


# The Indian diaspora, cultural heritage and cultural transformation in the Colony of Natal (1895–1960) during the period of indenture

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The article chronicles diasporic cultural heritage in Natal during the period of indenture in an Indian community in colonial South Africa. Using the qualitative ethnographic research methodology the focus is on the period 1895–1960. This methodology was chosen as it is a qualitative method where observation and/or interaction has taken place in real-life environments. In this article, the Indian cultural heritage as experienced by Mrs Takurine Mahesh Singh who arrived in Port Natal in 1895 is chronicled through the reflective memories of her South African-born eldest grandson, Mr J.S. Singh (b.1930). Further to this, her life in South Africa is explored as she lived in different worlds through various political systems and this life experience extended to include a cultural transformation. During 1960, the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the indentured Indians to the Colony of Natal was commemorated. Hence, this study considers the period 1895–1960. Moving across continents, the indentured Indians arrived in the Colony to work on the sugar plantations. Cultural heritage may be viewed as a sense of one's subjective self-perception based on one's language, ancestry, values, rituals, traditions and religion. During the political era of colonisation and indenture, the Indian nationals became displaced. This displacement created an intrinsic emotional threat. This emotional threat compromised their cultural heritage and consequently led to other forms of cultural transformation. During the oral history interviews, it emerged that the Indian nationals and their descendants in South Africa did not experience abject deculturalisation as they were able to practise aspects of their cultural heritage without the complete loss of their identity. This is one of the findings of the article. The findings indicate that complete deculturalisation did not take place even though cultural transformations resulted in the Indian diaspora in Natal.

**Contribution:** With a unique focus on aspects of cultural heritage in the Indian diaspora, this article contributes to the knowledge of the social memory historiography with a spotlight on descendants of Indian indentured labourers in South Africa. The overarching contribution of this article focusses on the cultural transformation during the period under review.

**Keywords:** Colony of Natal; cultural heritage; cultural transformation; indenture; Indian diaspora; South African Indians.

## Part One

Part One of this article includes the introduction, aim, reasons for the study, literary review, methodology, terminology, interpretation of results and structure of this study.

### Introduction

This article is closely integrated with a previously published article (Archary & Landman 2021) as the respondent in the study is a 90-year-old grandfather who was 29 years of age when his grandmother passed on. At the time of the research he was of clear mind and able to reflect with ease and clarity on his lived experiences. This article is the second in a three-part research study. Aspects from the previous article may be replicated in this article, but in the main, the richness and value-add of this article is that it brings into focus the aspect of cultural transformation in the Indian diaspora.

### Aim

This article considers the Indian diaspora and provides insight on cultural heritage in Colonial Natal between 1895 and 1960 as the narratives and reflective memories shared focus on life

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experiences that include being born in the Indian sub-continent, transported under indentured tenure to Africa and living under British colonialism. These divergent political systems across the world took place at the same time. This article records aspects of the life journey of Indian-born Mrs Singh. She was a single 23 year old and it is postulated that she travelled alone from India on indenture.

The aim of this article is to record – by focussing the narrative on Mrs Singh through reflective memories of her grandson. Mrs Singh’s life experiences are shared to narrate the issues of cultural heritage during life under indenture in Natal. Aspects of cultural transformation that resulted in the Colony during the period under review are recounted.

### Reasons for the study

Considering Mrs Singh’s life-changing historical journey is relevant to a study of the Indian diaspora’s cultural transformation, the Indian indentured community and social memory historiography as no written accredited sources were found in South Africa that report specifically on widowed Indian national matriarchs who were sole breadwinners in the Colony during the period under review. Reading internationally on indenture and the Indian diaspora, the researcher reached the same conclusion as there is clearly a lack in terms of reported female sole breadwinners who were widowed Indian national matriarchs (Levine 1977):

No one who understands the historian’s craft would plead seriously that all groups should receive equal time. We know more about some groups than others not only because of the predilection of historians or the nature of their sources but frequently because we should know more about some groups of individuals in terms of their importance and their effects upon others. The problem is that historians have tended to spend too much of their time in the company of the ‘movers and shakers’ and too little in the universe of the mass of mankind. (p. ix)

This statement clearly articulates the need to delve into writing about women, widowed Indian matriarchs, female indentured workers, cultural heritage and cultural transformations as ‘all groups should receive equal time’ (Levine 1977:ix). These sentiments raise the point of the inequality in recording the history of Indian women, indenture and cultural transformations that have occurred in the last 200 years. Hence, the researcher investigates *another* group, which is the indentured Indian matriarch who was a labourer in the Colony of Natal.

