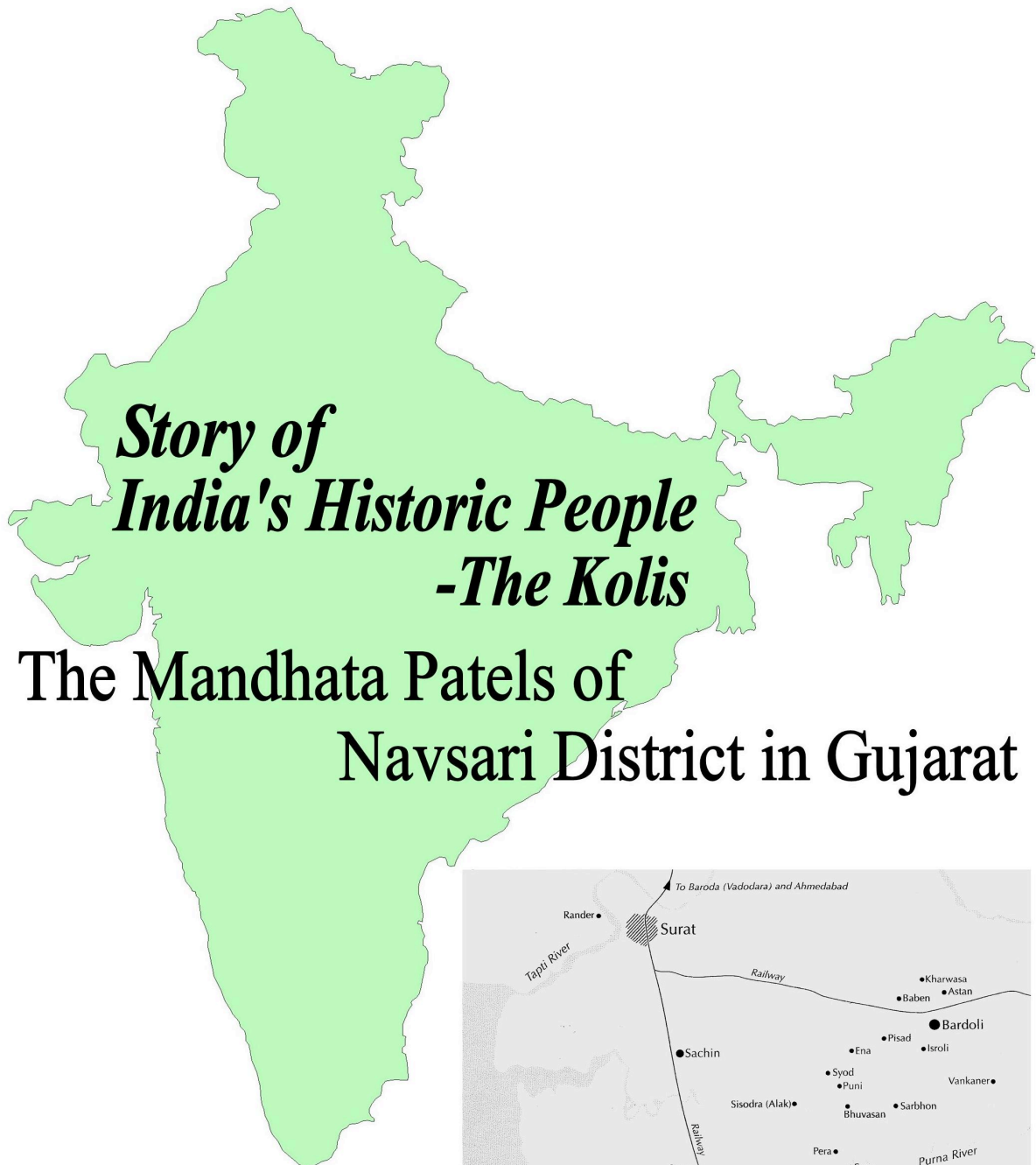




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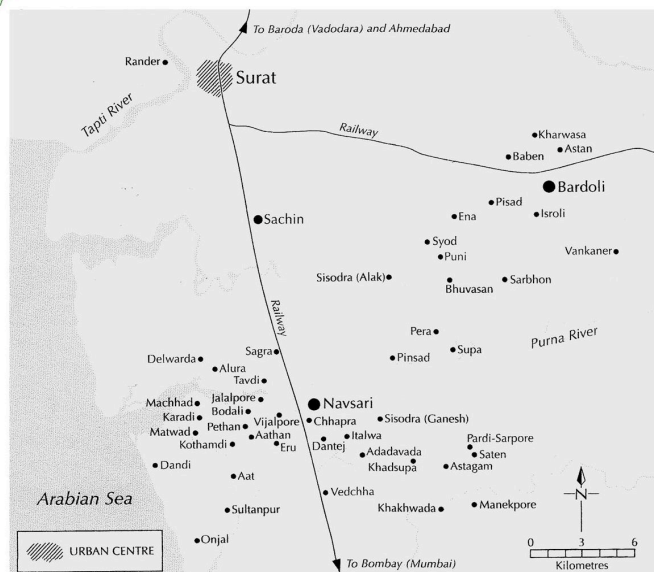
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## *Story of India's Historic People -The Kolis*

## The Mandhata Patels of Navsari District in Gujarat





### Story of India's Historic People – The Kolis by Shree Keshavbhai J Patel.

## FOREWORD

Our people have travelled so far in their journey to find the destiny of their dreams. There is a reason why we have been travelling so far. It is because the social conditions at home were so dire that we would travel to strange foreign lands in search of our dreams, not knowing what we were going to find. The early travellers often found themselves in bonded labour, no better than slavery, with no hope of earning enough money to find their way back to India. The sacrifice of our forefathers is monumental. The search for destiny has been unflinching. Knowing the possible hardship and deprivation they would face they still marched forward. It is not the thought of one self that has caused such a huge wave of exodus from the motherland, it is the need to create better opportunities for our children that has been a huge motivating factor. It is with this knowledge of an extraordinary debt to our forefathers that we salute all those who travelled and gave us the new world that we are so privileged to inhabit. It is with knowledge of this debt to the motherland that gave birth to our forefathers that we have been contributing to the development of our villages for over 50 years.

Shree Keshavbhai with the help of the authors whose work is quoted in the reference section goes much further than retelling the story of our exodus. He delves into our past and examines our origins. He examines the rise and fall of the Koli people from early history to the present. Some of the material will not be easy reading but we must come to terms with our background. It has taken Shree Keshavbhai over 30 years to collect the material contained in this work. This work is of huge importance in narrating the brief history of our community.

The caste system has been completely thrown out in our new world. Many have prospered to a level which our forefathers could never have imagined when they left in their boats and steam ships.

It is a great privilege to write a foreword for this story of the Koli people. As head of our community in the UK I feel truly humbled by what we have achieved. We only truly appreciate our current position and status if we examine our past. Without our history we are incomplete as a community. This book goes a long way to fulfilling this void. As for our future please ask yourself what Shree Keshavbhai's reference to leaving the pond and exploring the ocean means. I salute this book and I salute the author who has devoted a large part of his life to the betterment of our global community.

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*With special emphasis on the Koli Patel Samaj from In and around Navsari District*

### About the Article

A few years back I wrote a short article under the above main heading mainly for the benefit of our younger generation who are not fully familiar with Gujarati language. Almost all of the material available to-date on this subject is written in Gujarati and recently more of it has become available. It has thus become necessary to update/rewrite this article. It is also felt that as more and more of our youths are becoming less and less familiar with Gujarati it is best to bring most of this detail in one booklet so that the present and future generations our people became familiar with their roots and the historical background and the trials and tribulations of their forefathers. It is also hoped that this may inspire others to undertake further research.

### Preamble

When in the quiet of the night the question arises in your mind as to who your forefathers were? Where did they come from? How did they live? And you desperately want to explore your roots, this article may help.

Perhaps the obvious starting point of this inquiry could be our own firsthand knowledge of the stories told by our fathers and grandfathers of their experiences in their villages and how they made it to the foreign lands all over the world.

From their own lips we have heard how a few young men from the villages found construction jobs building railways in Surat and other nearby cities. Back in village for holidays their offers of help led more youths to join them. At work they came in contact with other peoples and particularly the English who valued their construction knowledge. This broadened their horizon. When opportunities came their way to work for railways in East Africa, plantations in South Africa and New Zealand many volunteered and packed their bags.

My paternal and maternal grandfathers both came to Mombasa, in East Africa to work on the Railways in 1919/21. They were perhaps among the first there and in their own words life was terrible. They lived in tents and were always in fear of the wild animals. For the first year or two they survived on boiled lentils with some pepper and salt. Later they grew chillies and ginger. Apart from bhajan singing in the dim light of a lantern, other entertainment was zero. Life in South Africa or New Zealand was no different. This was soon after the First World War period. Political power struggle was intense among the European powers and British were digging in wherever they went.

Period prior to the Second World War was the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of immigration for our people. Passports were easily available and hundreds of youths leaving their families behind boarded sea-going clippers and left in search of a better life. A number of them perished and for the many who made it, life was very, very hard in every respect. Homesickness gripped many.

Immigration to UK was mainly after the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. This was in two phases as we have heard. Many of the youths who worked with reputable companies in India obtained recommendation letters, which entitled them to passports. No work permit was required so as soon as they could raise enough money for the passage, they boarded steamships, which took around two months to dock at Portsmouth/Southampton. Others paid large fees to travel and passport agents. Most of these early arrivals started their life in UK in Coventry where two brothers bought their houses and welcomed all new arrivals. I am told, these two houses were home to at times 28 people sharing a communal kitchen. Beds were almost always occupied as the shift workers came and went. Many worked in the mines as this absolved them from doing compulsory National Service. Life was as you can imagine most basic and although few earned more than five pounds a week each contributed one pound to the pool to send to one family each week mainly to repay their debt.

Few of the people who ventured overseas in the first instance could have made it without the financial or other help from their relations, friends and neighbours. We the descendants residing overseas, are eternally indebted to our cousins in our villages for the sacrifices that their parents made in helping our parents. We extend our hand of friendship to them all.

The second phase was the bulk of families leaving East Africa in a hurried move due to forthcoming immigration controls in UK. Housing was still tight but tolerable. These families came with a reasonable knowledge of English, some skill and a little money but suffered discrimination and had to take up jobs much below their skill and capacity. In a year or two most bought their homes. First generation suffered all sorts of difficulties and sacrificed a lot to make life for their children improve. And improve it certainly has both materially and educationally, as we can all see. Sacrifices have still to be made and effort has still to be made to better our conditions.

