

Women and migration in South Africa - historical and literary perspectives*

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When Indians migrated from India to Natal in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as both indentured and free Indians, women were an important component of the newcomers. The lives of indentured women have only recently begun to gain critical attention in South African historiography. The narratives of free or 'passenger' Indian women have largely been narrated from the vantage point of 'passenger' males in the context of their arrival and settlement in Natal. The inclusion of their narratives into the history of Indian South Africans will stimulate a rethinking of the gendered experiences of Indian immigrants in the context of concomitant differences among ethnic groups, social mobility, and the processes of acculturation and integration. Moreover, it will bring to the fore a category of immigrant women whose histories have yet to be fully explored and documented.

Keywords: immigrant women in Natal; gender; immigration narratives; Indian diaspora.

Introduction

In the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the desire for cheap labour in the British colonies led to the settlement of both indentured and free Indian communities in Fiji, the Caribbean, Mauritius and South Africa. In South Africa, Indians who arrived under normal immigration laws were popularly known as 'passenger' Indians because they paid their own fares and were not contractual labourers. Women formed an important component of this group. Whilst indentured women came as contractual workers to labour on the plantations and mines, women of 'passenger' descent (henceforth referred to as 'passenger' women) arrived as free migrants who came to Natal to join their spouses as part of family migration in the early twentieth century. The differentiated status between these two groups led to diverse migratory experiences. 'Passenger' women led transnational lives. Whilst their spouses were trying to sustain a livelihood, they were charged with managing the household and the children in India. Family links were sustained by letters and intermittent trips and women only arrived in Natal once their spouses were financially stable. It is the lives of these women that this article seeks to explore here.

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Global Indian migration to the British colonies in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been the subject of numerous scholarly works. In recent years, critical feminist perspectives have begun to theorize the gendered dimensions of the ‘South Asian’ migratory process and have made significant contributions to debates on the diversity and complexity of women’s diasporic experiences (Hole 2005; Jain 2009; Hajratwala 2009; Hiralal 2013). The lives of indentured women have been analysed in the context of race, class, agency, sexuality and resistance (Lal 1985; Reddock 1985; Carter 1994). These works not only privilege women’s experiences, but also aim to reverse social constructs of women as oppressed and subjugated. Sadly, historical accounts of women of ‘passenger’ origin are absent. In South African historiography, similar trajectories of historical absence can be discerned. Historical accounts of immigrant women have largely focused on the lives of European women in the Cape Colony, Transvaal and Natal (Beall 1982; Van Helten and Williams 1983; Erlank 1995, 1996; Parle 1995). Erlank analysed the lives of settler and missionary wives in the Cape, who worked alongside men and performed various occupations, including teachers, hat makers, seamstresses and shopkeepers (Erlank 1995, 64). Van Helten and Williams have argued that the emigration of British women in the Transvaal was motivated by nationalism, which perceived these women as ‘imperial mothers’, as well as by the demand of the imperial bourgeoisie for colonial domestic labour (Van Helten and Williams 1983, 18). Parle and Beall have highlighted the experiences of settler women in Natal in the context of motherhood, social control and their contribution to the colonial economy (Beall 1982, 109-110; Parle 1995, 36). Studies of immigrant women of Indian descent have focused primarily on indentured labourers (Beall 1990; Badassy 2005; Essop Sheik 2005). Discussions have centred on issues of economic exploitation, agency and resistance. The histories and experiences of women of ‘passenger’ origin remain extremely under-researched. Moreover, discourses on the ‘passenger’ Indians as a migrant group have been narrated from predominantly male perspectives, focusing on their arrival, settlement and economic hardships (Bhana and Brain 1990; Hiralal 2009). Women have been treated as an adjunct to men because they came as part of family migration. In academic literature, phrases such as ‘migrants and their families’ or ‘male migrants, their wives and children’ are very common. In many ways, the historical experiences of ‘passenger’ women are subsumed in the history of the Indian community as a whole. Thus the silence and invisibility of women and their presumed passivity in the migration process needs to be rectified. In this article, I utilize both historical and literary sources to uncover these silenced narratives.

