

Anti-Indianism in Kwazulu-Natal: Historical and contemporary realities

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Abstract

Indo-African relations in KwaZulu-Natal are about competition and rivalry for limited resources and privileges not only between these two segments, but by all four categories¹ that make up South African society. It has been conditioned by White hegemony and the politics of divide-and-rule among the four classified racial groups who were stratified along a line of differentiated privileges. With Whites always on the top, Coloureds and Indians oscillated between 2nd and 3rd positions according to imputed criteria for the purposes of analysis by researchers, and Africans were always considered the least privileged. Ever since their arrival in 1860, Indians moved from being most welcomed and appreciated to most detested and unwanted among their White forbears. The reasons for this lay in the juxtaposition of their labour significantly and appreciatively boosting productivity in the colonial economy within a short space of time, and the unwanted challenges that post-indentured Indians provided to the nascent White entrepreneurial class who struggled to keep pace with their competence in petty trading. Similar situations of unwelcome politics of competition have bedevilled Indo-African relations in the 20th century and have filtered into the 21st century in ways that do require constructive analysis to contemporary conditions. This paper analyses three periods of anti-Indianism since 1860 viz. the latter period of the 19th century when Whites turned against Indians, the 1949 African-Indian clashes, and recent anti-Indian sentiments by a small segment of Africans in KwaZulu-Natal. This paper argues that if South Africans do not rise to challenge such sentiments, they will rise to dangerously engulf us.

Keywords: Indian; African; Kwazulu-Natal, Riots; Whites; India.

Introduction

Any analysis of Indo-African relations in post-apartheid South Africa, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, must be viewed against the historical and

¹ Whites, Coloureds, Indians and Africans made up the four classified groups during apartheid, sanctioned under the 1950 Group Areas Act. The categories are still used for statistical purposes by the post-apartheid state to gauge patterns of transformation in various sectors of the economy.

contemporary complexities that characterise the Indian presence not only in this province but also in the entire African continent. While there is a widespread belief that India's contact with Africa predates European colonial expansionism,² the presence of Indians as settled segments in Africa only really began with the colonial need for their labour.³ This requirement was spearheaded by the need for indentured labour after the abolition of slavery. Differences between slavery and indentured labour lay in the former being a purchase and sale agreement which permitted indefinite ownership once the transaction was concluded, while the latter was on a contractual basis that forbade permanent ownership of the labourers. Indian indentured labour in the Natal colony began in 1860 with three-year contracts, but was later changed to five years when three years was considered too short a period. The value of indentured labour was almost instantly witnessed when sugar production in the colony increased four-fold within the first few years of indentured labour being introduced - from 25000 pounds in 1863 to 100 000 pounds in 1864.⁴ In order to encourage Indians to remain in Natal, the colonists offered them land in lieu of their return fares to India. Many had preferred to return but others accepted and began building a permanent segment of an Indian population amidst a growing diversity of racial and ethnic groups in the colony. While the "Natal colony" is often associated with British colonialism, others classified as "Whites", such as Afrikaners and Portuguese, as well as African people from the Eastern Cape such as Xhosas and Sotho from in and around kingdom of Lesotho, began trickling into the colony.⁵

A common denominator between slavery and indentured labour however was the violent and harsh conditions that both slaves and indentured labourers had to endure. Violence against Indian labourers was both physical and structural. The physical violence was often seen in the lashings that they received for misdemeanours or for not succumbing to colonists' demands, often meted

2 A Biswas, "India's growing trade and investments with East African countries", M Mwagiru and A Biswas (eds), *East Africa-India security relations* (Nairobi, IDIS/PRIASA, 2012), pp. 139-148.

3 V Pathak, "India-Ethiopia relations in the 21st Century", M Mwagiru and A Biswas (eds), *East Africa-India security relations* (Nairobi, IDIS/PRIASA, 2012), pp. 161-170; N Ray, "India and East Africa: Development cooperation", M Mwagiru and A Biswas (eds), *East Africa-India security relations* (Nairobi, IDIS/PRIASA, 2012), pp. 149-160; M Sahu, "Emerging hydrocarbon resources in East Africa and India", M Mwagiru and A Biswas (eds), *East Africa-India security relations* (Nairobi, IDIS/PRIASA, 2012), pp. 171-182; S Sudhakaran, "India's footprints in East African community: Trade and foreign investment", M Mwagiru and A Biswas (eds), *East Africa-India security relations* (Nairobi, IDIS/PRIASA, 2012), pp. 183-192.

4 F Meer, *Portrait of South African Indians* (Durban, Avon House, 1969), p. 24.

5 G Lange, *The white Africans: From colonisation to liberation* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publications, 2005).

out by the use of African males.⁶ The structural violence came in the form of sustained attacks against them by local Whites who had the privilege of being backed by the official colonial structures. Ever since the completion of their contracts the success among post-indentured Indians in their entrepreneurial drives created significant consternation among many White entrepreneurs. At least two magisterial reports in the nineteenth century reveal this:⁷

A few more Indian stores have been opened in the town of Verulem during the year, and two European stores have been closed for want of support, the Indians having entirely absorbed the petty trade with Indians and Natives"; and

Complaints continue to be made of the increasing number of Indian traders and hawkers... these people render it impossible for small European store keepers to make a living.

