

‘To the villages of India’: Case Studies on a Reflexive Search for an Indian Identity

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Abstract

This paper is about my family roots in India and how its manifestations demonstrate a dual identity that depends upon India and South Africa for its consolidation. It is a reflexive account of how immediate members of my extended family retraced their roots to India and carried it across from South Africa in ways that exhibited both ‘sameness’ and ‘differences’. One of the core issues in this episode in trying to find their roots was to link up to kin in the remote village of Bihar viz. Harpurwa, and to compare their lifestyles with who remained behind. Glaring differences emerged out of the first meeting, especially by virtue of their South African kin showing affordability and demonstrating curiosity at tremendous expense to themselves. In doing so several important issues emerged out of identity building that middle class families in which South African families have become engaged. This paper will attempt to address these issues through the lenses of my personal experiences, especially in the pride and care that middle class families took in developing their enterprises against unbearable racialised conditions, educating and supporting their off-springs beyond marriage, and determining their space in terms of their ethnic identities because the political environment in which they prevail imposes such restrictive thinking upon them. But above such constrictions is the pride and place that they believe they have as ‘Indians in South Africa’.

Keywords: India, Indians, Identity, Roots, South Africa

Man becomes great exactly in the degree in which he works
for the welfare of his fellow men (Mahatma Gandhi).

Introduction

This research article is about the experiences that three family members had in their quest of tracing their ancestors back to the villages of India. The reflexion on one's life history is not only an indication of the accomplishments of many Indians families in South Africa who have achieved success over adversity, but is also very important to one's sense of identity. The question of identity has both personal and intellectual interest for the researcher. Unpacking the identity discourse is part of the researcher's personal identification as an Indian born in South Africa. Situating her experience as a 4th generation (3rd to be born in South Africa) South African Indian within the larger context of Indians in South Africa is an important reflexive account of how immediate and extended family retraced their roots to India and carried it across from South Africa in ways that exhibited both 'sameness' and 'differences'. This has impacted the researcher in gaining a deeper understanding of her own family's trials and tribulations that they had to endure within an individual context. Likewise, the study of the Indian Diaspora in South Africa especially since 1860 has helped the researcher to understand the larger South African Indian environment. According to Ashton and Hamilton (2003:27), *'the past that inspires genealogists, local historians, and collectors is not random but connected to their personal identity, most often their genetic heritage . . . the family is the principal site for exploration and teaching about the past across all cultures'*. The case studies in this paper are a record which helps to frame questions for more demanding studies on the identity of South African Indians. Formal viewpoints from two generations (2nd and 3th) were taken into account and informal interviewing of more than one generation within the family was conducted. The researcher justifies the selection of the case study method to understand the participant's identification with their ancestral land, India.

The first case study conducted with the researcher's father was undertaken in 2010. This case study will be briefly referred to in this research. It entailed going into the trials and tribulations of his life, his search for his identity and the contributions made to his ancestral village. This reflexive account comprises the researcher's father trying to reconstruct the past; not just the objective process by which he found his roots but also as an inner journey which he underwent to connect and trace the link to his identity in the context of South African society. The present three case studies in this research pertains to the researcher's extended family (father's brother Satish), and immediate

family (researchers brother Santosh together with his wife Ashitha) who sought to trace their roots and try to identify with people rooted in their ancestral land. This research used a variety of techniques including structured interviews and digital voice to record the three case studies. Furthermore, besides the interviews, *data was collected from archives, newspapers, and published reports.*

Contextualization of Indians in South Africa

It is a known fact that the first shipload of indentured Indian labourers came to work on the sugar plantations of the Colony of Natal, South Africa on the 16th of November 1860. In reality Indians arrived in the Cape as slaves in 1652. Soon after Jan van Riebeeck set up a Dutch settlement at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, to supply provisions to Dutch ships plying to and from India and the East Indies, people from India were taken to the Cape and sold into slavery to do domestic work for the settlers, as well as the dirty and hard work on the farms. From then until late eighteenth century when the import of slaves from Asia was prohibited, many hundreds, if not thousands, of persons from India – mainly Bengal, Coromandel Coast and Kerala – were taken to the Cape and sold into slavery. The number of slaves exceeded the number of white settlers by early 18th century and they did the hard work of developing the land. Most of the Asian slaves worked on the farms and were treated as cruelly as the Africans. There were almost as many, if not more, slaves from India as from Indonesia. The slaves were, however, dispersed and lost their identity in the course of time. The Indians became part of the ‘Malay’ community – so called as Malayo-Portuguese was the lingua franca in the Asian ports at that time – and their descendants later came to be identified as ‘Cape Malays’ (Cape Muslims) as the Muslim community expanded (Jaide 2009:1).

