

HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY 302

RESEARCH PROJECT ON INDIGENISATION
OF CLERGY IN SOUTH AFRICA - SPECIAL
FOCUS ON INDIAN CLERGY - CRITICAL COMMENT

SUBJECT RESEARCHED: REVD JOHN MOSES SUNDRUM
AN ANGLICAN PRIEST IN THE DIOCESE OF NATAL (1920-1943)

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BIBLIOGRAPHY BRAIN J.B. CHRISTIAN INDIANS IN NATAL
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ST AIDAN'S MISSION, CENTENARY
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1994.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The infant sugar industry in Natal required labour intensive workers to make it viable and profitable. Apparently, the local Blacks were not easily persuaded to take on this work. The sugar farmers therefore, began to look elsewhere for labour, and the experiences of sugar estates in Jamaica, British Guiana and Trinidad, with Indian labourers, encouraged them to seek labourers from India.

Emigration of Indians to Natal began in 1860. However, the emigration of agricultural labourers, artisans and traders from the Indian sub-continent to various parts of the British Empire began soon after the emancipation of slaves in 1833 and continued until 1917. Sir George Grey, Governor of the Cape, offered in 1853, to influence the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners to agree to the importation of Indians to work on the canefields. Governor Grey was struck by the terrible economic depression that had gripped Natal at the time. It was only in 1859 that the Natal government was empowered to import Indians with the passing of law 14. The first group of immigrants arrived on the 'Truro' in November 1860, followed by regular shipments until July 1866. Between 1860 and 1911 a total of 152 184 indentured immigrants arrived from India. A number of 'passenger' Indians also came, at their own expense. These groups of Indians included a predominance of Hindus, but also included Muslims, Christians, Parsees and Buddhists.

According to Brain (p.194) the Roman Catholic Church was the first Christian denomination to start work among the Indian immigrants. Fr. Jean-Baptiste Sabon, who had been transferred to Durban to minister to French and Irish Catholics, regularly visited the port to meet with new arrivals to Durban. He visited the Indian Catholics who had arrived on the Truro in 1860, and began ministering to them. Fr. Sabon performed the first Christian marriage among the Indians on 13 January 1861. Fr. Sabon was also concerned with the educational needs of Indian children and wrote to the colonial government for funds to build a school. In 1867 he opened the first school for Indian children with 30 pupils. It was to his credit that Fr. Sabon learnt to speak Tamil in order to communicate with Indian Catholics.

Anglican mission efforts were sporadic in the mid 1860's with various attempts at opening schools for Indian children, as well as the establishment of a small mission at Isipingo, and the start of mission work in Pietermaritzburg in 1868. It seems that the initial thrust of Anglican efforts in the Indian community was to focus on establishing schools. The diocesan synod of 1875 asked the bishop to liaise with the Bishop of Madras with a view to obtaining Indian Christian teachers for Natal (Brain p. 213). Appeals were also made for English clergymen experienced in Indian work. The first Anglican school was opened in 1880 by a catechist in Pietermaritzburg. The missionary efforts of St Cyprian's parish in Congella and St Matthias in Umgeni also focussed on establishing schools for Indian children.

However, it was Dr Lancelot Parker Booth, a medical doctor who offered himself to serve the Indian community as a missionary in the early 1880's that saw the firm beginnings of missionary work in the Indian community. Booth was ordained Deacon in 1883 and priested in 1885 and took charge of the Indian mission work in Durban as well as running a clinic. He raised money to build St Aidan's Church in Cross Street which was opened in 1887. It is interesting that again the idea of opening schools was integral to the mission thrust. Booth obtained the services of an Indian schoolmaster John Thomas who opened his school in 1883. In 1884 Anglicans were running 9 schools in the whole of Natal. Medical work was also an important feature of Anglican mission work in the community with the establishment of St Aidan's Hospital catering for people from all walks of life.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

INTERVIEWEE

An interview was held with Mrs Monica Thumbadoo, the fourth daughter of the Rev. John Moses Sundrum. She was born in Pietermaritzburg where her father was Priest-in-charge of St Paul's parish. It was only after her father died in 1943 that Monica married her husband who was a Hindu. She has four children, all daughters. She is very involved in the work of the church as a Layminister, Laypreacher, visiting the sick and in the training of Layministers for the Durban archdeaconry.

