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SPECIAL FEATURE
ON SOUTH AFRICA

HIST/RR

which we feel for our own complexion, if it is any but fair.

Model of discipline

In olden times the Zulu was a model of discipline and good manners. Living amidst the crudest of surroundings, he manifested the highest social virtues. Complete submissions to parental authority was the starting point and foundation of an African child's education and character-building. Upon the habits of respectfulness, obedience, generosity and decency were grafted the manlier virtues of love of freedom, of sense of duty and responsibility, of trust and trustworthiness, self-reliance and self-control.

Out on the *veldt* the boys developed the faculty of observation. They learnt the names of grasses and medicinal uses of herbs and the meaning

of the winds, clouds and mists. Absence of a written language led to their developing prodigious memories and the gift of eloquence. Every African, it is said, is a born orator, tribal life being particularly sited to the development of

this talent. A race was thus evolved that was at once noble of heart, dignified of bearing, with refined manner and learned in natural science.

A fierce warrior like the Pathan of the North-West Frontier, the Zulu in his *kragl*, contrary to the prevailing notion is a man of mild disposition. "Almost all early explorers from Livingstone downward, observes J.H. Gunther in his book *Inside South Africa*, have paid tribute to the peaceableness of Africans. Their decorousness and humility... The deepest thickets in the bush are safer... for a law-abiding traveller than New York's

ORGANISER

Zulus as Gandhiji saw them

Dr. R.V. Ramdas

Gandhiji's life and career in South Africa from 1893 to 1914 is too well-known to a student of world history. However, his observations and the study of Zulus there have not received the attention it deserves.

Gandhiji's pen-picture of the physical features, his description of the customs and religious beliefs of the Zulus indeed match the acumen of an expert anthropologist.

Gandhiji refers to the Zulus as the tallest and the most handsome among

the Negroes. In his book, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, published in 1968, Gandhiji says: A fair complexion and pointed nose represent our ideal of beauty. If we discard this superstition for a moment, we feel that

the Creator did not spare himself in fashioning the Zulu to perfection. Men and women are both tall and broad-chested in proportion to their height. Their muscles are strong and well set. The calves of the legs and the arms are muscular and always well rounded. You will rarely find a man or woman walking with a stoop or hump back. The lips are certainly large and thick, but they are in perfect symmetry with the entire physique. I for one would not say that they are unshapely. The nose is flat and large such as becomes a large face and the curled hair on the head sets off to



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advantage the Zulu's skin which is black and shining like ebony.

The physique of the Zulu is powerfully built and finely shaped by nature without any such effort as is made by Sandow and others in Europe in order to develop the muscles. It is a law of nature that the skin of races living near the equator should be black. And if we believe that there must be beauty in everything, fashioned by nature, we would not only steer clear of all narrow and one-sided conceptions of beauty, but we in India, would be free from the improper sense of shame and dislike

*Special Feature
on South Africa*

Central park at night".

According to the testimony of E.A. Ritter, the author of *Chaka Zulu*, in the Zulu kraal the spirit of joviality, comradeship and *esprit de corps* "ever strong in the African nature was at its best. While ease and freedom were enjoyed, stern discipline continuously reigned, but it was wholly moral force. The young men being thrown entirely on their honour, without standing regulations and without supervision, and they seldom dishonoured that trust."

Round, not square

The Negroes live in round huts built of wattle and douh. The huts have a single round wall and are thatched with hay. A pillar inside supports the roof. A low entrance through which one can pass only by bending oneself is the only aperture for the passage of air. The entrance

is rarely provided with a door. Gandhiji adds that like ourselves the Negroes plaster the walls and the floor with earth and animal dung. It is said that Negroes cannot make square in shape. They have trained their eyes to see and make only round things. We never find nature drawing straight lines or rectilinear figures and these innocent children of nature derive all their knowledge from their experience of her.

The furniture in the hut is in keeping with the simplicity of the place. There would be no room for tables, chairs, boxes and other such other things and even now these things are rarely seen in a hut.

The staple food of the Negroes is maize and meat when available. Fortunately, they know nothing about spices or condiments. If they find spices in their food or even if it is coloured by turmeric they turn up their noses at it and those among

them who are looked upon as quite uncivilized will not so much as touch it. It is no uncommon thing for a Zulu to take at a time one pound of boiled maize with a little salt. He is quite content to live upon porridge made from crushed mealies boiled in water. Whenever, he can get meat, he eats it, raw or cook boiled or roasted, with only salt. He does not mind taking the flesh of any animal.