The researcher, an executive committee member of a registered non-profit organisation, the 1860 Indentured Labourers Foundation Verulam (ILFV) (1860 ILFV), holding the position of Research and Development, undertook this academic research as oral history, ethnographic research and social memory historiography are interesting avenues to research and record the past by communicating with contemporary organic intellectuals.

The 1860 ILFV, using a hard copy publication format, has previously recorded the stories and undocumented histories of the migrant Indian nationals (who were indentured people) who arrived in the Colony of Natal – consequently settled in the Republic of South Africa – and their descendants of this community.

For this article, key among the aspects under current research, investigation and review are the Indian diasporic cultural heritage and cultural transformation. The labourers came as Indian nationals, then experienced a shift in identity to become indentured workers, and their descendants now consider themselves South African citizens living in a democracy.

The singular case study of Mrs Singh introduces the aspects of cultural transformation, life and living in two continents during the co-existing political systems of indenture and colonisation and consequently leads the way for further research in this field of study.

### Literary review

From 1834 to the end of World War 1, Britain transported about two million Indian indentured workers to 19 colonies (Jain 1989). The Indian diaspora, a result of the indentured sugar cane workers includes but is not limited to Fiji, Ceylon, Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies, Mauritius, South Africa, Guyana, Malaysia, Uganda and Kenya. According to a Calcutta newspaper, *The Statesman* (05 August 1980), ‘Indians are ubiquitous’. Further to this, the newspaper article states that ‘there were then only five countries in the world where Indians have not yet chosen to stay: Cape Verde Islands, Guinea Bissau, North Korea, Mauritania and Romania’ (1980:n.d.) This was in 1980, more than 40 years ago.

Thirty years ago, according to an estimate, it is noted that (Clarke, Peach & Vertovec 1990):

8.6 million people of South Asian origin live outside the sub-continent, in the United Kingdom and Europe (1.48 million), Africa (1.39 million), Southeast Asia (958 000), North America (729 000), and the Pacific (954 000). (n.p.)

In 2020–2021, the Indian population in South Africa is approximately 2.5% of the total population. Hence, a need to historically understand the experiences of the indentured Indian nationals who arrived in this part of the world from 1860 until 1911. These are the experiences that can now be reported on unmediatedly by some of their South African descendants in terms of reflective memories.

Reviewing the book, *Chalo Jahaji: On a Journey through Indenture in Fiji* by (2012), Samaroo (2012), from the University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus, Trinidad states that this book is a:

[M]ilestone in subaltern studies, a biographical journey penned by a living relic of the indentured experience and a scholar whose thoroughly interdisciplinary approach is a good example for the anthropologist, the sociologist or the economist who wish

to see the proper integration of their disciplines in a major historical work. (n.p.)

Further to this review, another reviewer, Shlomowitz (2012), based at Flinders University of South Australia adds that:

Professor Lal has made a most distinguished contribution to scholarship on Indian indentured labour in Fiji. His research is characterized by the use of new methodological approaches to the study of history, and by a comprehensive consideration of both quantitative and literary sources. In beautifully written articles, he has arrived at fresh and novel findings. (n.p.)

Seecharan (2012), the third reviewer, working at the University of North London comments that:

Professor Lal has produced a body of work which makes him the premier scholar of the Indian diaspora. His meticulous research, the depth of scholarship, the empathy, and the elegance have earned him great respect among Indian diaspora scholars. The themes covered in this book are relevant to other overseas Indian communities; and they are handled with such mastery that his reputation is secured. (n.p.)