Among the Indian indentured labourers there were two spheres of violence through which they had to persevere in order to claim their spaces in the colonies that they had settled in viz. the violence by their colonial masters against them, and the organised ethnic violence in most of the countries after independence in the twentieth century. In East Africa for instance, particularly Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, there were state assisted processes that mobilised against Indians in abusive and violent attacks until they either fled or were expelled en-masse. But further away from Africa, in places such as Fiji, Sri Lanka, Guyana, Trinidad and Surinam, the violence against Indians was both physical as well as covert in that their opportunities for unhindered participation in political and economic processes was continuously blocked.⁸

As colonialism was dismantled in each of these countries and White settlers began emigrating, vulnerability of the Indian settlers became more evident through their increased visibility, especially in the work previously done by Whites. Their occupation of key positions in the civil services, in professions and in commerce, as managers, professionals and as successful entrepreneurs, made them the next set of targets after the upholders of European colonialism left these states.⁹ In several of these instances such as

6 F Meer, "African and Indian in Durban" (available at: http://www.vl.sahistory.org.za/pages/library-resources/articles_papers/1960-african-indian-in-Durban, as accessed on 1 October 2014).

7 E Pahad, *The development of Indian political movements in South Africa, 1924-1946* (Ph.D, University of Sussex, 1972), p. 16.

8 M Klaas, *Indians in Trinidad: A study of cultural persistence* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1961); IM Cumpston, *Indians overseas: British territories, 1834-1854* (London, Dryden Press, 1969); H Tinker, *Separate and unequal: India and the Indians in the British commonwealth* (London, C Hurst, 1976).

9 P Bhatia, *Indian ordeal in Africa* (Delhi, Vikas, Vikas Publishing House, Pvt. Ltd, 1973), pp. 3-5.

in Fiji, Sri Lanka and Guyana, the annoyance of their visibility arose from their increased engagement in political structures and aspirations towards the highest political offices. These situations were often encouraged by the fact that racial or ethnic makeup of the populations was not overly skewed in favour of just one population group. The almost equal numbers of people of Indian origin to the other numerically larger groups, especially of African origin, created contestations for power that often violently precluded the former's total participation in political processes. Despite the inhibitions in places such as British Guiana, Trinidad-Tobago and Fiji, there emerged from the ranks of people of Indian origin (PIOs) Presidents and Prime Ministers, such as Cheddi Jagan in British Guiana, Basdeo Panday in Trinidad-Tobago and Mahendra Chaudhry in Fiji.

In South Africa it is unlikely that a person of Indian origin may ever ascend to the highest political office in the country, although several from among this category of people have varyingly occupied national and provincial Ministerial positions. One of the core reasons for this is that PIOs constitute no more than 2.5 per cent of South Africa's population. There is a widespread misconception in South Africa that most if not all Indians are middle to upper class. This misperception was often used by people bent upon driving wedges between Africans and Indians in order to distract attention from the atrocities for which they themselves have been responsible. The utterances for instance that were recorded during the 1949 African-Indian riots bear testimony to this. The 1940s was indeed the most boisterous decade of White settlement in South Africa. Convinced of their ability to sustain their hegemonic position, White rule in South Africa was consolidated by the rise of segregationist policies that kept the classified racial and ethnic groups apart from each other. Allowing them to share common residential spaces and to see themselves as equals to one another would have been toxic to the policies of separation. The intention among White legislators was to justify their separation of the racial and ethnic categories that they created through the perceived differences and hostilities that they showed towards one another. Meer for instance rightly pointed out that:¹⁰

Whatever the Africans' perceptions of the Indian in 1860, included in it must have been the sense, if not knowledge that he been brought by the White colonists to replace him and to be used against him in ways that he did not immediately understand. Hostility must have been one of the components

10 F Meer, "African and Indian in Durban" (available at: http://www.vl.sahistory.org.za/pages/library-resources/articles_papers/1960-african-indian-in-Durban, accessed on 3 August 2014).

in his approach to the new black stranger. It was in the interest of the White colonist to fan this hostility for any consolidation of interest between the two labour contingents would have been fatal in a situation where the ratio between White and African was in the region of 1:10. If the African bonded with the Indian, the ratio between and black would rise in the vicinity of 1:20. Apart from this, the African was perceived as an innocent if not noble savage: the Indian was perceived as conniving, artful, wily. He could not but spoil the African....