The Negro languages are named after the various tribes. The art of writing was recently introduced by the Europeans. There is nothing like a Negro alphabate. The Bible and the other books have now been printed in the Negro languages in Roman character.

About the Zulu language Gandhiji remarks that it is very sweet. Most words end with the sound of broad 'a' so the language sounds soft and pleasing to the ear. Gandhiji had heard and read that there is both meaning and poetry in the words.

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Thinly clad

Before the advent of European civilization, the Negroes used to wear animal skins, which also served them as carpets, bedsheets and quilts. Now-a-days, they use blankets. Before British rule men as well as women moved about almost in a state of nudity. Even now many do the same in the country. They cover the private parts with a piece of skin. Some dispense even with this. The law requires Negro women to cover themselves from the chest to the knees when they go to a town. They are thus obliged to wrap a piece of cloth round their body. The men are similarly required to cover themselves from the waist to the knees.

'Civilization' is gradually making headway among the Negroes. Pious missionaries deliver to them the message of Christ as they have understood it, open schools for them and teach them how to read and write. But many, who being illiterate and therefore, strangers to civilization were far free from many vices, have now become corrupt. Hardly any Negro who has come in contact with civilization has escaped the evil of drink. And when his powerful physique is under the influence of liquor he becomes perfectly insane and commits all manner of crimes.

In order to increase the Negro's want or to teach him the value of labour, a poll tax and a hut tax have been imposed upon him. If these imposts were not levied, this race of agriculturists living on their farms would not enter mines hundreds of feet deep in order to extract gold or diamonds and if their labour were not available for the mines, gold as well as diamonds, would remain in the

bowels of the earth. Likewise the Europeans would find it difficult to get any servants if no such tax was imposed. The result has been that thousands of Negro miners suffer along with other diseases from a kind of phthisis called 'Miners' phthisis'. This is a fatal disease, hardly any of those who fall in its clutches recover. One can easily imagine what self-restraint thousands of men living in mines away from their families can possibly exercise. They consequently fall easy victim to venereal diseases.

"What do you mean by civilization?" She sharply asked. "Is wearing gaudy clothes, decking yourself out like a whore, getting drunk on European liquor, deceiving people with a glib, lying tongue, leading an unclean life and then on Sunday unctuously to attend church to beguile your good civilization? If this be civilization then I would rather have none of it and be content to be called a 'barbarian' or whatever name you choose to give us."

"Negroes know nothing about spices or condiments. If they find spices in their food or even if it is coloured by turmeric, they turn up their noses at it and those among them who are looked upon as quite uncivilized, will not so much as touch it."

Cutting in, Gandhiji's co-worker suggested: "Perhaps you are jealous of your more advanced sister. Look at your greasy clothes, they smell; your body stinks of castor oil. You do not know how to speak dress or live in a cultured manner."

Who's civilized?

In the eyes of the modernised Africans those who have stuck to their old ways, are "uncivilized". The unchristianised, old-fashioned African, on the other hand equates, from what he sees around him, European civilization with liquor, laxity of morals and other vices of civilization, irreligiousness in practice and blunting of the sense of right and wrong. Often this leads to heated arguments between the two. Once, at the end of the long debate between two Zulu women, one modern, christianised, the other unchristianised, old-type, a colleague of Gandhiji, who knew the Zulu tongue and had been closely following the conversation, addressed himself to one of them. "You gave it hot to the other women", he said to her, "but do not you see that after all she is civilized while you are not. Does not that make a difference?"

Trimnings of culture

She flared up, "we know, but does that matter? They may look refined outwardly and boast trimnings of culture, but what about their inside? How unclean is their life? Our bodies may stink as you say, but inside it is clean. We walk in the fear of our Maker and we do not deceive him".

Gandhiji's work for the Zulus during the Zulu rebellion explains his love for the Africans. He joined the army with twenty or twenty-five men in a stretcher bearer corps for a month. The Zulu prisoners were beaten and their wounds were stinking and the others did not want to attend them. Rebels, it was terrible the way that rebellion was quelled. The soldiers would attack on unarmed men. The Zulus could not talk to us, but from their eyes, they seemed to feel as if God has sent us to their help. The work for which we had enlisted

Special Feature
on South Africa

was fairly heavy, for sometimes we had to perform a march of as many as forty miles a day.