One of the challenges in reconstructing an accurate gendered view of the migration of ‘passenger’ Indians is the absence of archival records such as passenger lists, captains’ logs and Medical Reports and Port Records. Whilst these records exist for indentured Indian women, they lack neutral perspectives and are ingrained with male bias and subjectivities. The Protector’s Report often adopted a paternalistic view of women, describing new arrivals as being of a ‘lowly class, of the usual stamp’ and infected with ‘the usual amount of venereal disease’. (Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants 1884-1889, 1894-1895, Beall 1982, 164). Recent historical and literary scholarship has sought to rectify these biases through life histories and a critical appraisal of Indian women’s literary works (Govinden 2008; Rajab 2011). Govinden (2008) uses several genres – poetry, autobiographies, short stories and essays – to highlight the complexities and challenges of life under colonial and apartheid society. In so doing she unearths lived experiences of Indians in contexts of identity, home and belonging (Govinden 2008). Rajab uses personal narratives to illuminate the changing status of women of Indian origin from early indenture to their current day status in post-apartheid South Africa. She examines their socio-economic political challenges in the context of identity, culture, religion and societal norms and brings to the fore the lost voices and experiences of women who are often ignored in public discourse (Rajab 2011). This article uses narratives derived from historical and literary sources to capture the diverse and unique experiences of ‘passenger’ Indian women. Historical sources such as immigration court cases, colonial reports and newspapers provide valuable insights into how gender relations, patriarchy, familial and societal factors intertwine to influence and shape women’s decision to migrate. Literary texts such as autobiographies and short stories capture the migration experiences of men and women upon arrival in the new country in the context of changing gender roles, spousal relationships and family dynamics.

This article locates the discussion at three levels: the pre-migration stage, the transition stage and the post-migration stage (Boyd and Grieco 2003). In the pre-migration stage, I examine how gender relations, patriarchy, individual, familial and societal factors intertwine to influence and shape women’s decision to migrate. The transition stage explores how women’s identity and citizenship rights in the migration process are, by and large, constructed by their ‘dependent’ status and how immigration policies, which are gendered, affect men and women differently, to the extent that they hinder, prevent and delay women’s decision to migrate. The post-migration stage examines the impact of migration on the status of men and women in the context of assimilation and integration, as well as the impact it has

on those still living in the country of origin (Boyd and Grieco 2003). By examining gendered migration at these three different levels, this article foregrounds women experiences and de-masculinises migration. Migration is no longer viewed as male-centred and the diverse and unique experiences of immigrant women can be discerned. The inclusion of the narratives of 'passenger' women into the historiography of Indian South Africans will stimulate a rethinking of gendered experiences of Indian immigrants in the context of concomitant differences among ethnic groups, social mobility, and the processes of acculturation and integration.

Demographic Profile

'Passenger' women came from very diverse backgrounds in terms of language, religion, place of origin, caste and ethnic group. While Bombay, Calcutta and Madras were key embarkation ports, the majority of the migrants came from the Bombay Presidency, large parts of which are found in what is known as the state of Gujarat today. In the late nineteenth century, the Bombay Presidency consisted partly of British districts and partly of native states under the administration of a governor. Migrants from the Bombay Presidency were predominantly Gujarati speaking Hindus and Muslims. The Gujarati Hindus were stratified along caste lines (Desai 1987, 44-45). For example, the agricultural groups comprising of the Kanbis, Kolis and the artisan group including the Mochis (shoe-makers) and Dhobis (washer-men), came mainly from the British districts of Bombay City, Ahmedabad, Broach, Kaira, Surat, Thana, Ahmednagar, Khandesh (partitioned into two districts in 1906), Nasik, Poona, Satara, Sholapur and Ratnagiri, all located in present day Maharashtra. The Sonis (jewellers) came from the native states of Cutch and Kathiawar, from villages, such as Ranavav, from Bhanvad, in particular the inland districts of Rajkot, Morvi, Gondal and the coastal districts of Porbander, Bhavnagar, Mandvi and Jamnager along the Gujarat peninsula (IRD 162/1898; CSO 1593 5118/1897; Bhana and Brain 1990; 6). The Gujarati Muslims were also divided along linguistics and sect lines. The Memons came from Porbander in Kathiawar and the Sunni Bohras who spoke Gujarati came from Surat. Women migrants also came from Calcutta and Madras. In Madras Presidency, Kilpaikum and Coimbatore were the common areas of origin. A few women migrants also came from Port Louis in Mauritius (*The South African Indian Who's Who 1936-1937*, 92-93, 107-109). A small percentage of Christian Indians also came from Bombay; from present day Tamil Nadu - Egmore and Hales Gardens in Madras, Pondicherry, Palaveram, Tinnevely, Nellore; from Travancore (Indian State of