During the 19th century, thousands of Indians were brought to work on the sugar plantations in South Africa as indentured labourers. On the 16 November 1860 a group of 342 Indians, comprising men, women and children, arrived at the port city of Durban on board the S.S Truro. They were the first of 384 such arrivals of ‘human cargo’ containing as many as 152 184 people that were shipped to South Africa over the next 51 years. Of them 62% were men, 25% women and 13% children. Two thirds of these emigrants were from

the then Madras Presidency, Mysore, Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal (The Indian Diaspora 2000:76). The initial purpose of importing Indians was to tend the sugarcane and sisal plantations of the British settlers. Their settlement and distribution across the Natal colony was staggered and subject to the economic conditions of the entire British Empire and its relationship to other imperialist forces. Around this time in India, the 1850's and the 1860's, imperial control made united Indian political action more possible than any previous time (Lal 2006: 26). While their initial recruitment had been for work in the plantations, Indian labour was also later distributed to the railways, dockyards, coal mines, municipal services and domestic employment. Even though they were not happy with the racist laws and taxes, only about 23% of Natal Indians had returned to India by 1911, when the much abused indenture was finally terminated. Many of the Indians had acquired little plots of land and became kitchen gardeners and hawkers, retailing their produce to the White community. In a nutshell, our Indian ancestors had to overcome many challenges. Initially, they had to submit themselves to hard labour and servitude without due appreciation. That was followed by mindless racial oppression. Finally, they had to wage a relentless fight against the evils of apartheid that they completed in partnership with all the oppressed people (The Indian Diaspora 2000:77-87).

Thus the period 1860 to 1911 is an important and integral part of the history of South Africa as it was during this turbulent period when over 150000 indentured labourers were imported to work mainly on the sugar plantations belonging to the colonial planters. Within this group of indentured labourers was the researcher's paternal great-grandfather, Mr. Mehi Sahu known as (Mahilall), who was lured into coming to South Africa-'the land of gold'

The Promise of a Land Full of 'Gold'

Mehi Sahu, Toti Sahu¹ (referred to as Mahilall), lived in the village of Harpurwa in Nepal, about eight kilometers north of the border with India. At the age of twenty- five Mahilall migrated from the northern

¹ The title 'Sahu' denotes the aristocratic caste lineage. This belongs to the 'Sonar' (jeweler) caste.

Case Studies on a Reflexive Search for an Indian Identity


parts of India, from the village Harpurwa which is 2, 3 kilometres from the district of Sarlahi which is a bordering district of Nepal.

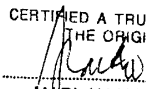
Figure 1: A copy of the ships list from the National Archives of South Africa on the arrival of Mehi Sahu to South Africa.

(Information extracted from Register: G)
(Please note that the information below is based on an interpretation of the handwriting from the register)

| | | | |
|-----|-------------------|---|--------------------|
| | Name of Ship | : | Sophia Joahim |
| | Date of Departure | : | 09 June 1883 |
| | Date of Arrival | : | 14 August 1883 |
| 2. | Name | : | Mehi Sahu |
| 3. | Father's Name | : | Toti Sahu |
| 4. | Sex | : | Male |
| 5. | Caste | : | Sonar |
| 6. | Age | : | 25 |
| 7. | Height | : | 5ft 4,5" |
| 8. | Next of Kin | : | Nuckchedi: Brother |
| 9. | Zillah | : | Nepal |
| 10. | Pergunah | : | Asibhoo |
| 11. | Village | : | Hurpoorwa/Hurpurwa |
| 12. | Colonial No. | : | 29953 |
| 13. | Bodily Marks | : | Scar at temple |

Certified a true copy.