Rev. John Moses Sundrum

John Moses Sundrum was the son of Daniel and Hannah Sundrum. His parents emigrated to British Guiana during a severe famine in India in 1876 - 1878. His parents met on the boat transporting them to British Guiana and married soon afterwards. They returned to India to keep in touch with their family and cultural roots. His mother was a catechist who went around evangelising. The young John Moses accompanied his mother on these evangelism trips and learnt a great deal about the christian faith in this way. On 1 January 1911 he married Ruth Chettiar the daughter of a wealthy businessman. They had five children. He was 30 years old when he arrived in South Africa *from Mauritius in 1920.*

MEANING OF INDIGENISATION

It is not easy to understand the term 'indigenous' within an African context in relation to 'Indian' clergy in South Africa. Phillipe Denis in his paper presented at the recent conference on the process of indigenisation in South Africa, states that the term 'indigenous' could be understood in two ways, i.e. those locally born; as having ancestors born on the African continent. He rightly acknowledges that the second understanding excludes the Indian clergy because their ancestors were born outside Africa. The issue is further clouded because the first Indian clergy to minister to Indian immigrants and those who subsequently settled here, were Indian nationals, and not locally born Indian priests. When Mrs Monica Thumbadoo was asked whether indigenisation worked in South Africa amongst Indians (p. 11 of transcript), she replied that it did! She felt that 'it was necessary at the time. Somebody had to understand the culture, customs, etc. The people expect the priest to understand their customs, culture and needs.' Hence, indigenisation within the Indian context implied knowing and ministering within the specific cultural and vernacular nuance, since the early Anglican Indians in Natal mainly spoke Tamil. Since most of these people were first generation Indians on foreign soil, they would relate more easily to someone who could identify with their homeland. It can be accepted that racial identity is implicit within this understanding of indigenisation.

South Africa has suffered racial and cultural alienation for many decades. The Nationalist Party government discriminated against all races that were not white and thus perpetuated this alienation amongst the oppressed people of this country. Over the years prior to the 1994 democratic elections, there has been a growing solidarity amongst the oppressed people towards a common identity as Black people. Many locally-born people of Indian extraction consider themselves indigenous or Black or African because this is their country of birth and struggle. Herein is the understanding of indigenous as referring to people who are locally born despite their cultural differences.

Hence, the term indigenous is difficult to fully define, and should best be understood in an inclusive and broad sense because South Africa is not a homogenous society but comprised of many different races, cultures, customs, etc. The clear-cut definitions of such terms in other countries is not necessarily fully applicable here. Perhaps, the complexities of our various communities in South Africa is a challenge to broaden our understanding of terminologies in our common quest for a national unity that acknowledges the uniqueness of each of our histories.

Hence, the Rev. Sundrum is understood in this inclusive sense although there is a need to reflect on the vocations of locally-born Indians and their entry into the ministry of the church in South Africa.

PERIODISATION

The church's mission to the Indian community may be divided into various periods beginning with the arrival of the first indentured labourers. Brain (p. 193) states that 'by 1860 all the major Christian denominations were represented among the colonists of Natal and sectarian animosities were strong.' This is an important observation because it raises the question why the Anglican Church only began serious mission work in 1883.