Finally, the fourth reviewer Moore (2012), based at the University of Queensland opines that:

Brij Lal's Chalo Jahaji is an intensely personal journey through his life and that of the 60,000 Indians who became girmityas in Fiji. The intricate history is measured, but Lal reveals himself and his family in a way historians seldom do. This proud grandson of a girmitya is equally a proud son of Fiji. Chalo Jahaji is Pacific history at its best: rigorous and critical, informative and involved. (n.p.)

In light of the work done on the Fiji indentured Indian labourers, there is an intrinsic motivation by the researcher to conduct and report on research around the South African indentured Indian labourers, with a specific focus on female sole breadwinners. Thus, a subjective reason by the researcher to delve into 'living relics' such as the wise Mr Singh who at 90 years of age was clearly able to reflect on his time with his paternal grandmother when he himself was an adult at the time of her passing, indeed, an adult at 29, with more than two decades of clear reflective memories.

Furthermore, it may be stated that 'Contemporary works on indenture have moved beyond macro studies, focusing instead on the "voice" of labourers in narrating the experience of indenture' (Sankaran 2012:68). The indentured labourers' 'efforts to maintain a sense of self while simultaneously negotiating significant social and cultural transformations in the context of overseas emigration' (Sankaran 2012:65) has not been researched in great depth in South Africa even though of great significance is 'the experiences of these little represented, poorly understood yet vitally important participants in the early Indian diaspora' (Sankaran 2012:65). Documenting the early experiences of the indentured Indian nationals and their subsequent descendants is value adding to the South African historical narrative as the history of South Africa is being rewritten with the objective and intention to decolonise the

educational curriculum. There is a need to include the indentured history in the school curriculum and higher education faculties as various political systems influenced and shaped not only South African but world history. Of importance is that (Modi 2010):

[M]ore than two million Indians are settled across the African continent, with a significant concentration found mainly in South Africa, the three east African countries of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, and Mauritius. (n.p.)

Conducting this literature review created new and greater interest as the researcher was able to unearth intensely emotive findings such as (Younger 2010):

As a result the stories I tell here are much like oral histories in that I try to let the local people tell the story as they want it told. Although we were dealing with people who were two or three generations removed from their ancestors who arrived there as indentured workers, they started most narratives by describing a grandmother or grandfather who had come on this or that ship settled on this or that plantation, and then had a miraculous experience that eventually had some role in the local history. (p. 16)

A search conducted on this book does not make any reference to cultural heritage and the consequent transformational culture. Hence, there is a need to research these aspects.

The available, suitable and relevant literature review for this research revealed that there is a severe lack of documentation and information on the topic under consideration. 'Academic research on the theme of cultural heritage and cultural transformation amongst indentured Indian national female breadwinners in South Africa' (Archary & Landman 2021). As there are:

[N]o available academic works on this aspect available, this article – as South African Indians reflect on their heritage of 160 years in the country of their birth – is an attempt at starting to chronicle. (n.p.)

aspects of cultural heritage and cultural transformation by reflecting on Mrs Singh's experiences. 'Literature referred to is not discussed in depth as the oral history interview provided original information and the reflective memories were captured and presented unmediated without interpretation' (Archary & Landman 2021).

The intention is (Archary & Landman 2021):

By merely pointing to the literature, the intention is to leave the reader with the vantage point of knowing where to commence reading in terms of their further personal research. Considering the literature examined and what gaps exist, it may be stated that case studies of widowed Indian national female breadwinners who lived in the Colony of Natal during indenture could not be found. (n.p.)

This article is the second in a three-part series (Archary & Landman 2021):

[H]op[ing] to encourage research on the gaps that exist in terms of experiences that widowed indentured Indian nationals living

during indenture endured with a focus on cultural heritage and cultural transformation. What has emerged from this qualitative ethnographic research is that many personal identities were necessary in order to survive the atrocities that were inflicted upon the indentured labourers. (n.p.)