This much we have learnt firsthand.

Let us go back and dig deeper into our background.

In studying the aboriginal tribes of India, scholars have consulted our most ancient records and documents - the Vedas, the Puranas, the epics in different languages, many archaeological records and notes, and various other publications.

Students of history and anthropology have found numerous instances recorded in all prehistoric and established history of India, of a glowing past of this ancient tribe of India and more is being uncovered as research continues.

Over the centuries, various scholars have written about their findings on this subject and various treatises in a number of Indian languages by different scholars are in circulation.

The Koli tribe, which in its various subgroups, said to number about 1050, forms about 20% of the population of present India is mentioned continuously through the centuries - way back to Mohenjo-daro and beyond. Historians and scholars find that Koli tribe, a ruling Kshatria Caste, was spread far and wide all over India. Due to their heroic exploits and acknowledged reputation and relationships with the most powerful of those times regarded them with awe and respect. This is what they concluded from the references they found from the prehistoric records.

### **The Historic Heroes of Our Tribe**

Historical findings suggest that our ancestry has left behind an illustrious record of their achievements that we can be proud of.

The most ancient King Mandhata, a supreme and universal ruler whose reputation spread far and wide throughout India and whose stories of valour and Yajna were described in the stone carvings of Mohenjo-daro, is said to have belonged to this tribe.

The most ancient and revered sage Valmiki, (Valia Koli before he had enlightenment) the author of Ramayana is said to have belonged to this tribe as his name suggests. Even today Ramayana is referred to as Koli Valmiki Ramayan in Maharashtra State. Teachings from Ramayan form the basis of Indian culture.

The great king Chandra Gupta Mourya, and his line of descendent kings belonged to the Koli tribe. Lord Budhha's mother and his wife belonged to the Koli tribe.

Sant Kabir, a weaver by trade, ended several of his 'bhajans' as 'kahet kabir kori' was a self-confessed Koli. Bhaktaraj Bhadurdas and Bhaktaraj Valram from Saurashtra, Girnari Sant Velnathji from Junagadh, Bhaktaraj Jobanpagi, Sant Sri Koya Bhagat, Sant Dhudhalinath, Madan Bhagat, Sany Kanji Swami of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century all belonged to the Koli tribe. Their life and reputation were described in books of their life and in articles published in Mumbai Samachar, Nutan Gujarat, Parmarth etc.

In the State of Maharashtra, Sivaji's Commander-in-Chief and several of his Generals belonged to this Koli tribe. 'A History of the Marathas' note with pride the bravery of Sivaji's army consisting mainly of Mavalis and Kolis. His General, Tanaji Rao Malusare, who was always referred to by Sivaji as 'My Lion' (Sinh) was a koli. When Tanaji fell fighting for and winning the 'Kodana Fort', Sivaji renamed the fort as 'Sinhghadhh' in his memory.

In the 1857 uprising a number of Koli women fighters played an important role in trying to save the life of the 'Rani of Jhansi'. Among them was a very close colleague of the queen named Zalkari. The Koli Samaj, thus, has given India and the world, great sons and daughters whose teachings are of universal import and of relevance to modern day living.

### Legend of our Ancient King Mandhata

Archaeological findings of Mohenjo-daro are estimated to date back to 5000-3000 B.C. The stone inscriptions there describe the great Koli Kings and their Pyanchayet method of administration in their kingdoms. References to the Great King Mandhata are found many times and the various aspects of his life, deeds of valour, and Yajna are described in a number of publications.

These details described here are a condensed version of an extended article written in Gujarati by Shree Raghunath Brahambhatt and published in a monthly magazine 'Akhand Anand' in June 1964.

'King Mandhata is estimated to have lived some ten thousand years ago. Long after him were born such great souls as Shree Ram, Shree Krishna and Lord Buddha. Yet the greatness of King Mandhata's achievements were such that a household phrase came into universal use to this day when comparing others to ask – 'Was he as great as Mandhata?' Mandhata has been compared as the brightest star in the Sun Dynasty and was born in the 15<sup>th</sup> generation of Brahma. The great Manu was of the 5<sup>th</sup> generation and 10<sup>th</sup> generation after Manu was Mandhata. Shree Ram is said to be born as 25<sup>th</sup> generation after Mandhata. Ishvaku was another great King of the 'Sun Dynasty Koli Kings' and so Mandhata and Shree Ram were said to be of Ishvaku Sun Dynasty. This Dynasty later got divided into nine major sub groups, all claiming their roots to the Kshtria Caste. They are: Malla, Janak, Videhi, Koliye, Morya, Lichchvi, Janatri, Vajji, and Shakya.'

Indian mythology has a strange story of the birth of Mandhata.

King Yuvenashawer, Mandhata's father had hundred wives but no male child was born to them. He consulted many Rishis and finally came to Bhargav Rishi who agreed to perform a yajna to beget a son for him. At the end of the yajna, a pot of mantra-charged-water was put aside for the king to be taken to his queen the next morning. During the night, the king became thirsty and went looking for water in the Ashram. He saw the pot and quenched his thirst with this potent water. In due course, a son was delivered by cutting open the King's abdomen. God Indra heard of this unique incident and came to see the infant. To the question who will feed and protect the child God Indra put his thumb in the child's mouth and said 'Ma Thasyati', 'I will'. Thus the child was named 'Mandhata' and later learned the art of warfare from God Indra and acquired his unconquerable Bow.

King Mandhata with his superior strength, knowledge and well-equipped army conquered vast areas and many surrounding kingdoms. He would reinstate the defeated kings. Such a king would be made

to agree to the payment of an annual tax. An ambassador would be posted in each such kingdom to ensure compliance and good governance. Such a king would also enjoy the protection of Mandhata. To fulfil this promise he once had to fight his own Godfather Indra, who when defeated, challenged Mandhata to fight Lavnasur, a demon king. Soon an opportunity for a battle with this demon king arose.

For an ever-victorious King Mandhata, this encounter proved to be an anticlimax end to his life. The King and his army marched right into Lavnasur's kingdom but no resistance was forthcoming. Evening was approaching. King Mandhata decided to camp for the night, confident of capturing Lavnasur the next day. Lavnasur's agents however infiltrated the camp in the night and killed the sleeping king.

Archaeological findings, when pieced together, show Mandhata as belonging to Ishvaku – Sun Dynasty and his descendents were known as 'Sun Dynasty Koli Kings'. They were known to be brave, illustrious and just rulers. Buddhist texts have numerous references proving this beyond doubt. The descendants of Mandhata played a vital role and our ancient Vedas, epics and other relics mention their important contributions in the art of war and state administration. They are referred to in our ancient Sanskrit books as Kulya, Kuliye, Koli Serp, Koli, Kaul etc.

### Early history – After Lord Buddha

It was during the year 566 BC, when the Hindu religion became cruel and thoroughly degraded that Prince Gautam, later known to the world as *Buddha* (the enlightened one) was born in a little Kingdom by the river Rohini in a Himalayan valley in northwest India. Lord Buddha's mother, Maha Maya was a Koli princess.

When Gautam, the prince, who was later to become Lord Buddha, described the qualities of a princess he would be prepared to marry, his parents decided that such a princess could only be found in a Koli kingdom. Gautam went on to marry Yashodara, one his cousins. A son called Rahul was born to them. Soon after that at age 29, Gautam left home to find an answer to the ills of the world.

After years of severe penance, study and meditation he became the enlightened one - *Buddha*.

The teachings of Lord Buddha were seen as a threat to vested interests of the upper-caste Sanatan-Vedic Hindus. Soon, the teachings and followers of Buddha was completely banished from India.

It appears that Koli Kingdoms with their relationship and affinity to Buddha suffered most from this persecution. Although the vast majority never embraced Buddhist teachings, they were literally hounded out and driven out to jungles and other remote places and cold shouldered by others and suffered neglect from the rulers.

### 2000 Years After Lord Buddha

The upheaval must have proved too much for the Koli kingdoms. It appears that because of prolonged deprivations in the highly complex Hindu society, a once powerful tribe, hardworking, skilled, loyal, self-sufficient but easily provoked into war, lost its central position. A tribe that founded and built Bombay - named after the name of their Goddess, Mumba Devi, finds it hard even to this day to get into positions of political or academic influence. For centuries now, other tribes have looked down upon them and the resulting psychological effects were devastating for this entire community of Kshatrias.



On the whole, conditions of Kolis were humiliating and little better than being on the bottom rung, even as late as the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Majority of the people being powerless and property less, were constantly in search of labour and almost always in debt. Having fallen into this cycle of poverty, they were fully taken advantage of by the upper castes. Generations were tied to bonded labour and treated just as bad. For a once proud people, their reaction was uncompromising. Frequently they engaged in gang robberies, plundering and looting. They got involved in piracy on high seas. The British, who faced these forays a long time, eventually subdued them. They much appreciated these 'misguided' but secretive, loyal and trustworthy band and lavished praise on them saying, 'In these plundering parties they often display a very desperate courage; and it is to their honour that, rude and lawless as they are, they do not apparently delight in blood for its own sake, and neither mutilate, torture, nor burn the subjects of their cupidity or revenge like the far worse 'dacoits' of Bengal or Ireland.'

Records suggest that the years between 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were the most deprived and degraded years for Koli.

### The Present

Here I want to introduce a piece of research by Shree Ashok Patel. This research is based on the records kept by the 'Barots' of old who visited all the villages every two years in Gujarat recording births and deaths and any interesting story or incident. Ashokbhai wrote this for his Kanbi Community. However the conclusion is that the exodus referred to was not just of the Kanbis from a town called Kanbi but a general exodus of a huge Hindu people of the area. His article is entitled 'Origins of Patels'. I have taken the liberty to cut some of the long descriptions.

[Origin of Patels - Charotar Patels, Surti Patels, Kanbi Patels and possibly most of the Gujaratis in Gujarat

More than once, when addressing Patel gatherings, Swami Sachchidananda has said that over a thousand years ago the forefathers of us, the present day Patels, suffered great hardships in Punjab near the famous Takshila University. In conquering the region the Badhshah of Afghanistan created a havoc and large population moved south from Punjab settling as they moved down south from Punjab.

