politics was taking place within a South African rather than an imperial framework.” The British government was averse to prescribing policy to self-governing colonies or preventing the imposition of discriminatory legislation. Although faith in the British connection did not yield any meaningful improvement there was “hardly a thought about an alternative solution outside the imperial framework.”¹⁸⁴ The loyalty of Indians went unrewarded. Indians became part of a South Africa whose destiny was shaped by the war. The shapers of this new South Africa were Boer leaders like Botha and Smuts who remembered all too well that Indians had sided with the British. General Botha for example, who became Prime Minister of the Transvaal after the war and first Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa in 1910, commanded the Boer forces in northern Natal where he saw first hand the loyalty of Indians to the British. The position of Indians deteriorated in the post-war years as the foundation was laid for a modern South Africa based on white racial supremacy. The differential treatment during the war shows how racial distinctions in payment, services, etc. reflected the thinking of the time. The Boers

¹⁷⁹ CSO 1632, 9294/1899, Gandhi to Colonial Secretary, 19 October 1899.

¹⁸⁰ 'Notes on the Present Situation of the British Indians in South Africa', in *India*, 12 October 1900, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 159.

¹⁸¹ *Collected Works of Gandhi*, pp. 174-175.

¹⁸² In Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy*, p. 9

¹⁸³ Letter from Gandhi to selected persons, 16 September 1899, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, p. 111.

¹⁸⁴ Bhana and Shaw, *Gandhi's editor*, p. 6.

did not disguise their dislike for the Indians; they treated them with contempt; but the British were devious, and had no intention of rewarding them for their loyalty. Law 3 of 1885 was practically revived; and the Peace Preservation Ordinance was used to keep out returning Indians into the Transvaal. Immigration became a big issue in the 1900s, and throughout much of the first half of the twentieth century; the Afrikaner never accepted the Indians as a legitimate part of South Africa until 1961.