HEAD: DURBAN ARCHIVES REPOSITORY

CERTIFIED A TRUE COPY
OF THE ORIGINAL

MARI AN NAIDOO
COMMISSIONER OF OATHS
PRACTISING ATTORNEY, P
907/8 MARITIME HOUSE
143 SALMON GROVE
DURBAN 4001

Mahilall escaped from the villages of Harpurwa² when he injured his sister-in-law in a fit of rage when he got home and realized that the food was not cooked after a hard day of work in the rice fields. Due to fear of being reprimanded by his brother he went to the village of Sitamarhi. Starving, dirty and tired, he was enticed with food by a man who worked as an agent for the British Government in recruiting people to go to the British Colony of South Africa. When the British recruiter learnt that Mahilall was Sonar by caste he persuaded him not to go back to the hardships in the village of Harpurwa and lured him by saying that he could have unlimited supply of free gold in South Africa. Mahilall was told that the British people in South Africa needed Indian labour because the local African population was not skilled enough to work. The agent further conspired with him that the Indians were accustomed to working under the British Raj and would not encounter any difficulties. Besides, for the work that Mahilall did in South Africa, he was promised that he would be paid a monthly salary in gold. He was expected to serve a five-year contract and could thereafter return to India or Nepal, a wealthy man or remain in South Africa. All expenses, relative to his return to Nepal at the expiry of contract, would be borne by the British Government. Mahilall was told that all he needed to do in return was build the South African economy and teach the local African population.

Such an honourable gesture, all expenses paid and the promise of gold was too appealing for Mahilall to resist. The following day, together with his newfound friends, they boarded an all-expenses paid train to Calcutta, where they were going to meet other recruits and thereafter board a ship to South Africa. The train journey from Sitamarhi to Calcutta (now renamed Kolkata) was a long one. Upon arrival to their

² Harpurwa village is located in Bajpatti Tehsil of Sitamarhi district in Bihar, India. Bajpatti is nearest town to Harpurwa village. It is one of 58 villages in Bajpatti Block along with villages like Madhuban Basaha and Bhagwanpur Chaube. The nearest railway station of Harpurwa is in Sitamarhi. (Census 2011, Statistics South Africa).

destination they were accommodated at a massive compound belonging to the British Government and provided with rations. Other recruits, both male and female were also at the compound. Many had infants with them and were mostly from the state of Bihar.

Figure 2: Map of India indicating distance from Bihar to Calcutta (Kolkata)-red spot



The Journey and Arrival of Mehi Sahu (Mahilall) in South Africa from the Villages of India

On the 9th of June 1883, Mahilall together with the rest of the recruits boarded the ship Sophia Joakim, at the port of Calcutta. They were all inspected and herded on the ship like cattle, being identified by any bodily scarring that one may have. Furthermore each person was tagged with a colonial number. Mahilall's colonial number was 29953 and his serial number was 253. A total

of 418 adults set sail for the shores of South Africa aboard the *Sophia Joakim*. Amidst great hardship; i.e. lack of food, working in the kitchens, toilets, decks of the ship and severe illnesses the recruits reached the shores of Durban on the 14 August 1883. They had spent 68 uncomfortable days under unpleasant conditions at sea. Durban was a ‘culture shock’ for the new recruits. For the first time they encountered African people; neither understood each other’s language; Hindi and isiZulu. The Indian recruits were quarantined and checked by medical officers and a few days later were picked up by British farmers. The promised gold was nowhere in sight. For the British farmers the Indian’s were cheap, skilled Indentured labour. Due to the fact that they did not know English, their thumb-print was taken as an endorsement of their five year labour contracts. Mahilall (29953) was allocated to the Waterloo Sugar Estate. He served his five year contract³ at the Waterloo Estate in Verulam on the north coast of Natal. The area of Waterloo still exists today along the Umdloti Beach road, and is occupied predominantly by the African population who live in low-cost housing which is still dispersed with sugar cane plantation. Mahilall’s indenture expired on the 20 August 1888 after serving his five year contract (Figure 2). Instead of returning to India Mahilall chose to settle in South Africa. On his own he leased some land in New Glasgow, and cultivated sugar cane.