On examination of the records (Vansavadia, Vahivanchas) kept by the 'Barots' proves that this is so. The present day Patidars, various denominations of Patels and Kanbis are originally from Punjab. That part of Punjab is in West Punjab which today is the Punjab state in present day Pakistan. The areas of Gujranwala and Kheda are in Pakistan. It is interesting to note that when a number of them finally settled down in Central Gujarat they renamed the area Kheda. From Punjab they moved to Marvad and then to Gujarat.

Research shows that around AD 1000, the Badhshah of Afghanistan attacked and conquered Punjab. He and his soldiers committed great atrocities on the people of Punjab. The Hindus were forcefully converted to the Islam religion. They kidnapped and raped many of our women, Many committed suicide. Some of the women were converted to Islam and some soldiers married them in their traditional Islam style. Our forefathers left Punjab to escape from the atrocities of the Afghan king and his soldiers. The people who left Punjab were from Leava, Karad and hundreds of other villages of the Gujranwala district (presently in Pakistan). Even today there is a group of people of the Kanbi caste in the villages of the Pakistani Punjab.

These people left Punjab for Marvad with what little belongings they could fit on their bullock carts. At that time, Marvad was ruled by Parmar kings and the fame of Rajah Bhoj was widely known. This was the reason our forefathers were attracted to that region. At that time Marvad was very densely

populated and it was not possible to acquire enough land. After staying for a short period in Marvad, they left for Khambhat (Kheda District) on hearing that there was uncultivated land available and this brought them to Gujarat. At this time the Solankis were ruling Gujarat. At the time Petlad Taluka had plenty of uncultivated land and the newcomers requested the King to grant them this land. Land equivalent to about one GAM (village) was granted to each family and the many families settled on this land. The refugees being hard workers managed to cultivate the land with great benefits. It was decided that a twelfth portion of the crop would be given to the King in return for the land. But the cost of collecting this twelfth part from each farmer was very high so the king drew up an agreement and appointed a headman for each village. These headmen controlled the farmers and collected crops from them for the king. The agreement of the land was kept in the custody of the elders in the family of the headman. The records of the kingdom and the crops were kept on the PAT (record or log book) and the person who entered and kept these records was known as 'PATLIKH'. Patlikh was shortened to Patat and then became PATEL.

The people that came from the village Leava became known as Leava Patel and those that came from the village Karad became Kadwa Patel. The Kadva Patels settled in the Northern part of Gujarat and the Leava Patels settled around Khambhat. The people who settled in Gujarat were very industrious and intelligent and became farmers and in a short period of time, Gujarat started to prosper.

As time went by, the kings and the kingdoms changed and so did the portions of the crops given to the kings. The main industry and income of the kingdoms was agriculture and the kingdoms were sustained on the income from the farms and so the payments were increased to one sixth part of all crops cultivated.

Then Khambhat became the kingdom of the Mauryavansi and the crops collected from the farmers was different each year. It was high at times and low at the other times and was dictated as per the need of the kingdom and hence this part of the kingdom became known as CHAR OTAR (from Chad climb up and Utar - climb down).

Between A.D. 1300 -1400, the king of Delhi Allaudin Khilji and his soldiers captured this part of Gujarat and ended the rule of Hindu kings. Allaudin Khilji told his Subas (clerks) that the strength of the farmers was in their wealth and so squeeze as much wealth as possible from the farmers without making them completely destitute. Leave only enough for the farmers to sow the following year's crops. Fifty percent of the crops were collected in payment from each farmer leaving them extremely poor. Allaudin Khilji ruled Gujarat for 15 to 20 years.

Mohammed Bagdo became the next ruler of Gujarat and took a third of all crops and outlawed any stealing. To improve farming, he chose the best farmer from each village and handed those farmers the land. In return he asked the chosen farmers to improve the farming, provide security for that village and make the village prosperous and pay the kingdom on fixed cash base (BANDHI AVAK). This way the tradition of giving part of the crop to the kingdom was abolished and a permanent propriety of the land was granted. Whoever had the propriety of the land were called **Patedar** which changed to Kanbi Patidar and then became Patel Patidar. This way once again the Patel Patidar became the owners of each village. From then on the Patel Patidar have maintained themselves as Patidar and have cultivated land by hiring farm labour. Thus the villages of Gujarat started to prosper once again.

Around A.D. 1600 Akbar conquered Gujarat. Akbar had the land measured by the 'Todarmal' and established the 'Vindhoti' system (land tax). This is today's 'Mayshul' system.

When the Kanbis first came to Kheda from one of the first villages to be established in the Petlad taluka, Bhadrans taluka and others were Saujitra, Naar Bhardan, Karamsad, Virsad, Dharmaj, etc. They slowly became over populated and this brought shortage of houses and agricultural land. In the

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beginning each family had about 5000 'Viga' land but when that land was passed on to the successive generations, the share to each family became smaller and smaller which in turn made the families poorer.

Between A.D. 1820 and 1830 some of the poor families decided to move towards South Gujarat and were joined by Leava Patidars from other densely populated villages. They settled around Surat. The surrounding areas of Surat were dense forests which they cleared and cultivated the land. Houses were built from the timber of the same jungles and then villages were established.

In the beginning there was a link between the People of the Kheda district and that of the Surat district but as transportation was difficult, the link started to weaken. The main means of transport at that time were bullock carts, horses and camels. It took 10 to 12 days to travel between Charotar and Surat. (The railway first came to India in 1860 and the first rail route was between Bombay and Thane.) Relatives from Surat and Charotar visited each other but the contact gradually decreased over the generations and in the end all links were cut off. Right from the beginning, marriages between the people of Surat and that of Charotar had ceased as this could take over 20 to 25 days of travel.

Between 50 and 60 villages were established by the People who came to Surat and as the population of this group was small, they established between 50 to 60 houses in each village. They built big houses as there was plenty of land. The 'Khacho' (empty land at the back of the house) known as 'Vaado', in Surat, were big and so each house had their own well for water. They also had stables built with their houses for the cattle and had an 'Ukardo' for the cattle manure. They also kept a 'Khari' (plain clear space) in the 'vaado' for bringing in the crops. All these facilities were incorporated in each house. In Charotar, they had faced the difficulties of not having all these conveniences.

There are a number of stories and incidents recorded in the 'Barots' books. What can be summarized from them is that to escape from the atrocities of a new Muslim Rule, a large Hindu population possibly consisting of different castes, Gnatis and Jatis decided to move South of Punjab. As they moved some settled and over the centuries others continued to move south looking for better prospects. In the process the breakaway groups and the increase in population led to more groupings and divisions.

The Kanbi, Leava and Kadwa are mentioned because it is assumed that they were from these cities and villages still to be found in the present day Punjab now in Pakistan.

An interesting story is about a group setting out on a pilgrimage to see Kashi Viswanath in around 1840. En route they met a pious Muslim man called Imamshah who promised to give them 'darsan' of Viswanth where they were. Some agreed. This group later accepted Imamshah as their Guru and started dual religious practice. (Hindu and Muslim). Few of them now remain. But this is how it seems more and more groupings started.

Apart from the various Castes the Hindu society is divided in hundreds of jatis and gnatis. They became separated and ingrained permanently for lack of transport and communications.

Over the last century however thousands from these various groups have traveled and settled overseas. Mandhata Patels is one such group.

This article originally researched and written by Shree Ashok Patel as showing the origins of Kanbi Patel has been adapted to show our common history and heritage.]

In present day India, Kolis are found from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari and are known by slightly different names according to the languages of the regions. The following are some of the major groups: Koli Kshtria, Koli Raja, Koli Rajput, Koli Suryavanshi, Nagarkoli, Gondakoli, Koli Mahadev, Koli Patel, Koli Thakor, Bavraya, Tharkarda, Pathanvadia, Mein Koli, Koyeri, Mandhata Patel etc.

As an original tribe of India preferring to live in open agricultural landscape and coastal regions as clansman, the present day Kolis are a product of much intermarriage. It has been estimated that there are over 1050 subgroups all lumped together as Koli in the population census. Vast majority have very little in common except that they are Hindus, that the upper class Hindus have always accepted that a Koli's touch does not defile and Koli chiefs of pure blood are difficult to distinguished from the Kshtria Rajputs among whom there are regular intermarriage.

### **Kolis of Gujarat**

Writers Anthovan and Dr. Wilson believe that the original settlers in Gujarat were Kolis and Adivasi Bhils. Ravbahadur Hathibhai Desai confirms this to be so at the time of ruler Vanraj some 600 years ago. The very diverse ethnic groups represented now in the Gujarati population is said to be Vedic or Dravidian. These include the Nagar Brahman, Bhatia, Bhadela, Koli, Rabari, Mina, Bhangi, Dubla, Naikda, and Macchi-Kharwa tribes. Parsis, originally from Persia, represent a much later influx. The rest of the population is the Adivasi Bhil tribe.

It must be accepted that centuries of intermixing in all the peoples of the world in addition to natural, environmental and historical upheavals have left not a single race of the people intact and of pure blood. Untold number of civil wars and even world wars have been fought by misguided people to prove themselves a super race and practice ethnic cleansing on a large scale. In Northern Gujarat competent observers have noted that the Kanbi and Patidars castes have married into Koli caste for generations. And in 1918-19 it was a Patidar who introduced an Intercaste Marriage Bill to regularise the practice. The social hypocrisy of asserting the vanity of being of upper class among all Indian groups appears to be for no reason other than self and group vain glory.

While Kolis and Bhils may have been the original inhabitants of Gujarat they lost ground to the later arrivals and most likely settled near the coast and hills. Kolis in particular with their affinity to Buddha suffered severe discrimination in earning a living. As an original Kshritya fighting caste, their one characteristic of being easily provoked to fight did not help. They may also be described as ruggedly individualistic more so at that time then now. For majority of them life even two hundred years ago was one of severe hardship, bonded labour and indignity. That was the price they paid to submission.

The census of 1931 put the Koli population of Gujarat and Kathiavad to 24% of the total. This large proportion is said to be because all people settled in the plains and the coastal areas were treated as Kolis. They represented the five distinct groups who by now had developed separately and had lost contact with one another but put together as Talpadas.

### **Condition of Kolis in Daxin (South) Gujarat over the last 150 Years**

(This chapter is mainly based on a study carried out by Dr. Arjun Patel, PhD. for his doctorate in 1987. The article is in Gujarati and is attached to this paper as an appendix).