The corps was disbanded in a month. Each member of the corps was awarded the medal specially for the occasion. The three sergeants of the corps were Gujaratis: Umashanker Manucharam Shelat, Surendra Bapubhai Medh and Harishankar Iswar Joshi. All the three had fine physique and worked very hard. One of them was a Pathan who used to express his astonishment on finding us carrying as large a load as, and marching abreast of himself.

the Dutch Reform Mission, Johannesburg, who was a Negro and a member of the African National Congress, reveals his assessment of the Indian community in Natal. Gandhiji said the Indian community in South Africa was a microscopic community, that it could win only small battles against the racist regime there and could never sufficiently be a menace to it, as to uproot the system perpetuated by it. He wanted the closest possible relations to exist between the Indian communities of South Africa and the natives of South Africa with them, co-operating with each other in the friendliest way.

leaders are Christians, the vast mass of the Bantus and Zulus are not Christians. You have adopted European dress and manners, and as a result have become strangers in the midst of your own people. Politically, that is a disadvantage. It makes it difficult for you to reach the heart of the masses. You must not be afraid of being "Bantuised" or feel ashamed or carrying an *assegai* or of going about with only a tiny clout round your loins. A Zulu or a Bantu is a well-built man and need not be ashamed of showing his body. He need not dress like you. You must become Africans once more."

"Every African, it is said, is a born orator, tribal life being particularly suited to the development of this talent. A race was thus evolved that was at once noble of heart, dignified of bearing, with refined manner and learned in natural science."

In the *Indian Opinion*, of April 7, 1906, a weekly journal brought out by Gandhiji in South Africa, he gave a vivid description of the events unfolding themselves in South Africa and his concern about the fate of 'the Indian and other coloured people' there, just opposed against their White masters. Gandhiji concluded: The Indians and the other coloured people have much to ponder and they must act with circumspection. For his identification with the African people to be complete, Gandhiji often called himself black.

Indian community

Gandhiji's interview on January 1, 1939 to the Reverend S.S. Tema of

When Rev. S.S. Tema asked as to how can his people make their congress as successful as the Indian National Congress, Gandhiji replied:

"The Congress became successful for the simple reason that it was inaugurated by the most selfless and cultured people that could be found in that age. They made themselves the representatives of the people and captured their imagination by reason of service and self-sacrifice. They were from the people and of the people. You have not, as far as I am aware, a band of Africans who would be content to work and live in impecuniosity. Among those who are educated there is not that absolute selflessness. Again, while most of your

Religion and morality

Gandhiji found nothing to support the view propagated by the Christian missionaries that the Africans in olden times had not and even had no religion. But taking the word religion in a wide sense, we can say that the Negroes do believe in and worship a supreme being beyond human comprehension. They fear this power too. They are dimly conscious of the fact that this dissolution of the body does not mean the utter annihilation of a person. If we acknowledge morality as the basis of religion, The Negroes being moral may be held even to be religious. They have a perfect grasp of the distinction between truth and falsehood. The Negroes have their own superior code of behaviour and their practice is any day superior to most of the Europeans, at least so far as honesty, fair dealing and sanctity of promise is concerned. It is doubtful whether Europeans or we ourselves practise truthfulness to the same extent as the Negroes in their primitive state do. They have no temples or anything else of that kind. There are many superstitions amongst them as among the other races. Their tribal religion, writes Henry Gibbs in *Background to Bitterness*, is based on a belief in Supreme being, "Unkulunkulu", a being known under a variety of other names.

South Africa—a new horizon

Special Feature
on South Africa

By : R.C. Batura

A new experiment is being made in South Africa. Bitter racial foes of the past have joined hands to create a new economic and political order not just shorn of the hated apartheid but having a common society where the whites and blacks, who have nothing common in culture, language or religion and have lived all these years in complete segregation, can live together as complimentary to each other. The 90-year white rule in which the black population was treated worse than slaves has been replaced by a mixed rule under the interim constitution which provides for proportional representation for parties. Since the parties generally represent distinct racial or tribal interests, the system ensures representation of the racial groups both in the new 400-member national assembly as well as in the nine provincial assemblies which send 90 members to the senate by the proportion of the seats. These 490 members form the constituent assembly which will prepare the new constitution.

The President is elected by the national assembly. The new government of 'national unity' headed by President Nelson Mandela has been put in place by the joint efforts of the ANC leader and former white Prime Minister F.W.de Clerk who like, Abraham Lincoln in USA, played a leading role in persuading the whites to dismantle the apartheid instituted by Jan Smuts, though Clerk stands no comparison to the American libertar-



Black ascendancy: an ANC supporter astride a statue of Jan Smuts, architect of apartheid laws

***While the blacks
have the political
power, economy is
in the hands of
the whites.***

ian who had declared 'As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master'. Clerk was motivated by sheer weight of the situation. He felt that given the rising violent resistance to apartheid within the country and world wide condemnation of the obnoxious racial segregation, which led to political, social and economic oppression, the whites could not retain power for long.