He married a South African-born lady, of Indian origin – Bechuni Kalichurn. Mahilall decided to make South Africa his home and decided to plant his roots firmly on the South African soil. Mahilall’s marriage to Bechuni, produced the first generation of South African Indians in the family; 14 children – 10 sons and four daughters. The sons were Rattan; Ramlakkan; Jhingoor (Ramnarain); Roopnarain; Ramdaw; Dulan; Balgobind; Seepurshad; Seegobinand and Nundkishore. The daughters were Ramkalia (Brathmanie); Golabiah; Basmuthie and Phoolmathie. The children were all born in New Glasgow. One of the sons; Balgobind was the researcher’s grand-father. Balgobind was the first generation born in South Africa. He married Toothpathy Doorgha in 1925.

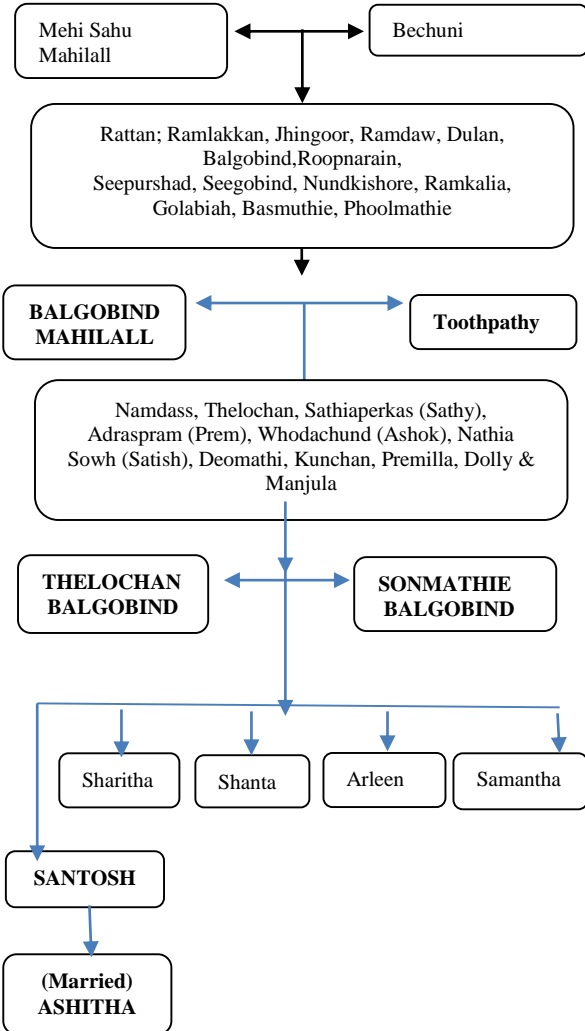
³ Indenture spawned harsh laws that governed every aspect of the migrant’s lives. They had to work for five years for the employer to whom they were assigned. Overwork, malnutrition and squalid living conditions formed the pattern of daily life for most agricultural workers; Indentured Indians had few ways of resisting (Lal 2006: 243).

Figure 3: Map of Coastline of Natal, indicating Durban and Umdloti (The area of Waterloo)



Balagobind and Toothpathy had thirteen children, twelve of whom were born in New Glasgow and one in Red Hill, Durban. Two of these children died when they were small. The surviving children comprised of six boys and five girls.

Figure 4: Genealogy of Mehi Sahu Mahilall



The eldest was Namdass. The researcher's dad Thelochan was the second child. The third was Prem, fourth Domathie, fifth Sathy, sixth Kunchan, seventh Dolly, eighth Premilla, ninth Ashok, tenth Satish⁴ and eleventh Manjula. At the time of writing this research, four of the sons, Namdass, Prem, Sathy and Thelochan had passed away.