The glorious past, that Kolis may have enjoyed in ancient times began to dwindle after Lord Buddha. Persecution suffered at the hands of the stronger Sanatan and Vedic groups drove them to wherever they could find safe ground. Living in fear and deprivation reduced them to resort to crime and other social vices. Like any other people of the world the Kolis must have survived by their wits, poor, hungry, unskilled and uneducated right until the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is most likely that other

people in such conditions all over India may also have been lumped together as Kolis, hence the huge Koli population. The caste system classified all these people as backward and little above the dalits and untouchables.

Indian literature of the time and even until the last fifty years Kolis were generally depicted as villains, uneducated, backward and of an elusive character, generally involved in crime.

And this is still the label carried by Kolis in most parts of India even today. Officially the Kolis are categorised as Other Backward Class –OBC.

We noted the Koli contribution in the 1857 uprising and the important part played by Kolis soldiers and generals in the Sivaji's Maratha army. The vast majority however eked out their living as labourers in various occupations. Some of the common occupations were in farming, shipping and fishing and other menial duties.

It has been estimated that there are some 1040 distinct tribes lumped together as Kolis. Depending on where they are in India they dress differently depending on the occupations they are tied to, speak a variety of languages, observe distinctly different customs and mode of living, not in any way related to, to other Kolis if they are geographically at a distance.

Let us now look at Kolis of Daxin Gujarat in some detail. Arjunbhai studied a period of a hundred years between 1885 and 1985. He divided that period in three –1885 to 1925, 1925 to 1960 and 1960 to 1985 to chart progress over these periods in detail in the social, economic and political conditions. I do not intend to follow the periodic changes but hope to cover to 2010 – the present day.

Of the total Hindu population of Gujarat and Kathiavad in 1891, Kolis were 23.2%. Whereas in 1931 of the 17,29,039 Hindus, 24% were Kolis. This large proportion as we have noted was due to lumping several distinct tribes as one.

The census of 1931 for Surat District put the Koli population as numbering 106,321. This was one sixth of the total. They were mostly residing in eight talukas of Surat and six of Navsari. Kolis also formed a good part of the adjacent Indian Kingdoms, particularly Gaekwad, etc spreading to Baroda and the Sachin State, in a total of about 600-700 villages. This cluster is formed within some 21 districts of Southern Gujarat and is estimated to have 900,000 Kolis. Among themselves this cluster maintains close social contacts with peoples of nearby districts and villages.

Among the higher caste in Gujarat the southern Gujarat Kolis enjoyed both a highly positive and the generations old negative reputations. Among the positive side, and this is perhaps within the last 200 years, they were described as brave and courageous, conscientious and hard-working, nationalistic and independent in spirit, reliable and said to be remarkably faithful when trusted. On the other hand the old picture of a thief, robbers, pirates and plunderers of the high seas. For this reason Kolis everywhere were looked down upon by the higher castes.

A serious scholar of the peoples of Gujarat, Alice Clarke, believes that it was easy and rather opportunist to blame the Kolis for criminal activities. Kolis were too simple and were really the victims of the then prevailing social circumstances. Historian David Hardiman too held the same opinion. Whatever the truth, the negative reputation stayed with them for a very long time and has still not fully worn off. The literature of the day described the villain characters in their stories as Kolis, thus scandalising the whole tribe. Even today the stigma has not fully worn off.

In Bharuch and Surat District Talapdas form the main groups. In the south the highest Kolis are called Mandhata Sororaria or Mansororaria and Koli Patel or Mandhata Koli Patel. Exactly where they came from to live in the plains and near the coast around Surat and Navsari is not known. It is possible that they are the decedents of the Thakurs of Gujarat who fled to the hills in the time of

Mahmud Begada's persecutions and later returned and settled as farmers. They are certainly said to be distinct from the Kolis of the Deccan Plains.

The religious beliefs of Kolis, as far as is known were based on the stories of Ramayan and Mahabharat and Puranas enacted by visiting troupes. They worshipped Siva, Ram and Krishna and were prone to the prevailing superstitions. Yet the simple understanding of their Sanatan Hindu Dharma kept them God fearing and on the straight path.

Right until the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> Century their chief occupation was agriculture, and farm labour. In this employment they were regarded as excellent cultivators and labourers. Most families had some land, which by this time had been handed down from father to son and as the supply of agricultural land in the area was limited the farms divided into smaller and smaller size. People living the coast developed fishing and transport of goods by sea.

In general right until 1925 Kolis and other lower tribes were exceedingly exploited by other higher castes all over India. In Gujarat it was no different. Alice Clarke has recorded that it was this exploitation that drove Kolis to criminal activities. She further added that the British in order to contain this activity enacted a law in 1835 and by enforcing it severely the British actually helped the rich and the powerful to exploit these simple people even more. As a result a large number were reduced to slavery and pitiable conditions.

As farmers few Kolis had more than 10 acres of land, most had 3 acres or less and a vast number were landless labourers. Also the land they had was of lower quality than land held by the higher caste members. Agricultural labour was available only for part of the time and so the landless labourers for generations were tied to bonded labour. In off season they would be made to do all sorts of other menial jobs. They were rarely paid in money. Their labour was in exchange for a bare minimum of food.

Financially vast majority of the Kolis were forever in debt to their bosses the Kanbi, Anavils, Parsees or the other non-Koli people. As they had no security to offer the interest rate charged was almost double. Quite often the debt was secured against whatever security they could provide. This could be land, domestic animals or any household goods. The lender would insist interest being paid every year. He was not too concerned about the principal as this was a lucrative source of his income. In due course of time he would simply take the animal or land away and even throw the family out of their ramshackle house.

In terms of education right until 1850 few Kolis could read or write. There were no schools in the villages and few that were there were in bigger cities. Only a handful possibly could afford to send their children to city school. Hence the Kolis of the time were uneducated, ignorant, unskilled, exploited and at the bottom of the rung.

We noted that farming and farm labour was the Kolis main occupation. However as this was by nature seasonal they had to look for other work. Fishing and transporting goods by sea were other occupations. Apart for these jobs involved in procuring juice from palm trees was another. This was a highly skilled undertaking climbing high up and making sure that the trees suffer no future damage when cut to let the juice run into the pot. Yet the workers were paid a labourer's wage. Delivering milk door to door was another occupation.

Spinning, weaving, textile and clothing created many job opportunities and Kolis were involved in all of these. Vast majority however were at the labouring end of each. Textile mills and ginneries employed many people in the cities and towns. Many Koli women including young girls worked in jinneries. The conditions under which they worked were most unhygienic. Working long hours, breathing cotton lint and quite often sleeping rough in the factories. Going back home most suffered from ill health, exhaustion and often developed serious diseases such as TB. The work in these factories paid little yet their need to help feed the family drove them to such dangerous jobs.

One of the talents Kolis had was in the field of construction. Kolis showed special skill in all jobs in civil and mechanical engineering. After the arrival of the British in Surat job opportunities opened up in building railways, construction of roads and bridges etc. Kolis were sought after. This was especially so among Koli Patels of South Gujarat and Navsari district in particular. Mention the name 'Patel' and he was immediately given such a job. Some of the famous bridges were built by Kolis.

For landless Koli labourers however there were long periods of unemployment. Going out to distant cities and towns was inevitable. And many did go. First on their own without being accompanied by their families and later when they had some secure job being joined by the family. In time to come large numbers settled in these towns and cities doing a wide variety of jobs. Bombay was a popular destination. In fact it is said that Bombay was initially settled by Kolis. They established Mumba Devi their icon in Bombay.

A survey carried out in Bombay in 1918, Kolis numbered just over 3000. In Bombay they lived in Kolaba, Kalbadevi, Bhuleswar, Bangalipura, Mandvi Bazaar, Khadak Majgam, Tardev Grant Road, Girgam, Chopati, Valkeshvar, Parel, Kot etc. areas.

As years passed more and more Kolis from villages joined their relations and friends in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Baroda, etc. and settled there.

Initially a large number of them who were not skilled in fishing or transport were engaged in occupations such as in horse/carriage transport, printing works, semi-skilled work and a few were clerks and primary school teachers. A number of fishing villages in Bombay were Koli villages.

Later however as they settled and trained themselves to become turners, fitters, joiners, metal workers etc. they found more rewarding jobs.

Late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century was also the time when Kolis from Daxin Gujarat travelled to distant land in search of work and a better life in India and overseas. The bold among them did achieve their dreams, usually away from their hometowns. Eg. In 1918 Shree Vallabhbai of Veravar in Navsari district started a company called 'Japan Bazaar' and had branches in Shanghai in Burma, Kabe and Hong Kong.

Prior to the start of railway line between Bombay and Baroda there was a large scale transport of goods by sea with Surat as the main port. All along the South Gujarat coast there were many more small ports. Some of these were, Vansi, Borsi, Umbhrat, Dandi, Onjal, Sultanpur, Dummas, Suvai etc. These were all Koli villages and a lot of them worked mainly as labourers on the boats. The two-way transport of goods carried on between the ports of South Gujarat and places as far as Calcutta, Java, Sumatra, Malabar, Singapore, Ceylon and on the West as far as Abyssinia. Building of the railways however curtailed much of the sea transport.

Kolis therefore had some knowledge of distant lands. In the later part of 19<sup>th</sup> Century many stayed longer and longer in these countries and some settled for good later taking their families. We shall look at this aspect later.

Vast majority of the Kolis in Gujarat and elsewhere in India continued to suffer serious penalties and discrimination at the hands of higher caste Hindus and others. Bonded labour akin to slavery was common among Koli labourers and lasted well into the first quarter of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Political power for Kolis right until the arrival of Independence was nil. After the 1960s some of the educated among them realised their power in politics as a result of their large numbers. Steadily they started taking positions in villages and towns and as of now Koli are to be found in State and National Parliament.

For Kolis slow but steady progress started to manifest after the arrival of Gandhi Bapu's Volunteers started to come and live among the Koli villagers and set up village schools, and other craft training.

### **Kolis of Navsari, Surat and Surrounding Areas**

We will now look at some depth the Koli people who settled in the costal area of Jalalpore and Navsari District formerly a part of Valsad District and before then a part of Surat District of South Gujarat. This is a Koli tribe known as 'Koli Patel' or 'Mandhata Koli Patel'.