Keeping Indians and Africans separate from each other was a strategy that often worked in favour of White hegemony at that time. In every aspect of their governance the purpose was to demonstrate differences rather than similarities among the varying racial and ethnic groups. Keeping them separated was alleged to be an effective way of minimising conflict and maintaining law and order. But the real reason behind such segregation often came in unequivocal declarations by successive generations of White leaders such as Jan Smuts, Hendrik Verwoerd, John Vorster and PW Botha, that separation of the races was the best possible solution to a conflict-free existence in multi-racial societies. There is a history to the consolidated legislation of the Group Areas Act of 1950 and the Population Registration Act of 1950 that were used to enforce separation by race and ethnic group. It was through the *laissez-faire* acts of racial discrimination over several decades that brought Calpin¹¹ to point out that “The problem had passed in sixty years from how to attract Indians to Natal to the dilemma of how to get rid of them”.¹² The basis of this behaviour was rooted in the fear among White entrepreneurs that their monopoly in business was being threatened by post-indentured labourers and passenger Indians. In 1885 the setting up of the Wragg Commission by the Natal Government was mandated to inquire into White complaints. At least two significant findings emerged from this inquiry viz. Whites fears against Indians were unjustified, and an acknowledgement of a prevalence of anti-Indian sentiment. It however recommended restrictions for free trading in the Transvaal province which translated into Indians being severely constrained in trade, residence and ownership of property. But the situation was saved by the Protector of Indian Immigrants in 1901 when he pointed out after an official survey that employers of indentured labour confessed to their indispensability, and if they were to be withdrawn: “The country would at once be simply paralysed”. However, the continuation of White agitation

11 GH Calpin, *Indians in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shuter, 1949), p. 7?.

12 D Bugwandeem, “Historical perspectives”, AJ Arkin et al (eds), *The Indian South Africans* (Pinetown, Owen Burgess Publishers, 1989), p. 8.

against Indians brought significant people like sugar baron Sir Leigh Hullet out of the woodwork and imploring upon him to state that: "... Durban was absolutely built by the Indians".¹³

While evidence of the Indian contribution to the Natal colony's economy appeared obvious through such statements discriminatory behaviour against them did not wane. The 1913 Immigration Regulation Act was especially introduced to stop further recruitment of indentured labour or permission for passenger Indians to work in Durban. MK Gandhi's legacy of agitation against repressive laws in Natal and in other neighbouring colonies had stirred sufficient trouble for the Union government (set up in 1910) to be wary of an increasing number of Indians in what is now South Africa. After Gandhi had returned to India there was constant representation between the Indian and South African governments on the "Indian question". By 1927 the controversial Cape Town Agreement had encrypted within it an imposition that should Indians wish to remain in South Africa they must adopt western lifestyles, but implicit within this condition was a notion that they would not be permitted free participation in the political processes. Legislation was still in a state of evolution on how to deal with the rising levels of upward economic mobility among Indians. As they acquired more residential land and commercial property in areas dominated by White occupation, another replica of the 1885 Wragg Commission became evident through the appointment of the Indian Penetration Commission, which produced its report in 1941. Its major finding centred upon the allegation of an accelerated acquisition of property by Indians. To curb this "growing infiltration" the Union government had introduced The Trading and Occupation of Land Restriction Bill for the Transvaal and Natal. This served as a compromise to the compulsory segregation that was being demanded by Whites in the 1930s and early 1940s, pegging the positions in which Indians had already bought. The process of pegging became formalised as the Pegging Act of 1943, by the then United Party. Its aim was to try and contain the rising White agitation against Indians by legislatively restraining Indians from further acquisition of property, but permitted the maintenance of the status quo. The more right wing National Party capitalised upon the mood of White segregationist sentiment and fought the 1948 election on the basis of completely separating racial and ethnic groups from one another, giving it a resounding victory in the election. Their mandate allowed them to introduce the infamous Group

13 E Pahad, *The development of Indian political movements in South Africa...*, p. 13.

Areas Act and Population Registration Act in 1950, thereby setting the scene for a more tumultuous 43 years in South African history, but which induced greater collaboration between Africans and Indians from African National Congress (ANC) and Natal Indian Congress (NIC). Despite legislation barring inter-racial political campaigns numerous events occurred during the 1940s that set the scene for mass non-racial mobilisation against legislated forms of discrimination. While the ANC rejuvenated itself during this decade increased contact between NIC and ANC began through support of each other in mass meetings, with Dr Yusuf Dadoo and Dr Monty Naicker often being among ANC leaders. In the 1950s there was increased Indo-African collaborative action in the context of the formation of non-racial organizations. For instance, the Durban and District's Women's League was formed at the Bantu Social Centre on October 4 1952, by a group of about 70 women with an organizing committee that comprised of the likes of Bertha Mkhize, Dr Ansuya Singh, Marie Naicker and Fatima Meer. But this was not the first example of collaboration between African and Indian women. In the first decade of the twentieth century Indian women publically supported African women who opposed the pass laws that restricted their movements. On 26 June 1955 the Congress Alliance was formed in Kliptown where the Freedom Charter was adopted and the future for a non-racial South Africa was mapped out. These examples are important because they exemplify nuances of cordiality in Indian-African relations at a time when the White minority government forcibly restricted inter-racial collaboration.