Kerala); from Bangalore (Indian State of Karnataka) - Goa; Calcutta and Port Louis in Mauritius (Brain 1983, 149-156).

Pre-Migration Stage

In this section I examine how gender relations, patriarchy, individuals, familial and societal factors intertwine to influence and shape women's decision to migrate, while producing differential outcomes for men and women (Boyd and Grieco 2003). The migration of 'passenger' women to the colony of Natal at the beginning of the twentieth century was largely characterized by family migration. In other words, women migrated as part of families, either with their spouses or with their minor children to join their spouses who were already settled in Natal. 'Passenger' Indian migration to colonial Natal in the 1880s was established through chain migration, specifically male migration chains, which facilitated the emigration process – earlier migrants consisted of fathers, relatives and friends who provided employment and accommodation for new arrivals. On arrival men worked as apprentices, and later, after acquiring sufficient funds, would set up a store. Their occupations varied. Some engaged in both skilled and semi-skilled work: shoemaker, tailor, accountant, laundry worker, jeweler, salesmen, hawker (fruit and vegetables); whilst others owned or managed small retail stores (Interview, Keshav Makan 2011). Men's decision to migrate alone was governed by the desire to acquire financial security before asking their families to join them. This male-centred pattern of migration can be discerned from official reports and statistical data. According to a Government Report in 1921, there was a large discrepancy between the numbers of married Indian men and women due to 'the custom among resident Indians of keeping their wives in India, where they are visited by their husbands at intervals. Thus a commercial or business domicile is maintained in the Union, but a domicile of home and family, that is, true domicile in such cases is retained in India' (Asiatics GG 913 15/1222).

The Report also comments on the low population figures amongst free Indians in the Union, 'It [the Indian migrant population] certainly has not increased to an alarming extent This would be owing partly to the fact that until comparatively recently few Indians had their wives in this country' (Report of the Asiatic Inquiry Commission 1921, 2) and the low birth rate, 'owing to many females remaining in India, while the majority of males are in South Africa' (Report of the Asiatic Inquiry Commission, 1921, 26). Statistical data on 'passenger' women reinforce the above statements. The male female ratio was skewed: for

example, in the Transvaal in April 1904, 'Asiatic' males totaled 9,799 and females 1,522. The number of 'passenger' women arriving between 1903 and 1907 were as follows: 1903: total number of women and children who landed in Natal, 260: 51 women and 209 children; in 1904, 42 women and 134 children; in 1905, 48 women and 195 children; in 1906, 69 women and 237 children and in 1907, 71 women and 139 children (*Indian Opinion* 22 February 1908; *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 489-490).