Records suggest, as we have seen that Kolis have lived in Gujarat for at least 600 years and may even be the oldest inhabitants of Gujarat. I personally could trace my own ancestry to six generations (Keshavlal – Jerambhai – Somabhai -Morarbhai – Valia – Makla) say about 150 years and find that my great grandfather Makla may have put his roots at a spot in a village now called Bodali. The exact spot developed into a falia called Dhuna Falia where all the houses now standing are of Makla Bapa's decedents. So where Malka Bapa or his parents were before then is still a mystery, a subject for further study. This is perhaps the background of all us in this area.

Whether this area was virgin land or there were other inhabitants there we do not know. But as the villages developed a few families of Kanbi and Desai must have migrated there as most of these villages have a Desai Falia in the village. Yet no case of bonded labour has come to light and so to that extent Koli people in these villages may have a slightly different background for the general Koli population in Southern Gujarat.

As a whole however, the financial position of this group of people spread over some fifty villages was poor. They were mostly uneducated and majority of them led a simple life and were often in debt. For the vast majority of them job opportunity were confined to working on their own farm or farm labour. The nearest town was Navsari and this was on average 10 miles away. Surat was the main city some thirty miles away. Transportation was by bullock cart. So within the limits of finance and geography, life for majority of the population was confined within the limits of their and a few surrounding villages. A century ago social contacts among people living ten or twenty miles away was extremely limited. Any parent deciding to give their daughter in marriage to a far away village may not see the daughter again for years on end. For a family, marriage, birth of a child and death of a near relation were the main events in life. These were also a time of stress as such events plunged the families into debt and worry. Simple religious festivals must have been a relief.

At the turn of the century a slow but sure change was taking place for these people. All of a sudden it seems a giant has awoken. Slowly at first but picking up speed over the years men and women found hidden talent and strength. More and more of the youths of these villages ventured further a field looking for work and fortune. Larger boats still depending on wind power and going overseas usually started from Calcutta and so our youths first had to make that journey before boarding a boat usually as a work hand to pay their passage. Yet many set off that way to Burma, Fiji, South Africa, New Zealand and as far as UK, Brazil and West Indies. (More about these Mandhata economic migrants (Diaspora in today's language) to these overseas countries a little later).

The catalyst for a major change in the 50 or so village in the Jalalpore and Navsari District came about as a result of Gandhi Bapu's return to India from South Africa. After what Bapu achieved in South Africa, he was hailed as a leader in India. One of his important programme in the fight against the British for Independence of India was the reawakening of people in the villages. And as part of this programme he sent out volunteers to villages to promote education and other home crafts and general awareness in preparation for Independence.

Our people in the villages were already aware of Bapu's work in South Africa through correspondence with the hundreds of our relations who had settled in South Africa. So when Independence movement gathered speed our people were ready before anywhere else in Gujarat.



The period between 1910 and 1920s was a period of great awareness for our people. While the problem of poverty was of personal importance to all our families this was delicately balanced with the need to make a full contribution in the Independence Struggle. In this respect the idealism of our youths was unstoppable. Clandestine groups were operating in all our villages. Network of news and information lines kept people aware of latest developments and movements of our leaders and their thoughts. Letters and visits from relations in South Africa kept people informed of developments there.

When on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1915, Bapu returned to India from South Africa a number of people who were with him there returned also. Bapu had personal knowledge of the character of our people. So when the time came to decide the destination of the 1930 Salt March it was no accident that he chose Dandi, from among a number of choices and pressures from other interested parties. He was convinced of the courage and the depth of understanding of our people in completing a project successfully. And so it proved.

During the 1930 Salt March and thereafter till Independence and particularly in 1942 when the British police opened fire on the peaceful demonstration wave after wave of our people filled the jails and in 1942 three of our young men gave their lives. They were 45 year old Shahid Vir Morarbhai Panchabhai Patel of Karadi, 22 year old Shahid Vir Ranchodbhai Lalabhai Patel also of Karadi and 16 year old Shahvir Maganbhai Dhanjibhai Patel of Mokhla Falia in Matwad. 10 suffered serious bullet wounds and had to be treated in private hospitals. One of them was my own maternal grandfather Ranchhodbhai Lalabhai Patel of Vahan Falia, Matwad, who carried me on his shoulder to the demonstration. Other 11 were wounded and were treated locally. A memorial in Matwad constantly reminds us of their sacrifice. Stories of great sacrifices made by Indians at all levels abound in every community.

From South Gujarat Mandhata Koli Patels played important role in the struggle for Independence. Dandi, Karadi, Matwad and other near by villages were central to this effort and thousands of people of this area made supreme sacrifices. Many suffered severe police brutality and long jail custody. Hundreds gave up their studies as they were actively involved in contributing to the Independence effort. Their stories of valour, bravery and sacrifices are recorded in a number of books produced as memoirs. These are: Swanratrya Sangramni Gourav Gatha by late Shree Dayalbhai Kesari, Swantra-Sangramna Mara Sansmrano by Jerambhai Fakirbhai Patel (Jackbhai), Swantra-Sangramna Sansmrano Published by Swantra-Sangram Itihas Samiti and Edited by Mohanbhai Dandiker, and a number of books on Dandi Salt March. All these are written in Gujarati.

Hundreds of freedom fighters are named in the above books with varied degree of bravery, and sacrifices. We salute them all.

While the contribution of each of them in the freedom struggle is unique and inspirational I want to record here briefly the story of Shree Panchakaka whose personal Satyagraha was hailed by Bapu as incomparable. Quietly and staunchly sticking to his vow became an inspiration to Indians all over India.

### **Panchakaka**

Not many of us have heard about him or know much about him. He did not leave a string of achievements to account for his long life. Yet he got the highest accolade from Gandhi Bapu the father of the Indian nation for the one vow he adhered to through out his life.

Panchbhai Dajibhai Patel was born in 1876 in Karadi. He probably never went to school but taught himself to read and write Gujarati. Like most of the people in the area he farmed the one acre of land he owned and to make ends meet he did some tailoring sewing garments. He was a religious man

and organised satsang at his home every Saturday evenings. Bhajans by Kabir, Narsih Mehta and Mirabai were his favourite and would recite from memory.

He came across a book translated by Balubhai Parekh on Gandhi Bapu's life story and instantly took to the Gandhi Way and Gandhi philosophy.

All the programmes that Gandhi Bapu presented to the Nation on his arrival from South Africa in 1915, Panchkaka was in the forefront in participating and implementing in his area. From Nagpur Zanda Satyagrah to the '1930-32 Salt March and Dharasna Salt Episode for which he went to jail. He was personally known to Bapu and admired his courage.

In 1921 Bapu was to start Satyagrah from Bardoli where he was to suggest withholding payment of land tax. Because of an incident the programme was called off. However Panchkaka took a vow not to pay the land tax on his small holding until Independence (by his and Bapu's definition – Ram Rajya) come to India.

When the time came to pay the land tax he refused. Indian Congress workers argued with him that since the programme where Bapu was going to put this to the people had not taken place he is not bound and that he should pay the tax. Panchakaka was not convinced and so he went to Sabarmati Ashram to consult Bapu. Bapu asked him on whose advice did you take this vow. Panchakaka replied 'you have written in 'Navjivan' that any one who stood up against injustice could not be subdued, I read this and decided it for my self'. Bapu asked him if he would carry on with the fight even if no one was with him. Panchakaka replied 'Yes'. Are you not afraid you might be on your own? Panchakaka quoted Rabindranath Tagore's 'Go Alone' poem and said "I will fight alone". Bapu congratulated him and gave his blessings saying "Don't pay the land tax".

At that time Panchakaka was the first and only one Satyagrahi in India. His land which was his main source of livelihood was taken away by the government. After 17 years in 1939 when Congress Ministers were appointed and it was decided to hand back land taken away from such freedom fighters Panchakaka refused to pay the tax saying getting petty powers was no Independence. Morarji Desai was responsible for land tax department and a suggestion made to give the land to Valjibhai, Panchakaka's nephew (Panchakaka had no children) who also refused to pay the tax. When Panchakaka met Bapu he was impressed by Panchakaka's resolve. Bapu suggested that the land could be given to Dilkhushbhai Desai who was managing the Karadi Khadi Bhandar until full Independence comes. In 1946 when Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel joined the Delhi Government a further request was made to Panchakaka to take over the land and he again refused saying that this was still not a full Independence.

On 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947, Panchakaka unfurled the National Flag in Karadi to mark the Independence of India. He was again asked to take back his land but he refused again saying that as long as the country has to be dependent on the army, it was not the Swaraj of his dreams and added that even Gandhi Bapu did not return to Sabarmiti. Panchakaka never took back his land. He toiled on his spinning wheel to earn his living till he died on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1951.

Panchakaka was perhaps the only man who asked Bapu in 1939, 1946 and 1947 if this was the Swaraj we all wanted. Bapu had to agree that it was not and noted in 'Harijan Bandhu' of Panchakaka's vow describing it as incomparable in the annals of Satyagrah. Earlier on Panchakaka had asked Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to see that the Independence they got for India ensured that the poor earned enough to eat.

Panchakaka's land with Gandhi Kutir stand there as a symbol and as remembrance of unfulfilled dreams. Sixty years on the poor are still struggling for their piece of bread.

This is one of many stories, which symbolises the bravery, sacrifices and iron resolves of Mandhata Samaj Koli Patel people of Kantha Vibhag of Navsari District.

### Education in Kantha Vibhag

#### South African Contribution

We have noted that starting around 1875 a number of people from our villages started going to South Africa and that many of them came in contact with Gandhi Bapu and even stayed with him in the Ashram he established and actively participated and supported him. A few even returned with him and gave up their right to go back to South Africa. Although they themselves had little education they were perhaps the first to realise the need for education for our people in the villages.

They formed 'Transvaal Koli Hitwarthak Mandal' in South Africa and collected funds to promote education among our people. In 1917 they bought a property in Navsari and converted it to a residential place – Koli Ashram - for students from the villages to stay and study in Navsari schools. They also set up a scholarship and loans scheme to be given every year.

During the first thirty years or so this Ashram played a very crucial role in the development of the Kantha Vibhag Villages. Hundreds of students studied from here. The Ashram was also the hub of the Freedom Movement in the area. These very students led the Freedom Movement programmes and later became the leaders of the community.

In 1973/5 the old Ashram Building was knocked down and was replaced by a five storey complex with shops/offices on the ground floor and students and visitors accommodation and community hall above. By this time however the need for any accommodation was much reduced and the Hall being on the top floor, the place is little used.

