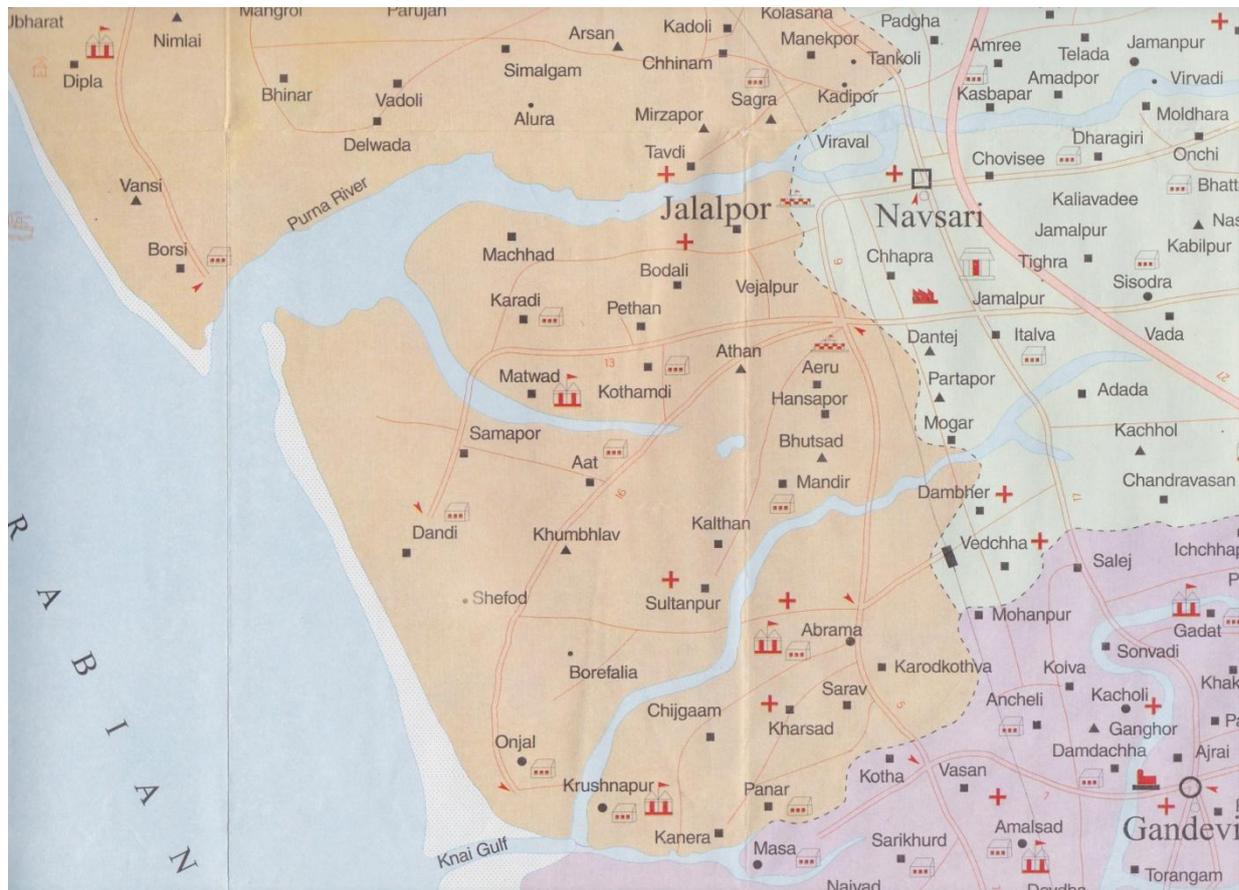


A Brief History of the Kolis :

The Mandhata Patels of Navsari District, South Gujarat (2nd edition)



Original by Keshavlal J Patel (1st edition 2010)

Updated by Ashok U Patel (2nd edition April 2021)

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Introduction

This article was originally written by Keshavlal Jerambhai Patel of Bodali - he is known to most of us as “KJ”. He left India to join his father in East Africa in 1948, where he studied and worked for a while in Nairobi, Kenya. In 1971 he he settled with his wife and three children in the UK. He is a Chartered Management Accountant (ICMA), now retired. He has taken keen interest in the welfare of the villagers of Navsari District, and on his second visit to India in 1983 set up the Kantha Vibhag Friendship Trust through which he promotes various development projects in those villages.

