

Boekbesprekings/Book reviews



S. BHANA and J.B. BRAIN. *Setting down roots: Indian migrants in South Africa 1860-1911*. Witwatersrand University Press: Johannesburg, 1990. 241 pp. Illus. Price unknown. ISBN 1868140202.

This work is a republication, with some new material, of the two-part study *The movements of Indians in South Africa*, completed by Bhana and Brain in 1984.

In the introduction it is pointed out that the migration of Indians to South Africa (1860-1911) was part of the Imperial government's regulation and control of labour within the British Empire. Due to the constraints of time and money (and the availability of sources) the research was limited to the socio-economic circumstances of the Indians during arrival and settlement in South Africa.

In the first chapter the arrival and settlement of the indentured and passenger Indians are discussed against the background of the labour position and economic conditions in the colony. Brief information is provided about the geographical areas of origin of the indentured labourers and the castes to which they belonged, and their distribution in Natal and the different economic sectors. The account of the passenger Indians includes information about their reasons for emigrating, their places of origin, their occupations and movement in South Africa.

The position of the free Indians in Natal is considered in the second chapter, as well as their economic activities in the different regions of Natal, their movement to the urban areas and steps by the colonial authority to reduce the number of people who ended their indenture.

In chapter 3 the hawking and trading activities of the free Indians are attended, followed by the 'Arab' traders from Mauritius and the western parts of India since the 1870s. Initially the 'Arab' traders provided in the needs of the indentured and free Indians, but before long they also captured the trade with blacks and in time acquired white clients. Tables indicate the growth of Indian trading. White trader response towards this success and attempts at immigration restriction and trade licence control by the Natal government are pointed out.

Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the settlement of Indians in the Transvaal and the Cape respectively. The fourth chapter also includes brief references to Indian settlement in the Orange Free State (OFS) and other areas in Southern Africa. Information is given about settlement patterns and population densities in these regions, the occupations of Indians, anti-Indian agitation by white inhabitants and efforts at control and exclusion by authorities.

In chapter 6 the restrictions on the movements of Indians in South Africa are discussed: literacy tests in a European language, passes, permits and segregation into locations (the 'bazaars'). The changing Indian response from conciliation to legal action to 'satyagraha' is mentioned briefly. However, the information in this chapter could well have been integrated with the previous chapters, since these restrictions are discussed according to the actions taken by authorities in Natal, the Cape Colony and the Transvaal, and since the restrictions have also been referred to in the previous chapters. Indeed, the barring of Indians in the OFS is only mentioned in chapter 6 (p. 156), but discussed in more detail in chapter 5 (p. 96).

Overall the discussion centres around endless facts and figures, resulting in a text that has a 'statistical' feel to it. How the Indians experienced their settlement in South Africa is difficult to understand. This is redressed in the final chapter with its accounts of emigration by Indian settlers or their relatives. According to the authors these recollections counterbalance the official records and sources with their prejudiced and stereotyped views of white society. However, as with chapter 6, the presentation of this information in a separate chapter only contributes to the fragmentation of the text. These personal perspectives should rather have been incorporated with previous chapters.

To researchers interested in the history of Indians in South Africa the bibliographical note at the end of the book will be extremely useful. It provides a complete overview of where to find unpublished and printed sources as well as some historiographical detail. The authors should also be recommended for a thorough and well-compiled index.

Setting down roots is an important contribution to the knowledge of Indians in South Africa. The authors have succeeded admirably in their aim to provide '... the context within which further investigations can be made into the emerging socio-economic structure of the Indians and their relationships with Africans and whites in the politics of South Africa' (p. 195).

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