Our people in South Africa and their leadership of the time made great personal sacrifices to try and help uplift the local Koli Patel Samaj. They made a successful start with the Koli Vidhyathi Ashram in Navsari in 1917. Later in 1946 they bought a four acre plot of land at Chhapra Road and the title deed was registered in the name of a Trustee of Daxin Gujarat Keravani Trust set up for the purpose. This plot remains undeveloped and under internal disputes.

In 1947 another over one acre plot of land was bought near Nutan Society and was registered in the name of Navsari Vibhag Keravani Trust. This plot too remains undeveloped.

Disappointed at the performance of the local management our South African leaders bought another four acre plot of land with a substantial building on it and registered this in their own branch organisation 'Transvaal Koli Hitwarthak Trust – Navsari, name. They reserved the right to appoint the local Trustees for day-to-day management under their guidance. This organisation has continued giving out scholarships and loans to students and also started a Magazine 'Nav Pragati'.

Over the years however the heavily committed South African Leadership gave way to a more relaxed leadership which depended more and more on Navsari management which proved not up to mark and this site too has now run down, dilapidated and mired in internal disputes.

It is a pity that the local management has failed to generate any useful income from the land and properties invested by our South African forefathers which are presently worth several crores of Rupees. This is a great let down of their dreams.

### Local Developments

(Most of the details of local educational developments and early overseas settlements described below are taken from the articles written by Shree Maganbhai B Karadia – see reference section)

At the beginning of twentieth century there was great up surge in the awareness of our people in the national and other developments. Letters from our people in South Africa laid the foundation in the work of Gandhi Bapu. When Bapu returned back to India many of our people were eager to hear and learn from him. Several teams from a number of our villages attended Bapu's meetings in Ahmedabad and elsewhere and on their return from these meeting they were bubbling with enthusiasm to put what they learnt from Bapu.

Bapu was putting forward programmes of Communal Unity, Abolition of Untouchability, Swadeshi clothes made from Khadi, and National education.

The above programmes were enthusiastically welcomed by the people in the villages. Spinning for at least few hours a day became a regular activity for everyone. Schools started in someone's home as one or two teacher affairs. People were encouraged to keep one or two buffalos as milk formed a large part of the family income. Solving social and family problems the non-violence way started to become the norm. Gandhi and Indian Congress were seen as one and almost everyone was a Gandhian. All the villagers were fast becoming part of Gandhi's army of freedom fighters.

Main thrust of village development was in the field of education. People donated land to build schools and steadily schools started becoming an important feature of village life. Most were of course basic affairs, but a few villages ventured to set up Rastriya Shala. Karadi, Bodali, Matwad and Onjal developed their schools as such, but these had to be run on voluntary funds. Eventually Karadi was the only Rastriya Shala that survived and in 1935 it was named Bharat Vidyalay, based on curriculum set by the Gujarat Vidhapith in Ahmedabad. This institution played an important role in preparing students from all the nearby villages for the Indian freedom Struggle particularly after the arrival of Acharya Manibhai Patel in 1928. The pioneers in establishing the original Rastriya Shala from Karadi were Shree Unkabhai Mankanbhai, Naranbhai Bavabhai, Ramabhai Gosaibhai, Kanjibhai Chhibabhai and Vallabhbai Punabhai.

After over fifty years the old buildings were showing signs of wear and tear and perhaps no longer suitable for modern day facilities. So on the initiative of Karadi Sangathan Mandal a Karadi village Mandal based in UK, built a completely new complex on a nearby site with full teaching and extra curriculum facilities. Science and computing subjects became compulsory and library, swimming and drama services were made available to all the students. This project became possible due to the foresight and hard work of people like Shree Babubhai Rama, Maganbhai Karadia, Maheshbhai Karadia, Ranchhodbhai (R.C.) and others of Karadi.

To encourage National education Programme, Bapu founded "Gujarat Vidyapith" –University - in Ahmedabad. To accelerate the emancipation of villages Bapu had called upon able and educated youths to go out and live in villages among the village people and put into practice his fourfold programme.

The arrival of these volunteers in our area proved to be a catalyst. They had high Gandhian ideals and skills. Two such important arrivals, Acharya Manibhai Patel who in 1928 became the Principal of Bharat Vidyalay, Karadi and Dilkhushbhai Diwanji who developed the Spinning and weaving activity in the whole of our area.

They lived amongst us until their death. Their contribution in our emancipation is invaluable.

The above example of Karadi has been a typical story of the development of education in each of the 50 or so villages in Navsari District Kantha Vibhag. There were pioneers in each village who set up schools, developed dairy farming to relieve poverty, encouraged spinning and weaving, kept the Talavs regularly maintained, started Bhajan Mandals and local Gam Seva Mandals to ensure that the village was generally kept neat and tidy and people enjoyed fair play in their social dealings.

Just as the second phase of development in Karadi was initiated by Karadias settled in overseas countries, all other villages were also helped substantially by their respective gam people overseas.

Names of most of these original pioneers and later groups are enshrined in the Gujarati books mentioned above and are also to be found in the records of each of the Gam Mandals either in India or overseas countries. Their hard work and donations have made what the local villages are today.

A tremendous effort is needed to raise the status of our people en par with other communities.

### **The Big Wave of Immigration**

The catalyst for a large social and economic change was the arrival of the British in Surat.

In the thirties and forties men confidently ventured out not just to the nearby cities but to the far corners of India and particularly overseas to New Zealand, South and East Africa in large numbers.

The turning point was the skill of our people in construction, especially in large civil engineering and bridge building projects.

The second half of 19<sup>th</sup> and the early years of 20<sup>th</sup> century, young men from the villages proved their worth working Indian Railways projects. More and more joined them. A time came when a Patel from Navsari and Surat was hired without a question being asked. These experiences prepared them to take on large construction projects.

These young men back in the villages in between work were fired with ambition and ideas. They spoke of education as the key. With the help of better off farmers in the community they started schools. Renaissance had begun.

The famine conditions of 1910/11 must have been severe. The British Agents in Surat were recruiting for rail building in East Africa. And while it definitely look foolhardy to make a 2000 miles journey across the ocean in a 30 foot boat relying on nothing but favourable wind many youngsters put their lives on the line and sailed. Over the years many perished.

This was also the time when many sailed for South Africa and New Zealand. In New Zealand Indians were not eligible for Government jobs and other employment were just as difficult. Here their natural survival skills and practical talents led them to self-employment and eventual prosperity. In South Africa our people felt the full force of apartheid. They struggled hard for a living all the time suffering indignities. Many joined Gandhi Bapu and became his close associates in a common struggle.

Also, the period prior to the Second World War saw the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of immigration of our people. Passports were easily available and hundreds of youths left their families to board sea-going clippers in search of a better life. A number of them perished and for the many who made it, life was very hard.

The story of Indians migrating to countries overseas mainly from the Western States of India and others over the last fifty years is a story of only partial success. Thousands of young men from our villages had migrated to South Africa and East Africa and New Zealand and later to UK, Canada and the USA. 1950s saw the wives and children of these men join them in those countries. In all these countries they were left to live their typical Indian way of life. Each Indian group lived their own

enclosed life surrounded by their Gods and ceremonies. Each group found the caste division and the associated status preceded them in these countries also.

Each lower group found some way of hiding their identity and raising their status in the eyes of other Indians. Some gave themselves fancy names, mixed with other groups, changed their diets and pretended to be of a higher caste.

### **Mandhata Koli Patels Abroad**

#### **Africa**

##### **South and Central Africa**

India is surrounded by sea on all three sides. Transport of goods by sea to nearby and distant lands was common and involved many people. They were familiar with many countries of the Far East and Africa. Well into the twentieth century even the bigger ships were dependent on wind power to carry them to their destination. Durban in South Africa was one such destination. Most of the ships going to Durban at that time used Calcutta. People from the city of Madras and large number of Muslims were the first to go to South Africa.

One of the first Mandhata Koli Patels go to Durban in South Africa in 1875 was Shree Vallabhbai Parshotbhai from Veravar Gam. Many soon followed him from Karadi, Matwad, Bodali, Samapur etc and they all had to travel to Calcutta, which must have taken a week and more in those days.

By 1893 when Gandhi Bapu arrived in Durban there were a fairly large number of Indians. At that time South Africa was fast sliding into a socially segregated society and practising strict apartheid based on the colour of people's skin. Gandhiji stayed on after the end of his assignment to fight against laws legalising apartheid. Many of our Koli people joined him. Foremost among them were, Nana Sita from Matwad, Jasmat Nana from Karadi and Fakira from Aat. They and others suffered jail sentences also and it is said that Fakira carried out guard duties at the Ashram protecting Gandhiji. He was so liked by Gandhiji that when Bapu came to Dandi for Salt March in 1930 and stayed in Dandi and Karadi for a total of 31 days he visited Fakira's home in Aat.

Fighting for their rights in South Africa during the time of Gandhiji and afterwards with Nelson Mandela our people made great sacrifices, A Maniben from Rupen Talav near Aat spent 22 years in jail and Naranbhai Jasmat spent 18 years. Dahyabhai Govind from Bhatpore gave his life in the struggle. Various others including Jasmat Nana, Chhotu Makan, Ramlal Bhulia were close associates of Nelson Mandela.

Our people there as in India proved fearless and reliable freedom fighters.

Many of our people who arrived in Durban and found life in South Africa not to their liking moved North to Southern and Northern Rhodesia and settled in Lusaka, Livingstone etc.

Our people who settled in South Africa were the first to take an enlightened view of the Community as a whole and took constructive steps to attempt to uplift our people at home. They set up Transvaal Koli Hitwardhak Mandal, in Johannesburg in 1914, collected donations from our people there and from our people in the Rhodesias and invested this in a property in Navsari where they built a residential home for students from the villages to stay and study in Navsari schools and colleges. A Samapur couple returned permanently from South Africa to manage this home called 'Koli Vidharthi Ashram -Navsari'. A Trust was set up to give scholarships and loans to encourage higher studies. They also funded the printing of a monthly magazine, 'NavPragati'. This was indeed an act of far reaching vision. This philanthropic work continues today.

To day there are a large number of our people in various towns and cities of South Africa. Whereas in the earlier days they toiled in all sorts of skilled, unskilled and menial jobs today vast majority of them are substantial businessmen, professionals and in other influential positions including politics.