Social and cultural norms also influenced women's decision to migrate. Patriarchal attitudes and cultural beliefs determined women's mobility. Traditional Indian society was highly patriarchal, with women occupying a secondary status; their primary role was that of wives and mothers. Young girls were discouraged from engaging in higher education and the system of 'purdah' (or seclusion) restricted women's social and economic mobility. In most instances, family and community elders determined a woman's decision to travel abroad, as well as when women should travel and with whom. Oral narratives provide useful information on this aspect of women's migration. For example, Keshav Makan, grandson of Naran Makan, recalls his grand-mother's experience. Tapi Naran Makan travelled with her husband to Natal on board the *SS Surat*, via the *Indian African Line of Steamers* in 1916. Their main port of embarkation was Calcutta, via Delagoa Bay in East Africa. They purchased third class tickets which cost 75 rupees. According to family folklore, the local *panchayat*² forbade Tapi from accompanying her husband to Natal as she was four months pregnant. They considered it inauspicious for a pregnant woman to travel across the seas. Naran and Tapi defied the ruling of the *panchayat* by travelling to Calcutta where they boarded a ship for Natal on 10 June 1916 (Interview, Keshav Makan 2011). Women rarely travelled alone. In most instances they were accompanied by their spouses or at the very least their children or relatives. The majority of women arriving during this period came either with their spouse or a close family member or friends (Northern Natal Kshatriya Silver Jubilee 1984, 17).

Familial obligations, responsibilities and local economic conditions also affected and shaped women's decision to migrate. Most 'passenger' male migrants came from regions which were predominantly rural, and agriculture was the main source of livelihood. Men were primarily agricultural workers and women tended to domestic duties. Men's migration to Natal meant that women were now tasked to carry on with the agricultural work as well as

taking care of their families. Immigration court cases provide interesting accounts of how men's migration led to changing dynamics of the nuclear family (which was essentially patriarchal) and gender roles. For example, Kanjee Davah arrived in the Colony in 1896, at the age of 12. He stayed at 79 Prince Edward Street in Durban for several years. He returned to India in 1911 to visit his ailing mother. Upon her death, he inherited three houses and 40 acres of land. Whilst in India he married and had a child. On his return to Natal in 1913, he decided to make Natal his 'permanent home, with his family' but, 'did not bring them because there would be no one to look after my land in India... . My wife looks after my land in India... .' (IRD KCM 99/53/7). Similarly, Mahomed Yousoof Kajee arrived with his father in Natal in 1897 when he was eight years old. He remained in Natal for several years and later secured a wife in India in 1912. In 1913, he returned to Natal without his wife, as 'she had property of her own there' and was 'taking care of the property' (IRD KCM 99/53/7).

Transition Stage

Another factor that influenced women's decision to migrate was immigration policies in Natal, which were gendered and racist. Migration laws and regulations determined the entry of men and women into Natal in two ways. Firstly, migration policies characterised the male as the primary citizen and females as dependents. A married women seeking entry into Natal (and later the Union) could only enter the country if her spouse had a valid domicile status. Women rarely arrived as independent candidates. Thus married women's identity and citizenship rights in the migration process were, by and large, constructed by their relation to men. Secondly, the fact that women were defined as 'dependents' meant that the state placed women in the context of a family role as opposed to being a labour commodity (Boyd and Grieco 2003). By contrast, the entry of indentured Indian women was sanctioned by colonial laws that viewed these women as important labour units within the political economy of Natal.

During the colonial period, migration policies in Natal were racist and aimed at curtailing and regulating the entry of 'passenger' Indians. The Immigration Restriction Bill of 1897 and its amendments in 1903 barred the entry of immigrants who were not literate in English. This seriously affected Indian immigrants who were not fluent in the language. Moreover, domicile residence could only be acquired after three years of residence (Bhana and Brain 1990, 131-135; Report of the Immigration Officer 1900, 66-67; IRD KCM File 5

99/53/5). This might explain both the visual and statistical absence of ‘passenger’ women in the colonies. However, their numbers began to gradually increase after 1913. This was primarily due to the passing of the Indian Relief Act of 1913, which allowed for the entry of one wife and the minor children of a resident Indian. However, the Cape Town Agreement of 1927 required minor children of South African born or resident Indians born outside the Union, to enter the country within three years of their birth, accompanied by their mothers (Joshi 1942, 138-145). These acts not only hastened family migration, but also inevitably increased the number women of ‘passenger’ origin, by making them a more settled, visible and permanent part of the Indian population in Natal and the Union. For example, the entry of ‘passenger’ women for the years 1914 and 1917 were as follows: 1914:53; 1915:115; 1916:137 and 1917:108.³ By 31 December 1940, the total number of new immigrants (i.e. wives and children arriving in Natal and the Transvaal) totaled 2,212 (*Indian Views* 17 February 1941; Report of the Asiatic Inquiry Commission 1921; Report of the Indian Colonization Enquiry Committee 1933-1934).