THE FIRST PERIOD: 1860 - 1880

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| 1860 - 1880 | : | The Roman Catholic Church begins ministry to Indians |
| 1861 | : | The Methodist mission begins |
| 1865 - 1870's | : | Sporadic mission attempts by Anglicans |

THE SECOND PERIOD: 1880 - 1902

This period is marked by the entry of Dr L.P. Booth as Superintendent of Indian Missions for the Anglican Church in 1883. It is also an important period in that the Indian Clergy who ministered to Indian Anglicans were imported from India. Rev. Sundrum was one of five overseas Indian priests serving in the Indian Mission. He was preceded by the Rev. Solomon Vedaker (1890-1895); Rev. Joseph Nullathamby (1890-1916); Rev. Simon Peter Vedamuttu (1892 - 1911); Rev. Dravian Koilpillai (1911-1917).

- 1883 : Reconstitution of the Standing Committee on Indian Missions (Anglican) and Booth appointed in charge of Indian Mission
- 1896 : Lutheran Church enters Indian mission field
- 1900 : The Baptists begin to minister to Baptist Indians
- 1902 : First Indian minister ordained in South Africa, in the Methodist Church - Rev John Thomas, a teacher who came out from India in March 1895.

THE THIRD PERIOD: 1902 - 1940

This was a very significant period because in 1902 saw the first Indian minister ordained in South Africa by the Methodist Church; he was the Rev. John Thomas, a teacher who came from India in March 1895 (Brain p. 210). Although he was originally from India, he was the first Indian to be ordained locally. *Significantly, John Thomas was a teacher at the St. Aidan's Anglican school. It would be interesting to know why the Anglican Church did not ordain him.*

This is also a significant period for Anglican mission work because the first local Indian Anglican priest was ordained in 1939; he was Rev J.C.David from the parish of St Paul's in Pietermaritzburg. Rev. David was the first South African minister of Indian extraction to be ordained in South Africa.

THE FOURTH PERIOD: 1940 - PRESENT

This period to the present sees the Anglican church with many local Indians ordained to the priesthood. The Anglican Church has been steadily moving away from it's colonial inheritance of attitude that mainly ministered according to the social and racial patterns provided by the apartheid policies of the previous government. Furthermore, there have been great strides by the Indian community in terms of education and the economy. They have taken their proper place in the greater South African society, and are not dependent on handouts from liberal people. Moreover, the ending of the Group Areas Act has moved people of color away from strict ethnic residential areas. Hence, although there are certain residential areas that are predominantly Indian, there are also emerging areas that are completely mixed. This will continue to happen. The mission of the Church will need to adapt to this changing demographic scenario if it's mission is to continue to thrive. All clergy, both Indian and others, will need to adapt themselves to this transition. There is little room for cultural exclusivity within a Group Areas demography. Indian clergy have been involved in making this transition, and must continue to do so. They are ordained according to the general needs of the church and not on any quota system. It is also a period of political transition in South Africa and Indian

Limited Funding and it's Effects on the Process of Indigenisation

It is important however, to note that despite the firm beginnings of the Indian Anglican Mission in 1883, the first local Indian Anglican was only ordained in 1939, fifty six years later! One would expect that the Anglican authorities would encourage local vocations for the success of the future existence and health of the mission. It would seem that the Anglican Church ordained or imported clergy when a staffing need arose. Moreover, the cultural and vernacular considerations may have limited the wider appointment or 'usefulness' of Indian priests. One must remember that in the first fifty years of Anglican mission work the church took education and schooling very seriously. Hence, there would have been many educated Indians in the church, who would have met the educational standards for the priesthood.

It would seem however, that potential candidates for the priesthood were unable to be trained because of limited funding from overseas mission agencies, and the lack of financial support from local White parishes (Brain p. 217). Brain (p. 217) states that

'lack of support meant that in Pietermaritzburg the Rev Nullathumby [1892-1916] [brackets mine] usually unaided but occasionally with the help of the Rev. (later Canon) A. P. Troughton, was responsible for the pastoral care of Indians living in the triangle stretching from Richmond to Greytown and Newcastle as well as supervising the schools and visiting the gaol and the hospital.'