### East Africa

I have mentioned earlier that my grandfathers from both side of my parents – Ranchhodbhai Lala of Vahan Falia, Matwad and Somabhai Morar of Dhuna Falia, Bodali, went to East Africa – Mombasa – Kenya in 1919/21. They went out to work on the building of the Railways and stayed there for about three years and returned. Until about 1935 East Africa was not the preferred destination for our people, but after that more and more youths in their late twenties and thirties set sail for Mombasa and Kenya. The stories of their travel in the early years and during war time were full of danger. Ships were reliant on favourable wind and often took more than a month from Bombay to Mombasa. My father was on one such boat with many others from our area. In 1943 – this was world war II time - and the Japanese sunk a steam ship carrying a load of passengers from Bombay to Mombasa. A few were drowned but most swam to safety. After the war large number of our people came to East Africa and settled there. I arrived in Kenya in 1948 at the age of twelve with two other from Bodali aged 12 and 15 year.

Mombasa was the main port of call. From here many continued to other large cities like Nairobi, Nakuru, Kisumu etc in Kenya, Kampala in Uganda and Daressalaam in Tanzania.

By the time the main thrust of Koli Patels from Surat district started to come to East Africa, other communities from Panjab and business people from Gujarat were already here in big numbers and had built their own homes. In the earlier years when our men folk came leaving behind their families they rented rooms - quite often unoccupied shops or stores - and lived in groups – often ten to fifteen. These dens were called meshes. People form the same gam lived together and were known as –Matwad Mesh or Bodali Mesh etc. As the men got a reasonable job and earned enough to rent for himself elder children were called up and then wives and other children.

Here it may be worth pointing out that the first generation of our people in East Africa were almost all labourers or semi-skilled workers. Life there was lived almost exactly as in the Indian villages. One member of the family going out to work and the family depended on one wage. After the wives and children arrived, the children studied to perhaps matriculation level and entered the job market mostly as clerks. Few of our people there had the resources or the knowledge to start a business. In financial terms the most that can be said is that the majority of the families lived a frugal, mostly debt free but poor life. Very few had a business and fewer still own a house. Most of these families had been settled in East Africa for over thirty years and held British passports.

In East Africa the Koli Patels from Navsari district –Surat District at the time - adopted 'Mandhata' as the name of our community. We identified ourselves as belonging to the Mandhata Community and all our Community Mandals were named as Mandhata Mandals. Few however attempted to hide their Koliness or change their diet to pass as holier than thou.

At times people have wondered how the word 'Mandhata' came to be connected to our community. I have not heard of a credible explanation but it appears that someone from our community reading or hearing the 'Purana's' identified us as the descendents of 'Mandhata' the powerful ancient king. And so the 'Mandhata' name stuck. This is now the name used by all our people residing in overseas countries.

It is one of our strong trait that where ever we find ourselves in a fairly big group we organise ourselves as a Mandal. Informal perhaps to start with to be formalised later. This is what I understand happened in Nairobi, Kenya. Few people informally started to meet as far back as 1925, possibly for

a pint of beer. They came to be known a 'Mandhata Mandal' although community work was rarely in their mind. Around 1951 however some community spirited people came together and under the leadership of Shree Keshavbhai Bhikhabhai Patel of Matwad met formally and formed 'Mandhata Hitwardhak Mandal', asked Hirabhai Vala, who had recently qualified as lawyer to prepare a constitution and a committee was elected. Prabhubhai Rattanji was one of the founder members. I too was a committee member for a few years around 1959. Keshavbhai Bhikhabhai provided a strong leadership and collecting donations of few shillings at a time form community members built a Mandhata Hall in Grogan Road in 1961. We did not make use of this hall for long as around 1968/9 more and more people started emigrating to UK before the arrival of Independence of Kenya as it was feared that after Independence of Kenya entering UK would come to a close as we were British Protected persons and not British Subjects. The premises were later sold for a song and the £10,000 received was repatriated to UK given to Mandhata Samaj UK.

Mombasa was another city where we had a big community there and Shree Makanbhai Budhia Patel was instrumental in starting a community Mandal and donated his land to build a hall and some accommodation. People going to India or coming from there and even local visitors were grateful for this facility.

Mandals were formed in Kampala, Daressalaam etc.

Unlike South Africa no major all embracing project to help our people in India was undertaken. What help was given was organised ad hoc by Gam Mandals for the benefit of their Gam. In the main the financial assistance sent was sent for the upkeep of the family members in the Gam and perhaps some contribution for the Mandir or the local school.

The period between 1965/70 brought in a sea change. One by one the East African countries became independent. The eventual aim of these countries was the Africanisation of the jobs starting with the lower and middle levels. Apart from the businessmen and professionals the vast majority of the Asians were in the middle level and they were already under pressure. British Government fearing a big influx of immigrants quickly passed legislation to limit entry to Britain by a quota allocation. In 1969 the weeks before the quota system was to be implemented in Kenya there were almost panic conditions to rush to Britain to avoid being caught up in the numbers game. Thousands just fled leaving everything except perhaps their prize possessions. Those left behind were stuck for over a year in Kenya without jobs or any official help.

In Uganda there was no immediate pressure under President Obote. He was however ousted by General Amin in 1972. Amin ordered all Asians to leave the country and gave them just two days to do so.

In Tanzania there were no such political or economic reasons for our people who were much small in numbers, to leave in a hurry.

There are now perhaps only about fifty or so families from the original stock in the East African countries. They, just two or three family members, are mainly there because of their business or professional connections. Rest of the family have settled in UK or elsewhere.

### **Burma and Fiji**

Originally Burma now known as Myanmar was a part of India until it was separated by Britain in 1937 and made into a colony. During WWII Japanese invaded and occupied the country in 1942 to be reoccupied by Britain in 1945. Many construction workers from our area went to Burma to build railways and railway bridges. Shree Lakhkhubhai Budhia and Khandubhai Manga of Aat Gam were subcontractors there and took many of our people to work with them.



The Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League were fighting the British for their Independence and in 1948 when Independence came the Military Junta took over and all the foreign workers were driven off in a hurry. Number of these workers perished during their escape through the thick jungles. A number of people from Samapore Gam lost their lives.

For a short time our people were in Fiji also but most used this stop to go to New Zealand.

### **New Zealand**

A nineteen year old youth from Machhad Gam was the first man from Kantha Vibhag to go to New Zealand in 1902. His name was Shree Keshabhai Daji. He was followed in 1903 by Narottambhai Babar of Bodali and Keshabhai Chhiba. They were followed later by the brothers Gulabbhai Jivan and Makanbhai Jivan of Amadpur.

Looking back it seems amazing that these youths just passed their teens uneducated and could speak Gujarati only travelled to Calcutta to board ships not knowing where they would end up.

In fact the same could be said about all the early pioneers who travelled anywhere at all. Their courage and resourcefulness had to be experienced to be believed.

They were of course not the first Indians in New Zealand. Punjabis were already there a few years earlier.

New Zealand was a British colony, but Indians were not allowed to take up government jobs at the time, so most survived on odd jobs. Our Keshabhai Daji is said to have landed his first job of scrub clearing for plantation.

Later migrants to New Zealand were able to go from Bombay. So by 1920 hundreds for Kantha Vibhag people left for New Zealand.

The early years were of great hardships. Surviving on any odd jobs like hawking, door to door selling fruit and vegetables etc and spending the nights in railway shed etc. Early settlers as everywhere else even after fifty years of residence were severely discriminated in all fields.

As time passed many started fruit and vegetable stores and other general merchandise and started spreading their roots in New Zealand. New Zealand was too far to make a quick return journey home in India. Most returned after many years and stayed much longer when home. I remember one of my grandfathers (mother's uncle) Dheda Lala (Dhhok) of Vahan Falia, Matwad who was on his second visit when I was only about six.

Today our people in New Zealand are in business, in professions, as large-scale agricultural producers and in positions of influence. They are generally prosperous. The later generations are very well educated. Our people, particularly in New Zealand has carved out their name in sports at national level especially in hockey and cricket. Of particular note at national level are Mohanbhai Maganbhai Fakirbhai of Karadi, Rameshbhai of Bodali, and Peter Daji of Tavdi who played in the Montreal Olympics New Zealand Hockey team which became Olympic champion that year. Miss Shanta Patel daughter of Dr. Kanubhai Patel won the world surfing gold medal at the World Olympics in Mexico. In Cricket Narottambhai Puna of Machhad and Dipak Patel of Dandi are a leading light in New Zealand.

Most of our people New Zealand are either in Auckland or Wellington. Both these cities have active community Associations. In Auckland they have built a magnificent Radha Krishna Mandir and next door the Mahatma Gandhi Hall with a capacity of over two thousand people.

In New Zealand Rameshbhai was noted for the essential services he performed of the Indian people there. He served as a Pandit conducting weddings and death rites for all Indians there. He also taught Gujarati to the young children. His family is well noted for bringing Indian cultural awareness in New Zealand. Over the years many many people have served the community in various capacity. Dayalbhai Kesery, Chhotubhai Chhima, Pratimaben are some of the names I am familiar with.

Two important books have been recently published detailing early settlement of our people in New Zealand. These are: 'Indian Settlers – The Story of a New Zealand South Asian Community' by Jacqueline Leckie a Social Anthropology at the University of Otago and 'Machhad to New Zealand' published by Machhad Gam Committee headed by Shree Uka Chhiba. Both these book are classics and a heritage for our Community.

### United Kingdom

Immigration to UK took place in two phases, mainly after the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. Many youths, who worked with reputable companies in India obtained recommendation letters, which entitled them to passports. As no work permit was required, as soon as they could raise enough money for the passage, they boarded a steamship, which took around two months to dock at Portsmouth. Others paid large fees to travel and passport agents. Some of the first to arrive in UK from our area in 1934/5 were Shree Makanbhai Parshottambhai (known as Lakhoti) of Matwad and Dayalbhai Dahyabhai from Bodali. They were followed by Vallabhbhai Unkabhai of Matwad, Vallabhbhai Bhagal of Machhad, Lalbhai Jerambhai of Bodali and others. During the war years Shree Vallabhbhai Fakirbahi (Vilas) of Bodali came to UK from New Zealand. He started a business exporting bicycles to India. In 1942 one of the first student to come to UK was Shree Parbhubhai Parshotbhai fo Kothamadi. He studied Law and returned to India and practiced there. After the end of the war many more came to UK. During the years 1949/52 Shree Narshibhai Hirabhai (Talati) of Matwad, Shree Bhanabhai Lakhkhubhai Budhia and Bhanabhai Lakhkhubhai Sukha of Aat, from Kothamadi Shree Gandabhai Parbhau, Shree Keshabhai Master, and Shree Lallubhai Narshibhai, from Aat Shree Dayalbhai and from Maroli Shree Gopalbhai Ravjibhai and Shree Chhaganbhai Bhagabhai. The two Chhapi brothers Shree Morarbhai Unka Chhapi and Shree Chhimanbhai Unka Chhapi of Matwad also came during this time via West Bengal where they were living for a number of years. These and many more who we have no information of were our main pioneers in UK. These were the people who accommodated the large number of arrivals from East Africa later.