Women’s dependent status as immigrants was particularly noticeable in the implementation of the immigration policy and the procurement of travel documents. For example, during the colonial period, ‘passenger’ women and minor children accompanying their spouses to Natal had their status endorsed on their spouses’ domicile certificates (Indian Immigration Appeal Board, Natal Supreme Court, KCM 99/53/4). After 1910, the immigration laws of the colonies were consolidated by the Immigrants Regulation Act No. 22 of 1913, which to a large extent aimed to curtail free Indian immigration.⁴ This Act and subsequent amendments spearheaded a paper trail of documentation for ‘passenger’ women seeking to join their spouses in the Union. The D.I 91 form facilitated the entry of wives. In 1918, Ibrahim Patel wanted his wife in India to join him in Natal. He had to secure a copy of his marriage certificate from the Magistrate in Surat. It requested biographical details of his wife as well as her thumb impression. The marriage certificate reads:

This is to certify that the following thumb impression of Havabibi daughter of Isap Jiva Davji of Kathor, a village in the Taluka of Kamrej, District Navsari, have been taken in my presence; and that she is the only legally married wife of Ibrahim Suleman Patel of Kathor, District Navsari, (holder of a Certificate of Domicile No. 5304 dated Point, Port Natal 6th May 1910) having been married at Kathor, District Navsari on the 2nd day of Shaban 1336 Higri, corresponding to the 12th day of May 1918. (IRD Indian Immigration Appeal Board, KCM 99/53/5)

The marriage certificate had a rubber stamp which read ‘Magistrate of the First Class: signed by Jamandan Pattiakji, Honorable Magistrate of Surat’ dated 23 December 1918. Similarly, Thakor Narotam Bhoola sought the entry of his wife, Bai Tapi in 1924. She was born in Rander, Surat in 1907 (D. Vallabh, Indian Immigration to Natal with Special reference to Narotam Bhoola 1983, 5-6). His wife applied for a passport which was issued on 7 November 1924. Under the section ‘Observations’, the Immigration Officer in Bombay wrote, ‘The holder is proceeding to join her husband in Natal. She holds a certificate of relationship’ (D. Vallabh, Indian Immigration to Natal with Special reference to Narotam Bhoola 1983, 5-6). When Bai Tapi’s husband made an application for her entry to Natal, he had to fill out a Certificate of Identity (CI) form. This was then forwarded to the Immigration Officer in Surat, Bai Tapi’s residential district. The magistrate in Rander verified the marriage between Bai Tapi and Thakor. The CI contained the following information about Bai Tapi: full names, place of residence and birth, date of birth and marriage, height, distinguishing scars, impressions of right and left thumb and a photograph of the applicant. However, when Bai Tapi arrived in Natal on 16 December 1924, she was declared a ‘prohibited immigrant’ because the CI form was deemed incomplete and Thakor had not submitted the form in due time to officials in Bombay. Thus, Thakor had to rely on friends and family in Rander to provide additional information that the Immigration Office in Natal requested. The Immigration Officer, GW Dick, wrote to Thakor on 31 December 1924, ‘Mr Bhoola is requested to instruct his friends in Rander to get in to touch with the magistrate at the place in order to supply the necessary information in regard to his marriage to Tapi’ (Vallabh, Indian Immigration to Natal with Special reference to Narotam Bhoola, 5-6). These examples clearly indicate that patriarchal norms characterized the manner in which travel documents were verified and processed.