To take care of his big family, Balgobind a pioneering man had his own sugar cane farm and used to transport sugar cane to the mill on ox wagon. In 1930 he bought a lorry and began carting sugar cane to the mill on his lorry. For extra income he lugged other farmers' cane on his lorry to the mills. Being an innovative man he also rented his lorry in order to augment his income further. Balgobind got tired of farming and was encouraged by the success of his transport business to venture into investing his profits to purchase taxis and buses for expanded transport business activities (Singh 2010:84). On the 30th December 1962 at the age of fifty four Balgobind passed away and on the 16th September 1979 his wife also passed on.

'Tracing of Roots' by the 2nd Generation to India

In 1971, the researcher's father, the late Thelochan Balgobind (the first member in the family to attempt tracing his ancestral roots), accompanied by his wife Sonmathie, his sister Deomathie and her late husband Sukhraj Kasipersadh, set out to Nepal in search of the Mahilall family roots. In his quest to discover his roots and understand his heritage, Thelochan encountered a host of difficulties. His forefathers came to South Africa as indentured labourers therefore their names, village and district address were entered on their emigration passes. However, the search became complicated because the names of places and their spellings had changed over the centuries; villages had been incorporated in different districts and there were different villages with similar names (Singh 2010:87). Amidst much trials and tribulations Thelochan and his accompanied family were eventually successful in finding their village. After verification by elders in the village, the entire community came out to meet them. There was great joy and commemoration following this reunion.

⁴ Mr Satish Balgobind is one of the case studies in this research.

Analysis of Case Study 1

The researcher's first case study for this paper was with Satish Balgobind, the youngest brother of Thelochan. On the 24th October 1993, Satish, accompanied by his wife Susheela his brother Thelochan and sister-in-law Sonmathie undertook a trip to their ancestral village of Harpurwa. They flew from New Delhi to Kathmandu where they stayed overnight in a hotel. The next day they hired a four wheeler vehicle (the terrain through which they had to travel was treacherous, having to pass through many gorges) and travelled down the Himalaya Mountains to their ancestral village of Harpurwa. Upon reaching their destination, the entire village turned out to meet them (prior to their departure Thelochan had communicated with the 'new found family' in India their intention to visit the village with members of his immediate family from South Africa). The relatives from South Africa stayed the night of 25th October 1993 in the village of Harpurwa.

At the time of this study Satish Balgobind was 68 years old and the second generation of Indian to be born in South Africa. He is a retired, married man who had been to university in South Africa. He has 4 children (3rd generation born in South Africa) and 6 grandchildren who are part of the 4th generation to be born in South Africa. When Satish was asked to describe his current economic status, he was very modest and indicated that he is within the middle-income group and achieved this through *hard work, commitment and honesty*. In the researcher's opinion Satish would fall into the higher income category due to his economic status within the South African Indian community. The reason that he wanted to meet his family in India was because he had an enquiring mind, genetic factors and he always displayed a keen interest in his origins as a South African Indian⁵.

The first contact that he had with his relatives from the village induced a feeling of immense joy and inner- satisfaction within him. He was so proud that he finally made contact with his relatives. He was also humbled by their simplicity and the love shown to them. *'They didn't leave our sight. They actually bowed at our feet, and asked a million questions. They are all very poor but are big hearted. The humility of our people was overwhelming. How do we repay them for the love and affection bestowed on us'?*

⁵ As discussed earlier the tracing of the family roots to India was done by the researchers father Thelochan Balgobind.

Figure 5: Satish (beard and glasses) with brother Thelochan, wife Susheela and sister-in-law Sonmathie with relatives from the village of Harpurwa



Figure 6: Satish and Susheela (right) with Thelochan and Sonmathie (left) standing before religious deities⁶ worshiped in Harpurwa



⁶ The religious deities depicted in this photo are the same as the deities worshipped by some Indians in South Africa.

Although their life style was very simple and Satish was able to identify with them in terms of their 'Indianness' i.e. culture; religion, festivals and weddings; he was of the opinion that *'there was no comparison to the lifestyle that we as South African Indians enjoy. We may maintain our value system but we are really spoilt in South Africa; there is too much focus on massive houses, cars, wealth. In the village this is not an issue. The common thread between us is our religion and religious practices. There was a commonness in the worship of the same 'Gods' and belonging to the same caste'*⁷.