A glance at the roll of clergy printed in the centenary brochures of St Paul's Church in Pietermaritzburg and St Aidan's in Durban reflects this discrepancy in relation to staffing of Indian and White clergy. Indian clergy who served as Priest-in-charge were often expected to work on their own without extra clerical assistance. This is the case with Rev. Sundrum who worked alone at St Paul's from 1920-1929. However, he was transferred in 1929 to St Aidan's in Durban to assist the Rev. H.W. Satchell who had three congregations to pastor. It would seem that there was more distances to cover in the St Paul's parish in Pietermaritzburg than in Durban. Perhaps all this travelling in Pietermaritzburg and the other midlands towns by foot and public transport eventually took it's toll on Fr. Sundrum, who died while in active service in 1943. He had to continue travelling on foot and public transport when he assisted Rev. Satchell at St Aidan's (p. 4 of transcript). According to Brain the colonists were biased towards the mission to the Zulus and the White parishes (p. 217). This bias resulted in the shortage of funds. This meant fewer Indian clergy, severe limitation on further ordinations, and most certainly delayed the process of indigenisation of local Indian clergy. Furthermore it laid heavy burdens on the few Indian clergy who had parishes that stretched to many distant towns (p. 217). The Indian clergy who laboured under such difficulties must be commended for their efforts. Their perseverance ensured that the work of the mission continued and succeeded. Sadly, the price they paid was very costly in terms of their health and life expectancy. One could only imagine the cost to their families in not seeing their husbands and fathers for long periods of time. An interview with the daughter of the late Revd James Francis revealed that she was born while her father was studying for the ministry at St Peter's Rosettenville. One wonders how much this young child saw of her father after his ordination!

Influence of Church Schools

Both the Roman Catholic, Methodist, and Anglican churches established schools as an integral part of their missionary thrust in the Indian community. Teachers were imported from India. Teachers and Principals often also served as Catechists and provided christian instruction to the children under their care. Children were, in most cases, required to attend church services and many converts were made in this way. These schools were open to non-christian children as well, thus influencing the community at large. The involvement of the church in providing education reflects an indictment on the colonial government who did not plan to educate these children, although grants were provided by the colonial government of Natal. The St Aidan's centenary brochure (p. 16) states that because the sugar farmers and the state did not accept responsibility for the education of the Indian labourers, 'the mass of illiteracy increased; so too did the poverty and the misery of the under-privileged in the Durban slums.'

The establishment of the St Aidan's Diocesan (later Provincial) Training College in 1904 was a revolutionary concept in Indian education. The College was divided into three sections:

- a) A Boys' school
- b) A Teachers training college
- c) A Training school for Indian Catechists

In addition to providing schooling, there was a training facility for catechists who clearly assisted in the mission. Brain (p. 219) gives an account of the extension of the mission enterprise from St Aidan's Durban to Christ Church Sydenham when Mr Dravian Koilpillai a trained and experienced schoolmaster, was appointed a catechist in 1908. For the purpose of the process of indigenisation of clergy this is an important fact. Moreover, Koilpillai was ordained as a minister in 1915, the second Indian to be ordained in Natal. The previous comments on the shortage of funds may account for the number of teachers who doubled as catechists in the schools. It is important to acknowledge the close working relationship between the missionaries, clergy and the teaching fraternity in the mission of the church. Sadly the state withdrew it's subsidy to the Training college in 1920 forcing it's closure. The relationship of the teaching fraternity with the clergy and the church is further reflected in the fact that numerous clergy who were ordained were themselves teachers. Fr. Isaac Anthony (1955) was a teacher; Fr. Poodhun (1956) was a teacher; Fr Laban (1972) was a teacher, as well as Rev. Koilpillai. The church schools clearly influenced society at large and also provided some clergy as well, in addition to providing a large number of Catechists, who were often important forerunners in the work of the Indian Mission. The special and important role of these Catechists needs to be acknowledged. Sadly, most often only the 'upfront' people who were White English Missionaries, Benefactors and ordained clergy are acknowledged. Even the contributions of many Indian clergy are only acknowledged in a few short sentences, compared to English Benefactors and White Superintendents. The Catechists, in particular, were able to relate to their pupils on a sustained basis because they spent more time with them than did the clergy or any others. It is important to note also that there is a large proportion of teachers who were and are Anglicans. Mrs Monica Thumbadoo, daughter of Fr. Sundrum was also a teacher.