Interestingly, for academics to note is that 'despite and through the various political systems, cultural transformation emerged and this allowed the Indian community in South Africa to remain behind' (Archary & Landman 2021). They chose, whether by force or voluntarily, not to 'return to India when their period of indenture terminated. Of note and importance is that deculturalisation did not take place as aspects of cultural heritage remained intact' (Archary & Landman 2021).

## Methodology

This narrative juxtaposing the relationship between the British-African-Indian cultures and communities during colonisation and indenture was necessary to ensure that the lack of knowledge that exists on the cultural heritage and cultural transformation is addressed. For the intentions of this article (Archary & Landman 2021):

[A] semi - structured questionnaire was utilised. The interview was not tape recorded. The respondent was satisfied with answering questions upon which the researcher then captured the answers by writing them down. (n.p.)

Mr Singh, is the president of the non-profit organisation, 1860 ILFV (Archary & Landman 2021):

Over the decades he has written extensively on the experiences of Indian labourers in South Africa. He was not interviewed in his official capacity as president but in his personal capacity. (n.p.)

The researcher informed Mr Singh of the aims and objectives of this research article. He provided written consent to participate in this study. Mr Singh understood that the information received would be for research and academic purposes only. The main interview was 'conducted by means of a telephonic conversation, even though a large part of the information was written down after the respondent had answered questions' (Archary et al.). In terms of current research around theology, religion, culture, heritage and cultural transformation the qualitative ethnographic research methodology is applied as it is noted that this methodology is most appropriate for this study as the respondent is a nonagenarian. The task [of ethnographers] is to document the culture, the perspectives and practices, of the people in these settings.

The aim is to 'get inside' the way each 'group of people sees the world' (Reeves, Kuper & Hodges 2008). A nonagenarian is an individual who is over the age of ninety – thus having lived for over nine decades. The decision-making differentiator in favour of the ethnographic research approach was – at 90 years of age at the research stage – the respondent was clearly able and competent to share his

memories of his paternal grandmother. Using qualitative data analysis, categories and patterns of meaning were identified under the thematic framework (Mestry & Singh 2007).

## Explanation of terms

### Culture

Culture is an extremely broad concept with countless possible definitions. A concise definition of culture may be understood as possibly all human conduct that is passed on from one generation to the next. Culture is not the prerogative of just one generation. It may be embodied in and shaped or adapted by later generations (Godwin & Gittel 2021).

### Cultural heritage

Cultural heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values. Cultural heritage may also 'include tangible culture and intangible culture. Tangible culture includes items such as buildings, monuments, landscapes, books, works of art, and artifacts' (Ahmad 2006). Intangible culture includes items such as folklore, traditions, language and knowledge. Natural heritage includes culturally significant aspects such as landscapes and biodiversity.

### Cultural transformation

Internationally, almost '1.2 million men, women and children emigrated from India under contracts of indenture, comprising a vast diasporic movement that transformed the cultural and demographic composition of receiving societies' (Waetjen & Vahed 2014). The Indian nationals 'were able to transplant, secure, and sustain their culture in the Caribbean amid westernization. The Caribbean experience, despite its authoritarian and repressive characteristics, transformed indentured Indians' (Roopnarine 2009). In the Colony of Natal, cultural transformation occurred as the indentured Indian labourers worked, interacted and lived among black Africans and were subjugated to an existence under British plantation owners and white rule.

## Interpretation of results

The tradition of 'using qualitative methods to study human phenomena is grounded in the social sciences' (Streubert & Carpenter 1999). For this article, commentary is provided under sub-themes which include cultural practices, cultural heritage, economic cultural activities and cultural transformation. The discussion includes the paradigmatic exposure to the mixing of foreign cultures, British and African with one's heritage culture, Indian, and the influence thereof. In addition, it must be noted that exposure to the 'mixing of a foreign culture with the heritage culture' (Cheon & Hong 2020) may threaten cultural identity and thereby trigger deculturalisation (Archary et al.). From the interviews, it was gleaned that aspects of the Indian cultural identity remained