The 1949 “African-Indian Riots”

It was hardly a coincidence that soon after the National Party victory in 1948, a violent confrontation between the two disenfranchised segments of Natal's population manifested,¹⁴ which was essentially African anger against an exploitative and racially divisive Durban Municipality. However the clashes that occurred between Africans and Indians in January 1949 is widely viewed through generally divisive language among the uninformed as: entrenched hatred between Africans and Indians, an African victory over

14 F Meer, “African and Indian in Durban”...; T Nuttal, “The Durban Riots of 1949 and the struggle for the city” (Paper presented at Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa Seminar, University of Natal, Durban, 1989); J Kindra, “Riots that shocked KZN”, *The Natal Witness*, 1999 (available at: http://www.pmbhistory.co.za/portal/witneshistory/custom_modules/TheWayWeWere/Riots%20that%20shocked%20KZN%2020.01.1999.pdf, as accessed on 10 July 2014).

Indian privileges, proof of incompatibility between two distinct race groups living together, and the need for White control over South Africa's multi-racial population to avoid further clashes either between other classified race or ethnic groups. The province of Natal, especially in its major port city of Durban, provided an ideal platform for the divisive politics of White political parties in the twentieth century to manifest. With differentiated access to land as well as economic and political opportunities, Africans and Indians were inevitably going to clash over artificially created scarcities that were racially based. Africans were restricted to unskilled labour, but most working class Indians were only just acquiring access to semi-skilled and clerical employment. While Indians were becoming increasingly urbanised, Africans were seen as no more than temporary sojourners in South Africa's growing urban-industrial-commercial complexes. The possibility of Africans owning land in urban South Africa was virtually impossible throughout the twentieth century. DF Malan and Hendrik Verwoerd were the chief architects of apartheid – South Africa's system of legislated racism. Both men were emphatic about their view that Africans could not be a part of their vision for South Africa – a mobilising factor that won them majority White support in the 1948 election. When Verwoerd became Prime Minister in 1958 after the death of JG Strijdom, he realised his dream two years later of turning South Africa in to a republic. Having being brutally open about his feelings during the 1948 election campaign that Africans were inferior, he tried to recast apartheid through a more humane mould by claiming that Black people owed their loyalties to tribal affiliations and would therefore not easily assimilate into broader South African society. He unconvincingly emphasised his point that Blacks were not inferior but only different, and therefore needed to be among their own ethnic groups in order to achieve their drive towards independent nationhood.¹⁵

But Indians were not exempt from such provocative and patronising diatribes either. The 1949 clashes between Africans and Indians where the latter were the worse off for a range of reasons brought out some of the most racialised utterances against them. The racism against Indians during the 1949 riots had a (then) recent history to it. By 1946 leaders of the African National Congress and the Natal Indian Congress had begun working closer together to confront White racism. On the Indian side Doctors Naicker and Dadoo, and on the African side Messrs Xuma, AW Champion, Mismang, Oliver

¹⁵ Anon., "Overcoming Apartheid", (available at: <http://overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/people.php?id>, as accessed on 3 July 2014).

Tambo and Moses Kotane, initiated a joint council of the two Congresses, pledging support for Indo-African unity, and the issuing of a statement to fight racial discrimination. Two incidents in 1946 provided an apt illustration of organisational capacity among the ranks of Indian political leadership viz. the Indian Passive Resistance campaign, and the resoundingly successful presentation in the United Nations (UN) about racism against South African Indians, lodged by the Government of India. It was not so much the issue being put on the very first agenda in the UN in 1946 as much as it was the humiliation that the South African government suffered in trying to have the complaint withdrawn. It was the South African Government's contention that the issue was within their jurisdiction and that the United Nations was not competent to deal with the matter. Not only was the South African Government humiliated by its failure to have the issue removed from the agenda, but it gave prominence to those who initiated the campaign when the UN decided to make racism a matter of international concern.¹⁶

By this time the cumulative effects of MK Gandhi's agitation against British imperialism and the resurgence of Indian led agitation against the Union, brought about a White-led hysteria against Indians. Such acts of respite fuelled anti-Indian sentiment to the point of giving carte blanche to politicians on public platforms to say what they wished and encouraging the media as well to support them. Meer¹⁷ recounted this period:

Political speeches at all levels tended to violate the provisions of the Riotous Assemblies Act, and among those who indulged in such racialism were two future Governors-General, Dr E.G. Jansen and Mr C.R. Swart. The white press virulently supported this trend and took a leading part in creating and maintaining anti-Indian passions. They published high-pitched stories about Indian land-grabbing and the seduction of white girls in brothels run by Indians in white areas.