Women’s status as ‘dependents’ also made them socially and legally vulnerable. They faced double discrimination in the context of race and gender, as migrants of Indian origin and because of their status as women. While the Natal and later the Union government permitted the entry of wives and minor children through legal channels, women were still subjected to multiple vulnerabilities, in relation to the legal rights of widows of domiciled Indians, the non-recognition of customary Indian marriages and spousal violation of their migration rights. The following brief case studies illustrate some of these points.

Women’s resident or domicile rights in Natal were sometimes prejudiced by the death of their spouses or through prolonged absence from Natal. The case of Mariam Goga is very

interesting. She resided in the colony between 1893 and 1898. In 1898, her husband successfully applied for a certificate of domicile. Her name was endorsed on the certificate as the legitimate wife to the satisfaction of the Immigration Officer. In 1898, she departed with her husband for India. Mariam stayed on in India but her husband returned to Natal within a year due to business commitments. He made frequent trips to India between 1898 and 1920. On one of these visits, in 1920, his health deteriorated and he subsequently died. Following his death, Mariam sought re-entry into Natal in 1920, but this was denied because of her 'prolonged absence' from the colony (Immigration Restriction Appeal Board, KCM 99/53/4). Similarly, a woman named Kasthoor challenged an Immigration Restriction Board ruling, which declared her a 'prohibited immigrant' in 1928. Kasthoor had left the colony in 1909 and lived in India for 20 years whilst her husband ran a business in Natal. In 1929, whilst on a trip to India, her husband suddenly died. After his death, Kasthoor sought re-entry. She claimed her right of entry into Natal based on two premises: firstly she was a widow of a domiciled Indian and secondly, she had been a resident in Natal between 1904 and 1909. Her appeal was denied by the immigration authorities, who claimed that being a widow of a domiciled Indian who died abroad did not entitle her to residential rights; in other words, she had 'no right of entry' (Immigration Restriction Appeal Board, KCM 99/53/3). Thus her right of entry was nullified upon her husband's death. Whilst highlighting women's vulnerable position, the above examples also show that women sought to protect their rights both as women and as migrants, and were not necessarily passive or victims in the migration process.

In some instances the migratory rights of 'passenger' women immigrants were violated by their spouses. The story of Fatima Ebrahim is a case in point. Fatima married Cassim Ebrahim in Dundee in 1915. In 1921 Cassim successfully applied for a Certificate of Identity for Fatima which permitted her to visit India and secure her re-entry into Natal. Cassim and Fatima visited India in 1923. Whilst in India, Cassim contracted a second marriage to a woman named Ayesha according to Muslim rites. Cassim returned to Natal on 30 July 1924 on board the *SS Karapara*, accompanied by his second wife, Ayesha. Cassim indicated to the IRO that Fatima did not intend returning to Natal due to illness. He could not bring both his wives to Natal as the Immigration Restriction Act 22 of 1914 did not recognize polygamous marriages and allowed the entry of only one wife of a resident Indian. However, Fatima's father, Osman Alarakhta, challenged his son-in-law and indicated to the IRO that Cassim's statement was false and that his daughter had every intention of returning to Natal and resuming her residence there (Immigration Restriction Appeal Board, 1925, KCM

99/53/1). Thus Cassim sought to manipulate the immigration laws for his own personal gain by taking a new wife and securing her entry into Natal, which denied his first wife her legitimate right of residency in Natal.