intact and deculturalisation did not occur. Deculturalisation is viewed as the 'stripping away of a people's culture and replacing it with a new culture' (Kekeghe 2020:n.p.). Deculturalisation is a process. It leads to the deletion of the cultural orientation of a people, such as the indentured Indians to uphold and practise a new one in the host country. However, in the Colony of Natal not all aspects of the Indian culture were stripped away. To deculturate is to cause the loss of cultural characteristics, leading to the projection of a new culture. This did not happen holistically in the Colony of Natal. Because culture replicates the identity of a people – language, belief, norms and values of a people – deculturalisation is therefore a grave thing to occur to any human society (Kekeghe 2020:4). Mrs Singh was able to maintain aspects of her Indian identity, culture and value systems. Cultural heritage and cultural transformation conclude the interpretation of results.

## Structure

This research article is presented in four parts. Part One conceptualises the article by including the aims, reasons for this study, literature reviews, methodology, terminology, interpretation of results and structure of this study. Part Two, indicted as, arriving in the Colony of Natal, provides the *herstory* of Mrs T.M. Singh. Part Three which is entitled, Life experiences of Indian born indentured labourer Mrs T.M. Singh, includes commentary which is provided under sub-themes and includes the reflective memories as shared by the respondent. Part Four includes the conclusion with a focus on the challenges and theoretical postulations of the study.

## Part Two

### Arriving in the Colony of Natal – herstory of Mrs T.M. Singh

Circumstances surrounding Mrs T.M. Singh's arrival in the Colony of Natal were provided verbally by Mr Singh. During the interviews and general discussions, he shared this information with the author. Mrs Singh came to the Colony of Natal armed with her Indian heritage and culture. As she settled into life in the Colony, she understood and acknowledged the need to change aspects of her cultural heritage as the living and working conditions in the African continent were vastly different from the Indian sub-continent, the land of her birth. As an Indian national, now on African soil, she had to make various adjustments and adapt to, and adopt in doing things differently. In India, what seemed easy and simple, now seemed challenging to her. It was, however, a culture of survival that allowed her to cope. This contributed to her descendants now living as truly proud South African citizens; however, there is a cultural link with their Indian ancestry as their heritage provides a 'vaulting table' for personal growth and survival (Archary & Landman 2021:4). Certain aspects of dress, food, music, dance, religious understanding, child rearing, rituals, traditions, festivals, prayer, values and more are maintained by considering and applying aspects of the Indian heritage culture to life in Africa (Archary & Landman 2021:4). After her term of

indenture was over, Mrs Singh did not return to India, but remained with her children in the Colony of Natal and worked among the locals and lived under British rule while concurrently surviving under indenture conditions (Archary & Landman 2021:4).

Despite the Indian descendant now being in South Africa for over 160 years, during the changing stages of life – birth, puberty, marriage and death – heritage culture comes into play, providing guidance on what should be performed. Mrs Singh's story acknowledges that deculturalisation has not taken place despite colonisation, indenture, apartheid and democracy. Her heritage culture survived because of noninvasive deculturalisation. Organic intellectual Mr J.S. Singh was interviewed for this article as the primary respondent. Not much else is known about her parents, siblings or other family members.

## Part Three

### Life experiences of Indian-born indentured labourer Mrs T.M. Singh

Reflecting on his childhood, youth, adulthood and interactions with his paternal grandmother, Mr Singh was able to describe Mrs Singh's life experiences and these reflective memories address the issues of cultural heritage and cultural transformation during her life under African skies during indenture. The interviews with Mr Singh provided a unique opportunity to create themes that address the issues of culture, heritage and transformation.