When the researcher asked the question: In South Africa, despite unbearable racialised conditions, we had and have greater privileges than our relatives in the rural village? His response to this was: *'This is not true, the people of India have democracy; India is the largest democracy in the world. They do not need privileges, all they need is the opportunity to work and they are content and happy. Parents in the village depend on their children for financial support'*.

In identifying with India he points to the fact that he would always like to maintain his 'Indianness', even in South Africa. *'I am a proud South African Indian'*, He described India as a 'magnet' and had he been younger he would have loved to settle there. *Having found his relatives in the villages of India this has increased his desire to visit India more often in order to build the bond between the two families'*.

Satish keeps in contact with his relatives via email and the social media i.e. face book. On the flip side when asked what were some of the adverse impact in making contact with your relatives? The response was *'they will usually ask you for money or some form of assistance'*.

In October 2015 Satish and Susheela visited his maternal ancestral roots in Patna, India. This was also a heart-warming experience where they were able to meet a few of the older generation of the family who were still alive and living in the village.

⁷ In the context of the wider social stratification of Indians in South Africa, the class situation becomes dominant rather than caste. In India there is also an emerging class stratification which is taking over the caste stratification.

Analysis of Case Study 2

The second case study for this paper was with the researcher's brother Santosh Balgobind⁸ who is 58 years old and is the 3rd generation to be born in South Africa. The same questions as with the first case study were asked by the researcher and what was intriguing was the difference of opinion between the two generations in terms their sense of identity with India. Santosh is a university graduate who is self-employed. He married Ashitha in 1981 and is considered to be part of the higher socio-economic group in South Africa. The process of achieving this status was not an easy one. For Santosh there was a desire and importance in him to know where he originally came from, *'to have some kind of identity'*. Fortunately for him much of the groundwork in tracing his roots and the search for his identity was carried out by his dad Thelochan, whom he assisted in *'tracing birth certificates, checking with government records, university archives, and the ships register. Furthermore the village had to be tracked and the head in the region had to verify and provide additional information'*.

In December 1994 Santosh at the age of 38, accompanied by his wife Ashitha went to the village of Harpurwa to try and identify with his ancestral roots. Despite the very primitive, basic rural lifestyle in the village, there was a *'sense of excitement and satisfaction'* when he met with them, *'their warm welcome and ability to want to make their guests as comfortable as possible with the little resources that they had was impressive'*. They were able to identify with their recently discovered relatives from the village by their religious customs and manner of dress⁹.

When the researcher asked the question: In South Africa, despite unbearable racialised conditions, we had and have greater privileges than our

⁸Santosh Balgobind is the 3rd generation to be born in South Africa. He married Ashitha who accompanied him on his many trips to the villages of his ancestral land. Although Ashitha visited her husband's family in India, she has not visited her ancestral land which was also traced by her family members in South Africa.

⁹ Indian women in the rural villages of India generally wear saris or a 'shalwarkameez' (pants and long dress). However with westernisation this is changing especially with the younger generation.

Shanta Balgobind Singh

relatives in the rural village? His response to this was: *'Yes. South Africa is a developing country with approximately 55 million people. Our forefathers came here for a better life but also endured great hardships in the early years. It is only now that the current generation is educated that job opportunities have opened up'*.

In identifying with India Santosh's arguments are: *'We as South African Indians are a new breed. Our thinking, values and mentality is different from the Indians in the rural village. They may be our roots but there is a big difference in our way of life and thinking. We cannot be on the same wavelength except for our roots'*.

To the question, are the family ties that we as Indians display here in South Africa a continuation of the trends in the village of India? In his opinion *'the family ties were the same. Indians all over have the close bond between family members especially when there is poverty and lack of resources. Presently in South Africa affluence and independence is the cause of the breakdown of the family ties'*.

Figure 7: The entire village, including young and old came to welcome the family from South Africa



Furthermore he went on to add: *'a parent's support never ends for a child, especially in the Indian culture and practise. Generally when a child gets a job and marries, he/she goes on their own. It depends on the child, some need more support than others who become independent quicker because of their earning power or character'*.