Hence, although not all the children who attended the church schools became christians, many of the values and standards taught them would have been based on christian teaching because most of their teachers were christians. In fact, the St Aidan's centenary brochure (p. 18) states that by 1916 all teachers in Anglican schools were christian.

The emphasis on education as part of the mission thrust seems to be a mixture of moral and mission motives. However, it would seem that the mission/evangelising motive was stronger since the Bishop of Natal requested S.P.G. (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) support for teachers in 1871 (Brain p. 213). The fact that most, if not all of these church schools were eventually taken over by the government or became govt. aided schools, shows that the church was either willing or forced to be rid of this burden. This comment must be seen in the light of the fact that church schools for the White community (later private schools) still survive today. It needs to be questioned as to why the church did not hang onto the Indian schools as it did with the White private schools.

Colonial Mentality.

Poverty accompanied by illiteracy often breeds a lack of self confidence in people. The low level of education experienced by Indians after their arrival in South Africa clearly gave them a feeling of inferiority. The sense of colonial superiority is reflected in the fact that in most instances Indian clergy worked under White Clergy or Superintendents, both at St Paul's and St Aidan's. At St Aidan's it was only in 1946 that an Indian priest, Rev J.C. David, was placed in charge of the congregation.

According to Mrs Thumbadoo (transcript p. 8) this sense of inferiority was reflected in the Indian parishioners who looked for advice, etc from Rev. Satchell and not Fr. Sundrum, who assisted him at St Aidan's. Mrs Thumbadoo states that they (Indian Parishioners) 'believed that a White priest would know it all.' She further states that this sense of inferiority in the presence of a White priest still prevails in the church today. This colonial mentality and the difficult years under apartheid has clearly affected people negatively. This is an area that requires much work in the coming years as people are empowered and enabled to freely express themselves without the fear of racial inferiority.

This inability to be open about certain problems emerged with the interviewee as well because she was not happy to record details of an altercation that her father Rev. Sundrum had with Rev Satchell (transcript p. 8). Perhaps there is also the desire not to offend those who were very fond of Fr. Satchell. Transparency and openness is healthy for relationships in the church, especially amongst the people and their priest. Such speaking the truth openly in love could also bring to an end, backbiting and gossip behind the clergy person's back.

The present era in South Africa is one of political transition and the move towards integration and empowerment of those who have been oppressed. The church cannot and dare not escape this process, including Indian Christians and clergy. Perhaps this generation will need to move towards another stage in the process of indigenisation, i.e. transculturation. The importation of Indian Clergy was necessary because cultural and language factors are crucial to the process of communication amongst a group of people who were a minority in a foreign land. This minority has now grown into a significant size. However the process of indigenisation should enable to settle and establish the community and thereby provide the stability required for further integration into the wider society of South Africa. Although cultural and linguistic links should not be dropped completely, indigenisation would have failed if it emphasized racial or cultural exclusivity. The issue of language will need to be dealt with, just as Indians later learnt to speak English and became more integrated within South African society, making it possible for White clergy to minister to them. Now the African languages are a priority to learn, if our mission as the church, as well as normalisation of our society is to progress. Again, the influence of the schools, including church schools, are crucial to this process of crossing the cultural and racial boundaries that have alienated all South Africans for so long. These are some lessons that can be learnt from the Indian experience of indigenous mission and the process of making an indigenous clergy in the Indian community.