Even though the riots had taken a horrendous toll on poorer Indians, anti-Indian sentiments did not abate. Political propaganda and the White press harped upon differences between Africans and Indians in tones that were antithetical to the euphoria created by the architects of apartheid. It appeared obvious to many that Africans were being further incited to attack Indians. The now defunct United Party for instance produced a pamphlet denigrating Indians as "unassimilable and distasteful to all races in South

16 Anon., "Apartheid timeline" (available at: www.sahistory.org.za/topic/united-nations-and-aprtheid-timeline-1946-1994, as accessed on 3 July 2014).

17 Meer, "African and Indian in Durban."..

Africa”. In an about turn towards Africans, everything appeared positive about them while there was little if any praise at all for Indians. It did not matter that almost 20 per cent of the Indian population in Durban became temporary refugees, or that many had lost their lives or everything that they owned. The media harped upon the apparently exemplary behaviour of Africans in refugee camps, but painted a picture of Indians as dishonest, as people lacking in civic sense and generally uncooperative, who despite being given free rations refused to assist officials and pilfered food when possible for resale. A leading media article criticised Indians for failing to rise to the aftermath of the riots and for depending upon White welfare organisations for assistance. One of the articles described Indians as “crafty fellows, innately dishonest in business and confirmed perjurers”. Several prominent White citizens created an impression of Indians being almost entirely parasitic upon the state by making public statements that they received free education and that the municipality provided seventy-five per cent of housing for Indians. Yet evidence had revealed that Indians were among the first to organise their own relief. In the first recorded amount of 13472 pounds donated to the Riot Relief Fund, it was shown that local Indians contributed 8114 pounds and the Government of India 3750 pounds. Indians had built at least 17 per cent of their own schools and had an established record in the organisation, building and supervision of numerous welfare organisations. Only a year prior to the riots, in 1948, about 800 placard carrying Indians marched through the streets of Durban highlighting the fact that 30 000 children were without schools and 75 per cent were illiterate. A Durban Housing Survey in 1949 had highlighted several important statistics with respect to housing: that up to 1949 while the Durban Municipality had built 662 houses for Indians and had made available 90 building loans, the Municipality had estimated that 3210 houses were needed to alleviate overcrowding in housing, and 1380 houses were needed for Africans.¹⁸

There were explicit and implicit tendencies among Whites to identify with the African rioters. Reports were made of Whites being caught on camera enjoying the attacks against Indians, while others assisted in the actual rioting. Yet others tried to instigate a boycott by Africans of Indian trade and transport. The Municipality was quick to capitalise upon attempts to marginalise Indians by providing alternative transport for Africans, and government food depots were arranged for Africans as a way of deflecting support away from Indian

¹⁸ F Meer, “African and Indian in Durban”, (available at: http://www.vl.sahistory.org.za/pages/library-resources/articles_papers/1960-african-indian-in-Durban, as accessed on 4 September 2014), p. 5.

shops. Media reports carried statements such as: “Africans will never buy from Indian shops again”, “Africans will never travel in Indian buses again” – made by municipal officials themselves. Police too were complicit in the spreading rumours about the allegedly imminent attacks by Africans against Indians, although their behaviour was being closely monitored by the Natal Indian Congress. Meer¹⁹ cited an instance of bold support by a White woman, whose response to an African reporter somewhat confirmed the mood at that time. The reporter had observed how a European woman jumped out of a two-seater car and urged on the rioters, saying: “Fix up the bloody Coolies. The Government is with you.” He apparently asked: “Is that so missus?” to which she responded: “Yes of course, don’t you see what the police are doing? They are not shooting you!” Strangely though, although Indians were outnumbered by Africans and had the White dominated state against them it is alleged that only 50 Indians against 87 Africans had died in the violence.²⁰

Statements from White members of the public, from politicians, municipal officials and politicians, were made with impunity. Such possibilities prevailed because circumstances favoured White privilege to a point of immunity against proffered racist abuses. Judicial decisions in favour of Whites abound during apartheid when Whites clearly transgressed laws, Meer’s reference to violations of the Riotous Assemblies Act being a case in point.

Post-apartheid African “Anti-Indian” rhetoric

Soon after the announcement by FW de Klerk on 2 February 1990 that all banned political organisations and their imprisoned leaders were to be granted their freedom, Nelson Mandela, the biggest among the political struggle icons, made a convincingly conciliatory speech immediately after his release, about nation building and the challenges that lay ahead of this task. Mandela appealed to all racial and ethnic groups to work towards peace and stability in South Africa and he had paid tribute to leaders from all of the four major classified racial groups in the country viz. Whites, Indians, Coloureds and Africans. While imploring people of South Africa to stand united against racism with the words: “We must be one people across the whole of South

19 F Meer, “African and Indian in Durban”, (available at: http://www.vl.sahistory.org.za/pages/library-resources/articles_papers/1960-african-indian-in-Durban, as accessed on 4 September 2014), p. 2.

20 “Group Areas Act”, (available at: http://articles.philly.com.1990-06-16/news/25910668_1_indians-group-areas-act-apartheid, as accessed on 4 September 2014); J Kindra, “Riots that shocked KZN”, *The Natal Witness*, 1999....