Although Santosh thinks that India is a beautiful country he would never want to settle there. He thanks his forefathers for leaving the village and coming to South Africa despite the hardships they encountered. When asked what were some of the adverse impact in making contact with your relatives? The response was: *'they seem to be very money conscious and expect to be given hand-outs for everything, especially the younger generation'*. Contact is maintained with relatives from the village via email, phone and the occasional visit when they are in India.

Analysis of Case Study 3

In this case study the respondent (Santosh's wife Ashitha) was asked to discuss her experience and identification with the people from the village. The following narrative is a portrayal from a female perspective in uniting with the ancestral village and its inhabitants. Ashitha Balgobind, also a third generation Indian to be born in South Africa commented:

In December 1994 I accompanied my husband when he embarked on a trip to his ancestral village of Haripurwa. It was by no means easily accessible. We flew to Kathmandu and then to Janakpur and from there it was a long journey by car. The memorable part of the visit there was that we were treated like royalty. On arrival we were garlanded and welcomed by the family. Besides the families, friends and neighbours came by to meet the 'relatives from South Africa'. I was taken aback by their warmth and hospitality, trait that's eminent amongst the Indians in South Africa. Language was a problem for me as I only spoke English and a little Hindi.

I noticed that the women in the family were shy and hardly spoke, they had their heads covered with their sarees and sat away from the men. We were served fresh chicken curry, prepared using

freshly ground home spices with rice for dinner. Their style and taste of the food is different from that of South Africans.

Their living conditions are very basic, as there was no piped water and a pump was being used, we carried a few cases of bottled water with us. When we used the toilet we had to throw a bucket of water to flush it. It was quite a difficult one night stay. We were given a room on the upper floor as the home was double storey. During the night I was terrified as I could hear the rats running on the ceiling. I found their living conditions to be rather primitive, at that point in time which was 20 years as there was no proper sanitation and electricity. We awoke the next morning to see two men armed with rifles in the house. When we enquired about them we were told that they were there to protect us as our hosts were afraid of thugs (dacoits) attacking us. We were also escorted out of the village by armed guards.

In December 2012 my husband and I visited his grandmother's family in Aara for a day. This village is approximately 2 hours from Patna. Here again we were showered with love and affection and a warm welcome. I have visited India several times and have noted that although there may be similarities between the Indians in India and the Indians in South Africa, we are essentially different.

As I reflect on my two visits to the villages in India, I am thankful to my forefathers for making the move to South Africa. Although we as Indians have been discriminated against, pre and post-apartheid era, we have been living a better quality of life here in South Africa, compared to the rural Indians in India where most of our relative's live. We are still in contact with our relatives and we are sure we will visit them in the future.

Something that we should bear in mind is that the relatives that we visited were actually the more affluent people in that village, so there were some people even worse off than them. In another relative's home, the goats were housed indoors. Twenty years ago, many of the teenagers were well aware that education was the key to uplifting their living standards. Now most of them have graduated with masters degrees and are working in bigger cities and some even have migrated to the USA and the eastern countries.

In this research paper, and from the above case studies discussed, is an indication of how the present outlook of the 2nd and 3rd generation South African Indians recognizes that family histories can influence ones sense of identity and belonging in contemporary society.

Conclusion

Although the identity of people is rooted in their birth in a particular ethnic, religious and cultural setting, there is sometimes the longing and deep desire to trace ones true sense of belonging. South African Indians, having been in the country for approximately 155 years, have been forced by political conditions during colonialism, apartheid and post-apartheid years to endorse their identities and cultures as Indians. It includes the self-motivated yearning as well as a feeling of 'belonging' for many of the people of the Indian population to explore their origins back to the villages of India. The image of India as a place of origin remains a recurring characteristic in the current discourses on the Indian Diaspora. The three case studies in this research is an indication that the 2nd generation South African Indian identifies more with India as their 'motherland' and would never consider settling in India. They consider themselves to be South African. The 3rd generation are of a different view and although they identify with India in terms of the media, movies, festivals and religious traditions, they would not want to live in India either. A sense of identity is not just a construct of where one originated but both a construct of ones identification with the place and land of birth and a product of historical movements and a purposefully inculcated ideology.

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Shanta Balgobind Singh

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