### Cultural practices

While married and into her widowhood, Mrs Singh not only practised in her new country what she practised in India; but she took on more; she did more than she would ever have done in India. As she moved through the various phases of her life in the Colony, she did what she knew and believed to be right. She encouraged her children and then grandchildren to engage in cultural practices. On a daily basis she lit her lamp, prayed barefoot and ensured that her children were with her during this daily activity. They duly followed what she did. This enactment on their part, this repeated daily action and this entire traditional way of prayer continued until well into the adult life of her children. These religious activities were then continued by her married children even when they became parents. These simple daily practices are still enacted by her grandchildren, her great grandchildren and her great-great grandchildren today. These basic daily cultural practices have not been lost through the generations. Besides the daily practices, there are weekly practices, such as washing and decorating of the brass lamp, which she engaged in. These are still practised today by her descendants. And finally, there are calendrical activities which change on an annual basis in terms of actual dates. These activities are conducted on a more or less certain months of the year on a yearly basis. The following are some of the annual based observances: *Shiva Rathri, Hanuman Jayanthi, Krishna Janmashtami, Ganesha Chaturthi, Lakshmi Pooja, Nava Rathri,*

*Diwali* and many more depending on the deity being worshipped. Most, if not all, of these observances are still occurring among the Singh family descendants, some who incidentally are living around the globe.

Of significance to note is that all of these observances and practices were brought from India by Mrs Singh and even though they are still enacted to present day, there has been an inherent cultural transformation. For example, in India, prayer is offered at any time of day, whereas in the Colony of Natal, there are set patterned times in that the labourers could only pray before they leave for the farm in the morning and upon their return in the early evening. Getting used to this structured way of prayer timings is part of the transformation and acceptance in thought that new cultural habits need to be formed that are acceptable to different living conditions. Thus, this is an example of the cultural transformation that took place over the decades.

Engaging in cultural practices is still a part of Mr Singh's life as he lights the lamp on a daily basis, performs certain calendrical practices and engages the assistance of womenfolk from the family or temple to assist wherever and whenever possible.

### Cultural heritage

The first aspect of Indian cultural heritage is presented here as Mrs Singh was a well-known Ramayan reciter in the local community. The Ramayan is a religious Indian text. Reciting from the Ramayan is an oral-literate traditional habit and formed part of the cultural heritage activity among indentured Indians in Natal. According to Mr Singh 'The prayer room housed the Ramayan. Takurine was a great exponent of the Hindu religion-particularly the reciting of the Holy *Ramayan*' (Interview, 07 Feb 2018). Recitation of the Ramayan is an art and is viewed as a cultural activity. According to Mr Singh, 'My father and his sister listened to their mother when she prayed, sang or recited from the *Ramayan*' (Interview, 03 November 2020). Listening to their mother would have empowered them as young children and thus they followed and observed their cultural heritage. These recitations and activities were conducted within the confines of their Hindu home. As a single parent, Mrs Singh kept alive the cultural heritage in her home by reciting from the religious text and ensured that her two young school-going children listened and participated in these culture-based activities. Despite having to work on farming activities, keeping home and ensuring a safe environment for her children and herself, Mrs Singh probably realised that ensconcing her children in these cultural practices would provide a sense of emotional well-being.

### Economic cultural activities

Besides reading and reciting the Ramayan in the home, Mrs Singh engaged in cultural activities outside of her house in the local community. The principle of economic value for cultural work is presented in this article as in India the priests and community workers who engaged in cultural work, eked

a meagre living from whatever was given (as a form of monetary payment) to them in the form of 'dharshan'. For the purposes of this article, it is impossible to evaluate cultural activities exclusively based on the traditional methods of economics (Diniz & Machado 2011). However, looking at the concept of value from two viewpoints, which is the economic and the cultural value, provides a suitable framework for assessing the economic aspects of culture. Agreed, in South Africa, in the earlier decades (prior to the 1990s), there was traditional value in cultural activities but with time, more so during post-apartheid days, there developed a more structured economic value to cultural activities in South Africa. Initially, the Indian nationals 'performing cultural work were not paid a set rate fee for tasks performed' (Interview, 15 January 2021). Individuals like Mrs Singh, 'who performed cultural work, were given whatever the receiver could afford' (Interview, 15 January 2021). There was 'no structure to the economic or financial value of cultural work performed' (Interview, 15 January 2021). This was one of the aspects of cultural heritage that was maintained as the same situation took place in India. There was no set fee or rate charged for cultural activities in India and the Colony. However, with time, there has been a cultural transformation with regard to this aspect as the South African Hindu Maha Sabha, a Hindu regulatory body in South Africa has during the recent decades provided some sort of benchmark for what priests and cultural workers' rates should be. However, this cultural transformation did not take place during the life and times of Mrs Singh. But, it has taken place over time.