Africa”, he commended the partnership between Africans and Indians in Natal for working together in a spirit of non-racialism. The Natal Indian Congress (NIC), formed in 1894 was hailed as the first Black political organisation in the African continent and was praised for its fight against British imperialism as well as racism in South Africa.²¹ Despite the often glaring acts of racism and the prevalent perceptions of it across the racial categories, Mandela and the African National Congress were resolute in their approach to deal with such problems with sensitivity.

But this did not prevent the media from harping upon issues that fanned the flames of ethnic and racial mistrust. Neither are Indians free from implicit or explicit attacks by Africans who are not especially inclined towards them. Barely a few weeks into the era of political freedom a mugging of a few Indians by Africans in the notorious Warwick area in central Durban was reported as an African mob attack against Indians. News travelled swiftly within the Indian population and within hours rumour spread as though an attack against them was imminent. While word began to spread in some areas about preparing to defend against the attack, some had already armed themselves and were claiming to be in a state of readiness. Political leaders however from the ANC and the NIC were quick to quell fears about the issue not being a race based provocation to start another 1949 type of African-Indian riot. Whatever happened on that evening was deemed to be over and no further issue emerged thereafter.

A more subtle and veiled reference from a parliamentarian soon after the first general election occurred when alleged reference was made about the belief that too many Indians were in Parliament. The comment came from the late Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, who was also Chairman of the ANC’s Youth League, Peter Mokaba. Mokaba became infamous for singing racially charged songs such as “Kill the boer, kill the farmer” and for passing a comment in 1995 that Indians were disproportionately represented in Parliament, in that they constituted less than 3 per cent of the South Africa’s population, but had too many in Parliament. This issue played out in the media as an anti-Indian statement, and once again was being understood among Indians as a drive towards marginalising them. In an interview with ANC stalwart who served the same amount of time as a political prisoner with Nelson Mandela on Robben Island, the question was put to Kathrada

21 Anon., “Mandela speeches” (available at: http://www.mandela.gov.za/mandela_speeches/1990/900225_dbn.htm, as accessed on 7 September 2014).

about being uneasy in an organisation that is secretly gerrymandering the removal of Indians from political participation within the ANC. Kathrada's reply was with depth and effective enough to force the interviewer away from pushing the issue any further. The crux of the reply was about the fact that Makoba clarified his statement that put the matter to rest immediately within the ANC; and that among the Indians who were elected to senior positions within the ANC had the support of more than 3000 members who elected them. Kathrada's contention was that the matter was laid to rest within the ANC and that it was no longer an issue, but that it was remiss of the media not to focus upon these aspects of the ANC dynamics.²²

Two more bold statements emerged after soon after this incident. The first was by the late Minister of Correctional Services Siphon Mzemela, whose annoyance with complaints from several Indians caused him to make a public statement that "If Indians are not happy they should go back to Bombay". Once again senior colleagues in the ANC ensured that he withdrew the statement. More explicit references to Indians surfaced soon after Makoba's and Mzemela's insinuations that stirred greater controversy into the issue of over-representation of Indians in the South African parliament. In June 2002 celebrated stage writer Mbongeni Ngema's song "Amandiya", disappointed the Indian population because it painted a picture of Indians being racist and exploitative. The issue caught the attention of the entire world and was broadcast, among other world renowned stations, by CNN and BBC. Fatima Meer referred to the song as "a disgusting piece of diatribe... I never realised Ngema had so much rancour in his heart. With one song he has wiped away whatever glory he had earned over the years."²³ Ngema agreed to an East Coast Radio radio discussion with political activist (Ashwin Desai), but failed to appear. The South African Broadcasting Corporation acceded to the Human Rights Commission to ban Ngema's song as part of hate speech racial incitement. Ngema too accepted that his song overgeneralised the point about Indians being racist and exploitative, but he refused to withdraw it despite an appeal by the ANC itself asking him to do so in good faith, until the "watchdog" institutions had acted upon it.

There was thereafter a lull in anti-Indian, bar a few careless statements that were refrained from immediately after they were made public. On June 18

22 Anon., "Nelson Mandela" (available at: <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/cis/omalley/OMalleyWeb/031v00017/04lv00344/05lv01183/06lv01217.htm>, as accessed on 1 November 2014).

23 Anon., "Mbongeni Ngema" (available at: <http://www1.durban.gov.za/durban/discover/history/history/arts/ngema>, as accessed on 1 November 2014).