The non-recognition of Indian customary marriages led to many women of 'passenger' origin being declared 'prohibited immigrants'. This was exacerbated in March 1913 when Judge Malcolm Searle of the Cape High Court nullified all non-Christian marriages. This did not affect indentured Indians who were required by Section 14 of Law 12 of 1872 to register their marriages at the Protector's Office (Report of the Protector of Immigrants for the year 1884, 11). This judgment resulted in many women being declared 'prohibited immigrants'. For example, Munchi and Bhagwan Bhika were married in India in 1895 according to Hindu rites. Bhagwan arrived in Natal without his wife in 1896 and lived in Durban for several years. In 1912 he returned to India and in 1913 his wife accompanied him to Natal. The Immigration Officer allowed Bhika to enter the province, but not Munchi. She was declared a 'prohibited immigrant' because 'he was not satisfied that she was the legal wife of Bhika' and 'her marriage in India is one which would not be recognised by the laws of this Province' (Indian Immigration Appeal Board, 1913, KCM 99/53/5). Hundreds of similar cases were brought before the Natal Supreme Court. Some women were deported to India, whilst others were involved in lengthy, protracted court cases. Given the serious implications of the Searle judgment in the context of migratory rights and 'the honour of Indian womanhood' (*Indian Opinion* 10 May 1913), many supported the call to protest against the judgment. The non-recognition of Indian marriages alongside other discriminatory measures that Indians were subjected to led to the 1913 Satyagraha movement (Mongia 2006, 130-149; Hiralal 2009, 1-22). As a result of the protests, the Seale judgment was reversed and the Indian Relief Bill of 1914 allowed the entry of only one wife and minor children into the Union and validated all non-Christian marriages (Hiralal 2009, 20-21).

Post-Migration Stage

This section examines the impact of migration on the status of men and women on arrival in the new country in the context of changing gender roles, spousal relationships and family dynamics. More specifically, it seeks to explore how gendered migration impacts on life in the home left behind.

In light of limited sources on ‘passenger’ Indian women, literary texts are valuable in highlighting the experiences of immigrants in the colonial and post-colonial context (Govinden 2008, 174). For example, between 29 July and 23 December 1911, a short story titled *Dakshin Afrika Darshan yane Be Mitre-no Samvaad*, (Introducing South Africa or Dialogue of Two Friends), was written anonymously by *Ek Hindi* (An Indian). It appeared in a local Indian newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, and is based on two Gujarati childhood friends living in Durban, Udayshankar and Manharram. Their conversation centres on immigration challenges and men whose families have been left behind in India (Bhana and Bhoola 2004, 1). This short story is one of the few available literary examples providing insight into migrant families and their hardships in Natal.

In this dialogue, Manharram tries to convince Udayshankar to send for his wife. Manharram’s wife, Manorba, who lives in Durban, supports her husband and states, ‘If you send for Leelavati, we will visit your home, she can visit here and we can exchange news, and at the same time relieve our frustrations and boredom’ (Bhana and Bhoola 2004, 18). However, Udayshankar’s response outlines several reasons for her delayed arrival:

Firstly, there is the cost of her coming. I cannot afford second or first class fare ... Secondly, there will be increased expenses. We barely earn £5 to £10 a month ... Those living in India have great expectations of money from us. What hope is there to save even a penny if we have the expense of maintaining a household here? It would be difficult to afford the fare if we do have to return to India ... Thirdly there are no facilities for women to move about as freely as they can in India. They feel confined because they cannot meet friends and relatives, and feel frustrated ... Fourthly, this country does not have adequate maternity facilities for the delivery of babies ... Fifthly, should anyone unfortunately suffer sudden, serious illness, there would be no one to care for the person. In such cases of emergency, should one manage business or nurse the patient? (Bhana and Bhoola 2004, 19)

It is clear from the above quote that gender relations and hierarchies within the family shaped and influenced women’s decision to migrate. In this instance, Udayshankar was not ready to send for his wife, Leelavati, as he was not financially stable. He did not have funds to purchase her travel ticket, let alone maintain a family in Durban. What is more, the economic and social conditions in Durban, as well as the lack of resources in terms of health and educational amenities, hindered her settlement in Natal. The decision as to whether or not she should migrate to Durban was determined by her husband, who was clearly the head of the household.

The impact of migration on families left behind in India is clearly reflected in a letter written by Leelavati to her husband, Udayshankar:

Umreth

My Beloved

I take the liberty of writing since I have not had the pleasure of a letter for a long time. Just like a fish that suffers without water but eats as long as it lives. I am fretting night and day in sleeplessness to see you. Have a little compassion! Why is Prabhu [God] not changing your mind? Money has become everything to you. Oh, yes, forgotten wife is always there but money won't be there. So be it, but you do not even yearn to see your aged father? Day by day I am getting frailer. As the days of separation increase so my lifespan is getting shorter. I do not want anything from you except to see you. I am longing to satisfy that desire. If I have written more than I should I beg your forgiveness. All are well. My only entreaty before I seal this letter is for you to return.