So he held out the olive branch to the blacks and successfully worked out the new dispensation providing safeguards for the former white rulers at least for the first five years at the end of which a new constitution is likely to be prepared.

But even this five year period may not be without hiccups—economic, social and political—the seeds of which are there in the very nature of the new set up in which only the complexion of the government has changed but practically every other thing remains as it was before the change over. The apartheid has ended, legally, but its poisonous effects, are still very much visible in every walk of

life—education, administration, jobs, agriculture, industry, mines—which is dominated by the whites. The new government has opened up the society and is keen to provide opportunities to the blacks and other non-whites like Indians and Asians but it would need a herculean effort—and time—to undo the past. Almost all the means of production—industry, mines and

Special Feature
on South Africa

farming is in the hands of the whites.

So are the skilled jobs.

The main task before

President Mandela's government is to improve the condition of 15 million blacks who live below the poverty line and to look for jobs for the 40 per cent of the unemployed among the labour force. The ambitious Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) should go a long way in improving the economic conditions but the major question confronting the new nation is where to get the 80 billion rand needed for it in the next few years.

There are quite a number of educated blacks in urban areas but in the interior there is hardly any education among blacks. The repeal of the notorious Land Act which prevented blacks and Indians from owning agricultural land, will no doubt open up new avenues for blacks in terms of work and jobs, it will not be easy for the poor fundless Africans to buy land and change their economic status. In fact, the ownership pattern is not likely to be altered much, especially because the new government has not opted for nationalisation of agricultural land as advocated by some leftist organisations. Another sector, the rich gold and diamond mines too are in the hands of the whites. The Indians and Asians do figure in gold and diamond trade, but mining is in exclusive white hands. Thus while the blacks have the political power, economics is in the hands of the whites. Though the racial segregation in towns, restaurants, schools and buses etc. is a thing of the past the economic difference is so glaring that one can see virtually two sets of people living in the same country still having their exclusive areas though there is no legal separation as hitherto. Those who are in jobs want higher wages. A 10,000 strong union recently struck work demanding wage-hike of twelve per cent.

Here lies the tinder box, so to say. This disparity in economics, education, jobs creates suspicions and heart burning which some groups can exploit to create law and order problems, even among different black tribes. It makes both the whites and the blacks apprehensive. But President Nelson Mandela is determined to carry the ship of South Africa through these turbulent waters. He, in fact, is one person who commands the trust of various sectors of the country—the blacks, the whites and the Asians including Indians.

In this task, he needs all the goodwill and cooperation from vari-

The 12 lakh Indians look up to President Mandela.

ous forces within the country and outside.

The 12 lakh Indian's look up to him. Yet fears lurk in their mind because of the peculiar situation they are in. Though economically they are no match to the whites, they are much better off compared to the blacks. In Durban one can see the comparatively prosperous Indians—and other Asians—living on one side of the road while on the other the blacks eke out a poor existence. It creates jealousies which are quite natural in the circumstances though the Indians have always sympathised with the blacks and have always supported their struggle against apartheid right from the days Mahatma Gandhi created history in South Africa through his non-violent resistance to the racial

regime. Nothing has happened though. The people of Indian origin, however, are reminded of what happened in other African countries after Independence and some of the events even in South Africa—clashes between Zulu Inkatha movement and Indians, the most recent being burning down of Gandhi Ashram in Phoenix. They are especially afraid of what happened in Uganda where under Idi Amin Indian settlers were booted out. Yet with a person like President Nelson Mandela around, they look forward to a fruitful partnership with the black majority.

They look towards India also not for political support but for economic help. Some of them feel that India can provide farm expertise to South African blacks. India can also lend skilled manpower for development of the country. This, they feel, will have a good effect on the black majority, especially in developing social relations with the next generation.

There are possibilities of increased trade also but the Indian business and industry will have to work hard because of the peculiar situation. The trade outlook is generally 'Eurocentric' because it is the industrially rich countries which can provide both technology and capital for rebuilding of South Africa. The high tariff walls—stretching in some cases from 35 to 60 per cent—also work against Indian business interests. But with the goodwill for India that exists in the government in view of Indian settlers' support to the resistance movements of the African National Congress and the Indian Governments' campaign against apartheid, Indian business can still find some foothold. The visit of President Mandela, therefore, is not only an opportunity for strengthening political bonds, it is equally an opportunity for expanding economic relations not only between the governments of the two countries but also between the respective private sectors.