2007 a statement by ANCYL President Fikile Mbalula that the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Durban campuses were "looking too much like Bombay" because there was allegedly too many staff and students who were Indian, was met with a huge outcry after it was established that there was a balance in racial quotas with respect to staff, and that African students comprised 53 per cent of the student body while Indian students comprised 31 per cent.²⁴ He was later rewarded with a deputy Ministerial position and rose to become the government's Minister of Sport. But the sentiment still prevails and rears itself each time Durban has an episode that appears to induce racialised statements against Indians. Some of the most abrasive statements emerged in 2009, a year prior to South Africa's hosting of the world cup. Several Municipal officials planned to radically renovate a famous tourist and Indian stall holders and farmers' landmark popularly known as the "Indian Market", in order to increase the tourism potential for the imminent international soccer fans that were to travel to Durban for the soccer matches. If implemented, the move might have created spaces for small businesses for mainly African petty entrepreneurs. But numerous activists from the Indian segment of Durban's population opposed the move because of its historical significance. Apart from sentimental value, the "Indian Market" has become a virtual non-entity in post-apartheid South Africa for at least three reasons. Firstly, shopping in Durban's central business district has been transformed significantly since 1994 (after the first general election) in that most shoppers have evidently become African. Most White and Indian residents in Durban have resorted to shopping in mid-town shopping districts and malls, effectively eroding the attraction of the "Indian Market" as a place of choice for their fresh vegetables and fruit. Secondly, the Africanisation of Durban's central business district has also led to changes in the types of items for sale that are unlikely to have appeal to White and Indian consumers. And thirdly, there are prevalent perceptions that it is no longer a safe place to enter into because of the antisocial elements that have crept into the area and who are making a living out of theft and mugging. While renovations to the "Indian Market" were abandoned by the Municipality because of the huge costs involved, it was a red herring on both sides. But it elicited some of the most vitriolic statements that have emerged since the dismantling of apartheid. A translation of a speech in isiZulu by the Chairperson of the eThekweni Business Market Committee, Faso Majola, read as: "Indians only want to protect their interests in the Warwick area and

²⁴ R Naidoo, "Mbalula's comments angers UKZN staff", 2007 (available at: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/mbalula-s-comment-angers-ukzn-staff-1.358081>, as accessed on 1 November 2014).

they don't want township people moving in." The statement was supported by Majola's colleague, Phillip Sithole when he boldly said: "Let us take the food from the mouths of Indians! Now is the time for Africans to be in power! We will remove them and replace them with blacks!" Jimmy Manyi, the Former Head of South Africa's Communication and Information Services and also President of the Black Management Forum, stated that there are too many Indians in Natal and that Indians tend to buy their way to the top. More vociferous than the three quoted above was Julius Malema, whose reference to "amakula", a pejorative term used among Africans to refer to Indians, in a protest meeting in Thembelihle, decrying the government's alleged favouritism of Indians over poor Africans. For the appeal that Julius Malema enjoys with African youth in South Africa, his statements were considered exceptionally provocative by the largest circulated newspaper in the country, the Sunday Times. The paper warned that such reckless statements could have the effect of another Rwandan style genocide, and that he should be prevented from repeating such statements.

Despite such reprimands, more individuals purporting to be from mass based organisations, continued to make such anti-Indian statements, but with even greater brevity than the others. The fact that the authorities treated such offenders lightly has encouraged others to continue with such statements, but with apparently even greater immunity. On 3rd May 2013 in Newcastle, a town in northern KwaZulu-Natal, a person of Indian origin, Afzul Rahman, was allegedly unduly provoked by a Road Traffic Inspectorate officer, Zakele Mbatha in the following words: "Hey Gupta, what are you doing here?" When Mr Rahman replied that his comments were racist and offensive, Mr Mbatha retorted: "You can go back to India and take offense. Here in South Africa the country belongs to us". While Rahman reported the issue, the matter did not end there. Support for Mr Mbatha came from a Mazibuye African Forum member, Phumlani Mfeka, who threateningly warned Rahman, but simultaneously passing a veiled threat to people of Indian origin: "Do not grandstand an African person... in the way you did to the traffic official... First and foremost, you are an Indian... Africans in the province do not regard Indians as their brethren and thus the ticking time bomb of a deadly confrontation between the two communities is inevitable... India is your home and you should perhaps begin to embrace India as your home". Mazibuye Africa's grouse has been directed mainly at the fact that a number of government tenders for financially rewarding work is going to Indian entrepreneurs. In raising the issue they have engaged in a generalised

rhetoric that depicts all Indians as wealthy and insensitive to African needs. Employment too has become a crucial issue in Mazibuye Africa's attempts to side-line Indians. Their voices did acquire some ground with the political elite of the country. In an attempt to appease the African electorate prior to the 2014 general elections the Department of Labour proposed an amendment to the Employment Equity Act – that all firms with more than 150 employees follow the national population demographics in order to ensure representivity. The gesture was understood at grassroots level as gerrymandering by the ANC, but also recognition that the state's attempts to create more employment remained unimpressive. This has become the source of enormous disappointment and discontent among African youth which has translated into significant levels of frustration, country-wide demonstrations against lack of social service delivery and as the above statements, reveal, significant racial abuse against Indians.

