

Summary of Fall 2002 Seminar by Surendra Bhana

He's presently working on a new approach to Gandhi, the context in which Gandhi's work took place and its relation to South Africa as well as a person and a man.

The purpose of this song was to create a dialogue in Africa between Indians and Africans.

Some people were outraged by song, thinking it was actually hateful. A kinder kind of interpretation hints that the tone was more ironic than hateful, directed at Bhutalesi and Becky for their inability to do something about dominance of Indian businesses.

This is not something new, the context can go back to the 1930s and 1940s, when tension between Indians and Africans were very strong. In 1949, the tension became so high that it became a race riot, one of the worst in Africa, in which 148 people died.

1880-1910 held the origins of this tension, which was when white rule was being established.

There are 3 parts to my paper:

1. Basis of Gandhi and politics
2. Closer look at town's political economy
3. Suggest new way of looking at this - culture/religion among Indians

1. Gandhi spent almost 21 years in South Africa. When he came, he decided to unite Indians in South Africa even though they came from various backgrounds. He argued that people of South Continent always constituted a 'nation'. He took issues with militants in the UK, United States and India who wanted to get rid of British rule. He also engaged those who wanted to modernize India by westernizing India and he claimed that that wasn't the way to go. "Industrialization will lead you to hell", he said.

Young Gandhi was influenced by segregation. He wanted separate compartments and entrances in buildings for Africans. As he continued, he made no attempt to defend African leaders. Later on he was asked why hadn't he joined hands with the Africans and he said, after his thinking had changed a bit: 'they had much bigger issues and I didn't want to join weaknesses' so clearly they wouldn't have understood passive resistance. In 1910 - by the time he leaves - there's a greater awareness and appreciation of Africans, but no meaningful discourse came from that kind of thinking, it was a brief period.

2. Reason for conflict and tension is in political economy.

Indians were employed widely in coastal and internal regions, sugar, tea and coffee plantations, tobacco, beans and so forth. They worked side by side with Africans, but we're not really sure how many of those were there. Africans were used to police one another and not to work with one another lots of times so that there wouldn't be any unity among workers.

There was a growth in commercial agriculture and land was given away preferably to Indians over Africans

because they said that Indians understood crop rotation. African homestead couldn't own outside the reserve areas. Landowners preferred Indians tenants because they paid in cash and had access to credit.

Africans saw Indians as cause of land distress, especially from the period 1879-1881 there was tremendous drought in region. Africans were displaced in these drought years. In the early 90s, whites decided that giving lands to Indians was a bad idea. Zulu land was preserved, but also open to white fathers.

Indian traders were allowed to trade in or near but not inside the mission reserves. Secretary of Native Affairs wanted to keep Indians out. In fact, if you didn't stop using Indian traders, they would stop you from issuing trading licenses - and it worked.

Industrial Labor: competition in railway, which hired both Indians and Africans.

Coal Mining: Law protected Indians, didn't have to go underground.

Special Servants: Indians brought from India and they'd work in hotels, restaurants as cooks and clerks and this created some resentment.

A good example of this was that Zulus became laundry men ("washer") - it was pipe water, so people who benefited from that were people that had pipe water (Indians) and they knocked Africans out of business.

There was growth of crime as a result of this; African gangs were forming and seen as a menace.

So if you're looking for the basis of this inter-ethnic conflict, you will really find it here when you examine the political economy.

3. Cultural and religious backgrounds of Indians:

They were Hindus and Muslims and were not proficient in English language but would quickly learn it.

Religious worship was the strongest: Hindus had 8 major festivals or as many as 70 smaller ones. There were as many as 100 temples.

They were a cast organization, so these people believed that they had to keep cast purity. They maintained contact with India and believed they should help village in repairing bridges and so on.

Same for Muslims, they observed Ramada, went to Mecca ('Hadji'), kept contact with India, made generous donations and so forth. Organized committees were around promoting languages and opening vernacular schools. Organizations identified with nationalistic causes, keeping patriotism, speaking of 'Duty to Mother Land' and having meetings ending with National Anthem.

Now making the connection to Gandhi, he was totally aware of this culture discourse among Indians, but he didn't agree with most of the things, he thought they were fairly narrow and he had no time for them. Yet he was still prepared to work within the parameters of these groups. He was different as a social reformer, he was creative in uniting the various traditions and he worked at interracial tolerance. In South Africa he claimed to have only one duty: to bring Hindus and Muslims together and to serve them as a single community.

1912 "A true Hindu cannot harm a Muslim and a true Muslim cannot harm an Hindu"

His beliefs were very ethical in foundation: "No person who worships God can ignore the duty to serve others [...]"

He ran into groups who disagreed with him, both Hindus and Muslims.

1909 Gandhi wrote a biography and wrote that there would be collision between whites and Africans inevitably, because Africans had legitimate desires. If instead of massacres, Africans adopted passive resistance, it would be a great success.