Furthermore, what can be noted as an aspect of cultural transformation was that women in the Colony of Natal were allowed to engage in a male-dominated world where oral culture was performed in the main by men. According to the respondent:

'My grandmother was highly respected as a religious leader and counsellor despite being a woman in a traditionally male-dominated society. She was very endearing and comforting by nature. During her period of religious guidance and presiding over Hindu rituals, there were several Hindu male priests in the community who were exclusive choices by custom and tradition to be engaged by families for religious/cultural functions and were paid Dakshina (voluntary fee).' (Interview, 07 February 2018)

Thus, it is safe to postulate that cultural transformation did take place as women in the Colony enjoyed a greater degree of freedom out of the local home in the Colony where culture was involved.

Added to the cultural transformational mix is the concept of traditional, non-financial value which saw a development or transformation on how value was hence construed. Value – a key concept in both economics and culture – forms a sort of bridge between them. Among the Indian nationals, monetary value was never discussed formally whenever cultural endeavours were carried out even though it created an impact in the Colony of Natal. Mrs Singh was involved in most of these endeavours, and Mr Singh indicated that:

'There was no significance attached to the financial value of cultural endeavours. Cultural endeavours included but were not limited to being in attendance during the birthing process, caring for the new mother, naming of babies, hair removal, naval care etc.; providing direction and advice during the wedding; ensuring that all rituals related to death-and-post-death were carried out.' (Interview, 15 January 2021)

Simultaneously, value was attached to colonial norms that were in place. 'Men, women and children worked the soil' (Interview, 15 January 2021). According to Mr Singh,

'There was restricted and limited rest or recreation time. Post work activities included cooking, cleaning, tending to personal affairs such as prayer, ritual and traditional activities. In earlier decades people devoted most of their time to the task of making a living.' (Interview, 15 January 2021)

Much of what is now considered to be art was formerly a part of daily life and worship and a part of the basic cultural norm of the community. In the displaced Indian community, Hindu women generally did not engage in cultural activities such as painting and art but over time they engaged in music, dance, knitting and traditional activities that revolved around prayer and rituals around the home.

According to Mr Singh 'My grandmother not only engaged in (these) cultural practices at home but in the local area as well' (Interview, 07 February 2018). However, others in the community were not inspired by the role of Mrs Singh during this period and meekly accepted prevailing norms and values of the time. The respondent shared further, 'Women married young, took care of the home and raised children. Takurine nurtured everyone before herself. Many preferred men to carry out tasks relating to cultural and religious practices' (Interview, 07 February 2018).

The diary of the late Pundit S.M. Maharaj of Verulam (Maharaj 1950) as shared by Mr Singh reveals:

'Takurine was a very religious person, and the Shree Gopal Lal Temple was her second home, organizing recitals, discourses on the *Ramayana* at the Temple. She often single-handed provided meals for the devotees of the Temple during Religious functions. Takurine was able to cross the threshold of home into the broader world of the prevailing society.' (Interview, 07 February 2018)

In doing this – crossing the threshold of home – it must be noted that this is an explicit example of the cultural transformation that evolved over time in the Colony and then continued into the Union of South Africa, which is the political time frame under which Mrs Singh lived.