He helped the Agent-Generals for the government of India when they came to South Africa. These generals saw to the interests of the Indians both socially and politically. Kunwarani Lady Maharaj Singh was the wife of an agent-general and she did a great deal of work amongst the Indians in Natal. She laid the Foundation Stone of the St. Aidan's Hospital, *and Christ Church Overport*

Rev. Sundrum was politically inclined but he did not have much time to pursue this activity because his first obligation was to the church. He was a close friend of M. K. Gandhi's son, Manilal Gandhi ^{with whom he} and shared many of his political views. Meetings of a political nature were held at Rev. Sundrum's house by Manilal Gandhi. At these meetings those who supported the 'Passive Resistance Movement' met to discuss issues relating to the Indians in Natal. *There were AC-Christopher, P.R. Patten, M. Naicker, Mr. Naicker*

Rev. Sundrum died on January 31, 1943.

DEATH OF ANGLICAN PRIEST

Served His Community in Many Fields

The Rev. John Moses Sundrum died suddenly on Sunday night, January 31, at his residence, Durban. He always appeared to be in good health and his death came as a great shock to all who knew him.

The funeral took place at Overport on Monday afternoon and was attended by a large number of people, among whom were the Archdeacon of Durban and seven other European clergymen of the Anglican Denomination, including the Rev. W. T. V. Langley, of St. Paul's Church, Maritzburg.

The funeral service was conducted by the Rev. W. H. Fatchell, who was assisted by the Ven. the Archdeacon Martin and the Rev. Charles Harris.

The Rev. Sundrum was born in British Guiana in 1861, and was the fourth son of the late Daniel Sundrum, formerly of Madras, India. He married Ruth, fifth daughter of J. D. V. Mathuray Chettiar, of Madras. He was educated at Wesley College, Royappa, Madras, and St. Paul's Theological College, Mauritius; he was

ordained Deacon in 1911 and Priest in 1914. From 1911 to 1920 he was Priest-in-charge of St. Mary's Church, Port Louis, Mauritius, and from 1920 to 1928 he was Priest-in-charge of St. Paul's Church, Maritzburg. From 1928 to the time of his death he worked



with the Rev. W. H. Fatchell in the Mission Churches of St. Aidan's, Christ Church, Sydenham, and St. Michael's Church, Rosburgh.

The Rev. J. M. Sundrum worked among the poorer classes of the Indian community who always had his ready advice and assistance. His interest and work for the social and spiritual well-being of the Indian community

were unbounded. During the months he gave up practically all his spare time to work connected with the Governor-General's Fund.

The Indian community mourn the loss of a man who was in every way an asset to them; a sure testimony of this was the well representative gathering at the church and funeral and the large number of floral tributes paid.

The Rev. J. M. Sundrum is survived by his widow, three sons and two daughters to mourn their loss.

Last Sunday requiem mass was solemnised in the three Indian churches with which he was connected.

Archdeacon W. H. Martin, M.A., preached at St. Aidan's Church, and the Rev. J. C. David at Christ Church and St. Michael's Church.

BIRTH in the District of *Port Louis*

IN THE ISLAND OF

Age born & where	Name and Surname	Sex	Natural or Legitimate	Name and Surname of Father and Mother, Profession & Domicile	Name & Surname of Informant, Profession and Domicile	Name and Surnames of Witnesses, Profession & Domicile
<i>the seventh of May last at 11 o'clock in the evening Royal Street 41.</i>	<i>Dhircviam Vydellingum</i>	<i>female</i>	<i>legitimate</i>	<i>Vydellingum-228- 114 trader and Suranamu -his wife both of this town</i>	<i>The father</i>	<i>Sub-der Sail butty and Suroodaseopulay trader both of age 4 of this town.</i>

declared by the above said Informant in the presence of the above named Witnesses who, after I have read over this Act to them, have signed or marked the
 12th day of *June* one thousand *eight* hundred and *ninety five*

Signed: *W. Thatcher*

Signature or mark of Informant
W. Vydellingum

Signature or mark of Witnesses
W. D. Subillanait
Josip Character

Office of the Civil Status of the District of
Therwood street
 Extract: *W. Thatcher*

BIRTH CERTIFICATE OF
 MR. *SUNDRUM*

Office of the Civil Status of