Your obedient servant

Leelavati (Bhana and Bhoola 2004, 48).

Parents also missed their sons dearly. The extract below is from a letter written by Udayshankar's father, Panshankar:

With blessings I write that I have not received a letter from you in the last two to three months and am worried. All the relatives are happy, and are waiting for you night and day to return. I have now become old. ... Bhai, the house without you appears like a smashaan (crematorium). Therefore if you are expecting to see your aged father, then as soon as you receive this letter, take the first available ship to come home (Bhana and Bhoola 2004, 47).

These letters are important in that they highlight the links between the 'homeland' and the new 'home'. They provide a personal and more candid account of gender and family relationships, more particularly, the highly transient lives of women left behind in India, that often go unrecorded (Immigration Restriction Appeal Board, KCM 99/53/3).

The impact of migration on gender relations, family dynamics and patriarchy is also clearly reflected in Zuleika Mayat's book *A Treasure Trove of Memories – Reflections on the Experiences of the Peoples of Potchefstroom* (1990). Her book focuses on the lives of her immigrant family who hailed from India and settled in the Transvaal, and deals with the

challenges they endured under colonial and apartheid rule. Mayat's recollections are based on 'memory', but 'can be read in a transnational context, for the way they highlight typical experiences of immigrants in a post-colonial world' (Govinden 2008, 174). Mayat recalls the long absences of spouses away from home and the impact it had on women in the villages in India:

Like so many in the villages, they had to be content with husbands commuting from South Africa every other year. They were left behind to take care of the family estates, to look after the aged ones who were reluctant to leave the security of home and environment and to see to the education of the young ones since the facilities in South Africa were rather limited. The entire lives of these women were centred on the comings and goings of their husbands and sons (Mayat 1990).

Moreover, Mayat highlights the adaption and assimilation challenges of immigrant women in diasporic locations *via* the experiences of her mother, who was born in India and later arrived in Natal. According to Govinden (2008, 184), 'Mayat's mother is able to straddle the dividing line between perpetuating the texture of life lived in India in terms of gender roles and adapting to the demands of living in a new land'. Images of the past 'home' were kept alive through memory and were transferred into narratives by her mother, her aunts and relatives whilst performing domestic chores. Mayat recalls:

As custodians of family and community traditions, they were busy cooking, entertaining, sewing, arranging receptions and keeping daughters in tow. This was my mother's life too, when she had arrived from India (Mayat 1990, 158).

Thus traditional gender roles were refigured due to economic hardships. Mayat's mother, a Muslim woman 'heavily cloaked in a burkha' (Mayat 1990, 158), was forced to take off her traditional attire and assist in the family shop in town. As Govinden (2008, 184) states, 'She [Mayat's mother] moves into the public space of work alongside her husband, forging new values in an alien land and adapting to new needs for survival and success'.

Conclusion

Through the use of both historical and literary sources, this article has sought to make a concrete contribution to understanding some dimensions of 'passenger' Indian women's migration to Natal. It aimed not only to challenge traditional historiography which viewed women as 'dependents', but also provide new ways of theorizing gender and migration.

Historical and literary sources unearth the varied and diverse experiences of women in the migration process. The article has foregrounded women's migration challenges in the context of gender hierarchies, gender roles, assimilation and integration. Women no longer become an adjunct to men in migration histories, but independent categories of analysis.

Notes

1. Email: hiralalk@ukzn.ac.za
2. Many villages in India had a representative body called the *Panchayat*, which was local self-government at the basic level. Source: Interview, Keshav Makan 2011.
3. The war years between 1914 and 1918 led to a temporary decline in women migrants to Natal.
4. The Union of South Africa came into being 31 May 1910 with the unification of four previously separate British colonies: the Cape, Natal, Transvaal and Orange River Colony.

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