Most of these early arrivals from Kantha Vibhag started their life in UK at Coventry, where two brothers had bought their houses and welcomed all new arrivals. It is said that these two houses were home to 28 people at times, sharing a single communal kitchen. Beds were almost always occupied as the shift workers came and went. Many worked in the mines, as this absolved them from doing compulsory National Service. Life was as you can imagine most basic and although few earned more than five pounds a week each contributed one pound to the pool to send to one family each week mainly to repay their debt.

The second phase was the bulk of families leaving Kenya, East Africa in a hurry due to the forthcoming immigration controls. These fairly large numbers of arrivals from Kenya at UK airports were left to their own devices to settle the best they can. Housing was the biggest problem and it was to the credit of our own people who had come to UK in earlier years from India and elsewhere and had bought their homes that these large numbers were accommodated. It was to the credit of the genius of the ordinary Indian character that in spite of all the odds of unfamiliar weather, new conditions and systems, job and home difficulty the Indians managed to settle in very quickly.

In Uganda President Obote was ousted by General Amin in 1972. Amin ordered all Asians to leave the country and gave them just two days to do so. Once again in a matter of just one week thousand of Uganda Asians landed at UK airports. In spite of a very large number of East African Asians having come to Britain in the last few years British leadership behaved in a very statesman like

manner and welcomed the Uganda Asian and helped them settle. This was indeed a politically very difficult time as various other leaders like Enoch Powell who were making inflammatory speeches of 'rivers of blood' times to come, etc.

Unlike the first generation of Indians who came to East Africa, were mainly labourers, the first generation of Indians who came to the United Kingdom from East Africa were educated, well versed in English, skilled and experienced and many had run thriving businesses. Yet we had to prove ourselves the hard way in the job market. They suffered much discrimination. A lot of the well educated had to take up factory floor jobs to make ends meet. It was not long however that the employers realised our abilities. One by one we moved into positions of responsibilities. Our women took up jobs in local shops and factories and our children settled down to studies and proving themselves par excellent. Within two to three years of arriving in Britain most of our families, with the help of a mortgage bought their own homes. First generation suffered all sorts of difficulties and sacrificed a lot to make life for their children improve. It has certainly improved both materially and educationally, as we can all now see.

In a short span of time Britain had a large Indian population in most cities. It was as though East Africa was replanted in Britain. The community Associations that functioned in East Africa started emerging here too. Soon each community was hundreds strong and boldly asserted their identity. We started celebrating our religious festivals and organised other cultural programmes.

Today, fifty years on, we have a new generation of Indians. This generation did not have to face the hardships and the discrimination that their fathers and mothers had to endure. This generation is well educated, most of them graduates and professionals, confidently running their own businesses and practices. A number of them do so on an international scale. In business and finance Asians are an important force in Britain.

Our own Koli community has not been lagging behind in any way. Within a couple of years after arriving from East Africa our people set up 'Mandhata Association/Mandals' in each of the cities. There are also some 22 active Gam Mandals in UK. In West Bromwich we were perhaps the first community to have bought a church and converted it to Shree Krishna Temple. A few years on we set up an umbrella organisation, 'Association of Mandhata Samaj UK' to bring together all our people at least once or twice a year. Almost all our Mandals now have premises of their own, run Gujarati Language classes and other cultural classes for our children, celebrate religious festivals and generally enjoy all the material comforts.

On an individual and via Gam Mandals major projects for building Temples, roads, schools and various other projects to help Gams in India have been fully or to a large extent financed with the help of people settled here in UK. Similar financial help have also been flowing from our people settled in other overseas countries.

Recently a project to develop Navsari Assets – assets acquired by our forefathers from South Africa – has been taking shape. This could take off quickly if the people now managing these assets in India were more cooperative and take necessary suggested action.

A visitor to UK and other overseas countries is most likely to get the impression that our community has truly arrived. He will find in UK and in other overseas countries each household with several graduates and professionals. A large number of them hold positions of great responsibility and power at the place of their work. Unlike their parents our youths have completely shed their inhibition of caste and creed. They live life with complete confidence and shoulder to shoulder with any other citizen.

I have said earlier that our last fifty years in UK is only a partial success. We may have achieved financial independence, but there is lot more to life than money and material comforts. We need to

come out from our limited pond and explore the ocean. We need to be more committed to the problems of our Samaj, and our local society as well as the general problems affecting other communities and the world we live in.

### Canada and USA

Compared to other overseas countries the settlement of our people in the above two countries came rather late. Both these countries were lands of great opportunity. When Canada started advertising for people to immigrate there and help open up the great wheat belt many European and from India Punjabis – Sikhs took up the offer.

South Africa born Shree Chhibubhai Bhanabhai is credited to have been the first from our community to go to Canada in 1960. He studied in India and after returning to South Africa soon decided to immigrate to Canada. He accepted a teacher's job in Toronto and became active in community work also. Morari Bapu when in Toronto prefers to be his guest. Next in 1964 is Shree Gijubhai Patel from Bori Falia followed by Ramanbhai B. Mulchand of Karadi in 1967. Later more people from South Africa immigrated to Canada.

In 1972 recruitment drive from Canada saw a large number of our people from the villages immigrated to Canada and Shree Chhibubhai (mentioned earlier) is said to have helped them to settle. Canada has a policy for immigrants settled there to sponsor their blood relations to come to Canada. Particularly after the eighties when the children of the earlier immigrants came to marriageable age many returned to the villages to get married. This enabled a number of families to settle in Canada and many did.

Now there are large enough numbers from several Gams for operating active Gam Mandals both in Toronto and Montreal the two main cities where our people have settled. Montreal is in the French speaking Quebec State, yet our large community there settled comfortably and have recently completed a multi million dollar Shree Ramji Temple. The Mandhata Association there actively serves the social and religious need of our people. Youths from each Gam have a thriving cricket team.

Both in Toronto and Montreal the immigrants who were not qualified or technically trained had to take up manual factory jobs etc. but their children are now very well educated and qualified with fine job and very profitable businesses.

One of the first to go to America is said to be Shree Kalyanjibhai Patel from Kothamdi. He went there for further studies and later settled there. After that some of our better educated people qualified on the points system that America operates and emigrated on that basis. New Jersey has a number of them but most of them are spread out in a number of cities.

### In Conclusion

In this brief article I have traced the history of Kolis of whom we are one of the 1050 sub groups. I personally have not done any fundamental research but consulted a number of books and articles written by people who did spend time either out of interest or for their doctorate study.

If we are to believe the inferences from the Shastras and Puranas we may have had a glorious past. If that was true than we too have suffered the ravages of history where civilisations all over the world have come and gone where once powerful races were brought down by the upcoming more powerful races and made to serve the victors.

For me the past two hundred years are what matters. During these two hundred years we as a group were overpowered and made to suffer the indignities meted out to a loser in those time. Our forefathers suffered the conditions of slaves and bonded labour and it took many, many decades to make even small progress. As we have seen above one by one our forefathers came out of those harsh conditions and won progressive remit. Lot more however still remains to be won.

We cannot wholly and continuously blame the upper castes for our present conditions. History records with unceasing regularity the downfall of once powerful people who may have completely disappeared or reduced to pittance. In a world where survival of the fittest is the norm a people has to make great effort and sacrifice to unite under a wise leadership and start writing history again.

Mandhata diaspora spread around the world is now a multi-talented, multi-skilled group. We have thousands of graduates and professionals, highly qualified doctors, dentists, lawyers, and skilled technocrats, living in their adopted countries and in India. In a number of the overseas countries we are now a third and fourth generation. The new generation is now growing up in a completely new and different environment. Their values are a much watered down version of their parents values and are more akin to the western civilisation and beliefs where individual is in the forefront rather than the family. The new generation born and brought in the western country has no caste or creed inhibition. They travel the world and stand shoulder to shoulder with any and everyone. They are taught to respect ability rather than birth. In a vast number of cases India is neither their motherland nor fatherland.

In such an atmosphere the older generation has to be grateful that this new generation when in an Indian setting remembers and observes all the Indian values. I fear though however that the generation after them may not be quite Indian in their thought or behaviour.

The older generation had nostalgic emotional bond with their home and village, so much so that in the last twenty years or so many families went back to their homes and villages and repaired or rebuilt their homes at an exorbitant costs. Having spent a lot of money those who can visit the Gam every year. It is debateable if the sons and daughters will ever go to the Gam on their own.

As a community however, we must recognise that we also have a much deprived large population consisting of our relations and distant nieces and nephews whose parents and grandparents our parents and grandparents to emigrate, in our District in Gujarat, India. Substantial help has much improved their conditions somewhat but more need to be done to enable them to fully stand on their feet. The older generation as a matter of duty continue to help, but the same cannot be expected from the new generation. For them our people in India will have to prove that they truly deserve their help and support.

It seems to me that the ball is now in the old world court. If they play right I even our new generation youths will not be found wanting. They will certainly take up the challenge.

### **About the author**

Keshavlal J Patel, *ICMA*, is a native of Bodali Gam in Navsari District in Southern Gujarat. He left India to join his father in East Africa in 1948. He studied and worked for a while in Nairobi, Kenya. He is a Chartered Management Accountant, now retired. He has taken keen interest in the welfare of the Navsari District where his hometown is, and on his second visit to India in 1983 set up Kantha Vibhag Friendship Trust through which he promotes various development projects in Navsari District. Since 1971 he has settled with his family in UK.

In this brief article he has tried to compile historic information that he has collect from various sources and hopes that it will encourage others to research further and add to the knowledge of our past.

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