### Cultural transformation

When the Indians emigrated to Natal, that entire migratory episode in world history was based on financial decision making. In respect of the calibre of Mrs Singh and many other mothers like her, the respondent shares:

'Shortly upon arriving in the new continent they discovered that many a financial decision had to be made and these women assisted their husbands with those decisions, something that the women in India did not do as the patriarchy system was so deeply entrenched. Men and mainly fathers or elder brothers / sons made all financial decisions in India. Later generation Indian women ran their own households in South Africa and were not only allowed to study, engage in industrial work or earn money but have been jointly responsible for financial affairs at their homes.' (Interview, 15 January 2021)

Mrs T.M. Singh was enabled to manage the Singh household finances as she was widowed and to ensure the survival of her family, she would have had to repeatedly consider costs in making financial decisions. According to the respondent 'My grandmother was contracted to supply milk to the local jail' (Interview, 07 February 2018). This is but one example of a decision-making endeavour of financial value. While first generation migrants typically retain the values of their society of origin, later generations shift about 50% of the way from their parents' values towards non-migrant values (Mesoudi 2018). Having to forcibly handle financial capital bears witness to the embedded cultural transformation that took place.

## Part Four Conclusion

This article aspired to chronicle Indian diasporic cultural heritage and cultural transformation spanning just under two centuries marked by different historical periods in the lives of an Indian community in South Africa (Archary & Landman 2021):

It spans from modern day enslavement through an indenture system, life under the Union of South Africa through to South Africa's break from the British Commonwealth of Nations up to the period under apartheid. (n.p.)

## Challenges

Firstly, the period under review is 'too wide to cover in a short qualitative ethnographic research article such as this on' (Archary et al.); therefore, a series of three articles have been offered. Secondly, 'Mrs Singh passed away in the Colony of Natal, in 1959, two continents apart, separated by oceans and discerning time differences' (Archary et al.); thus, there is a great reliance on the reflective memories of Mr Singh. The challenge is to document as much as possible while nonagenarians are alive as they give a voice to another political timeframe especially when 'sugar cane plantations flourished across the world, and in the British owned Colony of Natal low-cost labour was needed'. (Archary & Landman 2021)

Further and necessary research on (Archary & Landman 2021):

[A]ccounts of South African and world history, even though they are not discussed here because of the scope of this article, will yield a clearer historiography. The abbreviated literature review

information provides a platform which indicates that the Indian community in South Africa have Indian roots spanning just under two centuries. (n.p.)

## Theoretical postulations

The aim of this article is to chronicle – by highlighting the narrative on Mrs Singh through reflective memories – aspects of Indian cultural heritage in colonial South Africa during the period of indenture. Some of Mrs Singh's life experiences are highlighted to relay the issues of cultural heritage during life under indenture in Natal by commenting on aspects of cultural transformation that resulted in the Colony during the period under review. This aspect of the article affirms that cultural heritage is the main theme of this article as the Indian cultural heritage has been maintained over the generations; however, with time, rooted cultural transformation has taken place. The cultural transformation took place during Mrs Singh's life and after her death. The cultural transformation of the Indian nationals who lived under colonial rule did develop, even though the Indian nationals continued to practise their oral traditions and religious habits. It may be postulated that cultural transformation in the Indian community in South Africa occurred as this community had to find an emotive yet practical way to survive across the oceans in the Indian diaspora.

In conclusion, this is a brief statement as to how the Indian labourers were brought to the Port of Natal (Archary & Landman 2021):

The matriarch outlived the official period of indenture which terminated in 1911. Widowed by 1908, she had to take care of her two children who were born in the Colony and she personally lived as a sole breadwinner in Natal. (n.p.)

The Singh descendants, even though they are South Africans, now live in a democracy but others have moved to other parts of the world. In South Africa, Jaisingh Surujbullee Singh (Archary & Landman 2021):

[A] retired school principal represents the Singh family. He is the voice of this ethnographic research article on cultural heritage and transformation culture as he witnessed the various life experiences of his paternal grandmother. Still lucid, of good health and of clear thought at age 90, he was able to share many reflective memories of her, knowing and having her company until the age of 29. (n.p.)

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## Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Author's contributions

K.K.A. is the sole author of this article.

## Ethical considerations

Mr Singh, the respondent, was informed of the aims and objectives of this research article, and gave written consent to participate in this study. He also understood that the information received would be for research and academic purposes only. The main interview was conducted by means of a telephonic conversation, even though a major percentage of the information was written down after the respondent had answered questions.

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## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article, as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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