While the last five issues have been widely read by the public and have become major issues in perceived attempts by Africans to induce fear among Indians Brij Maharaj had covered them in a mainly Indian circulated newspaper, *The Post*. His conclusion was that South Africa should turn to constituency based politics where local representatives contain such outbursts and deal with them locally. These ominous warnings however, have been addressed by the state, particularly by senior Indian members of the ANC such as the provincial Minister of Human Settlements and Public Works Ravi Pillay, and former Minister of Finance (presently Minister of Local Government and Traditional Affairs), Pravin Gordhan. Ravi Pillay for instance made an emphatic response through a newspaper column and a personal interview, and was supported by his colleagues at provincial and national levels, simultaneously addressing the issues pertaining proposals for the Equity Bill. Pillay's proposal was to encourage the Department of Labour not to lose sight of regional demographics, because in Natal it would seriously affect Indians chances of fair access to employment.²⁵ But significantly, it was not just the Indians in KwaZulu-Natal who have been objecting to the Employment Equity Bill, but Coloureds in the Western Cape also felt the same. Suggestions for the Equity Act to work out racial mixes in workplaces occurred after the issue was

25 SAPA, "Letters" (available at: <http://www.ehowzit.co.za/news/comments-letters-columns/da-dirty-misleading-employment-equity-actbill/>, as accessed on 1 November 2014).

challenged in the Western Cape with the decision favouring the 10 applicants who were employees (Coloured) of the Department of Correctional Services.²⁶ The judge had ruled that the Department of Correctional Services application of the Equity Act was unfair because Coloureds, like Indians and Africans, are classified “Black”, and that they should have taken both regional and national demographics into consideration. The issue was especially about promotions in the Department of Correctional Services. After the ANC won a significant majority in the 7 May 2014 election proposals to the Equity Act were withdrawn. But there is a prevalent understanding that the proposal had entrenched different perceptions in the minds among lay people of the public. Among Indians, it was another instance of being used as political footballs in a situation where the governing party is unable to deliver nationally on its promises for job creation; but to Africans it still remains as a situation of Indians and Coloureds taking their jobs.

Conclusion

Much of the evidence that appears here is a matter of public record. While no overt public statement matches the vitriol that is mentioned in the foregoing discussion, it was not the intention here to deny likely prevalence of either overt or covert racism by Indians against other race groups in South Africa. However, at least two common denominators emerge viz. the misperception that Indians tend to dominate in both business and paid employment; at times of hardship in business and acquisition of employment they were taunted to return to India. But the discriminatory practices in Natal by Whites against Indians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries arose out of significantly different socio-political and material circumstances than those that prevail in the second decade of the twentieth-first century by Africans. In the nineteenth century the African voice was virtually irrelevant and it was for the first time that Whites faced entrepreneurial competition in Natal from another racial category. By the twentieth century White domination had consolidated to a point that seemingly made the African ability to challenge them unthinkable. And with Indians being a dismal minority of no more than 3 per cent of the population, the chances of them becoming a formidable threat were nil. Not too long after the first general democratic elections the first signs of

²⁶ SAPA, “Judgment reserved in warders equity case” (available at: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/judgment-reserved-in-warders-equity-case-1.1640301#.VC6sc01xnIU>, as accessed on 1 November 2014).

anti-Indian sentiment by Africans began to emerge. The statement by Peter Mokaba that Indians were over-represented in Parliament persisted with numerous other statements such as that by then President of the ANCYL (now Minister of Sport), Fikile Mbalula, that the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Durban campuses "looked too much like Bombay", and a range of others that evidently grew increasingly vicious over the years. Ngema's song that Indians are exploiters of Africans still has the potential to ignite a race war in KwaZulu-Natal. But when people from organisations such as the Ethekewini Municipality talk about pulling bread out of the mouths of Indians, and when Mazibuye Africa representatives make statements that a race war is inevitable between Africans and Indians, then the likelihood of there being a more dangerous ominous sign about future. Indo-African relations should not be taken too lightly. These are not only evidently explosive statements but they have been made by people from different areas in the province with virtual impunity. And the responses from the state have been generally tardy. When viewed against the High Court decision to rule in favour of Coloured employees in the Department of Correctional Services and the Department of Labour wanting to take issues of employment on a national demographic level with employers that have more than 150 employees so that Africans may have the advantage, it demonstrated how ANC politicians can engage in gerrymandering when votes are needed to win an election. The plot was so easily discernable when it was abandoned after a few high-level objections and the fact that ANC won the general election with a comfortable majority. It will only take one popular but troubled leader in the province to call for an ethnic attack against Indians in KwaZulu-Natal (or against Coloureds in the Western Cape) only to deflect attention away from his/her woes. And the possibilities are that it can happen. While there has been an admirable position taken by senior Indian politicians within the ANC to abandon the national demographics approach on employment, to date there is little evidence to convince the country that the state is adequately prepared to act with the speed that would be critical to quell a genocidal attack, if Mazibuye Africa's words are to manifest in the future.