KJ authored the first edition of this article which was issued under the title “Story of India’s Historic People – The Kolis” with focus on the Mandhata Patels as the main tribe (Ref 1), in 2010. KJ had the idea of producing the article because he recognised that over the years as more and more of our youths/younger generations are born outside of India, they are becoming less and less familiar with Gujarati language, cultural heritage and ancestral origins. He has made a huge effort in bringing much about our ancestral origins into one booklet; his travels to India, numerous conversations with locals in the villages/towns, and consulting research from his peers, so that the present and future generations can both become more familiar with their roots and have an appreciation of both the historical background and the trials and tribulations of their forefathers. He hopes that this may inspire others to undertake further research in this area. KJ helped found and was a committee member of the Mandhata Mandal in Nairobi. After he moved to the UK, he was also one of the founder members of Wembley Mandhata Youth and Community Association in 1972 and has served as both President and trustee – he is still active within that community today.



Figure 1 : Keshavlal Jerambhai Patel - KJ

Ashok Ukabhai Patel with the permission of the author, KJ, has undertaken to update and add to this most important booklet explaining further, detailing our origins, history and migration of Kolis around the world. It has been an honour for him to contribute to this report and with the addition of maps and pictures in particular, should make it easier for all to appreciate the migration history of Kolis across Punjab and their eventual settlement in South Gujarat.

Some of this document may become “heavy” reading in parts, especially to newer readers; don’t dwell too long on those areas but to get a basic grasp of how the Kolis migrated and bettered themselves and get an appreciation of how spread out we are globally. You are advised to use the Appendices and Glossary at the end of this document as your first point of query.

This second edition has been produced with KJ as main reviewer.



Figure 2 : Ashok Ukabhai Patel

What is a Koli?

Below are just some of the results of simply asking Google “What is a Koli” :

1. The Koli people have a rich history as the aboriginal fishing community. They were native to the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. Today, they are limited to certain pockets such as Navsari and Valsad districts in southern Gujarat and north western Maharashtra, including Mumbai.
2. The government of India has classified Kolis under the list of Scheduled Caste for the states of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan in the 2001, while they also appear under the list of Scheduled Tribes. However, their life is beyond official classification; their zest, vibrancy and fearlessness make the community more than just a fishing community.
3. Records of Koli people exist from at least the 15th century, when rulers in the present-day Gujarat region noted their chieftains as being marauding robbers and dacoits. Over a period of several centuries, some of them were able to establish petty chiefdoms throughout the region, mostly comprising just a single village. Although not Rajputs, this relatively small subset of the Kolis claimed the status of the higher-ranked Rajput community, adopting their customs and intermixing with less significant Rajput families through the practice of hypergamous marriage (marriage to a caste other than their own), which was commonly used to enhance or secure social status. There were significant differences in status throughout the Koli community, however, and little cohesion either geographically or in terms of communal norms, such as the establishment of endogamous marriage groups. (Wikipedia)
4. *Koli* is a vague term covering the tribal populations living in parts of western India. Although traditionally classed as a tribe inferior in status to the Kanbis, the cultivating caste of the region, Kolis have now been designated as a Hindu caste in some areas. It is possible that the name of the tribe is derived from the Sanskrit *kula*, meaning "clan." There are

numerous groupings and sub-groupings among the Kolis, who tend to be endogamous, i.e. they do not intermarry with the Kolis of other regions. Kolis are thus a group of tribes or castes, rather than a monolithic entity. Some writers suggest that the English word *coolie*, meaning porter or hired labourer, comes from *Koli* (Britannica).

To anyone ignorant of the Koli origins, location and life, the above definitions give a basic impression that Kolis are :

- Mainly confined to the north and north west of India
- Originally fisherman and farmers and did labouring work
- Fearless and generally upbeat

However, the reader is not made aware of the migrations within India from their original home. Note that there is literature (and probably people) that use a different spelling/pronunciation for Koli - being Kori or Kol.

For many, if not all of us, there are times in our lives when the question arises in our mind as to our origins - Who were our forefathers? Where did they come from? How did they live? For those who desperately want to explore our roots, do read on. 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/towns and of their journey and life when they emigrated to foreign lands in search of a better life. We hope that the reader of this document will get a clearer picture of the Kolis and appreciate the loyalty of and important contributions made in the past and present day both in India and globally.

The Historic Heroes of the Koli 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 (a) were described in the stone carvings at Mohenjo-Daro (Ref 2), now situated in Pakistan following partition in 1947, was said to have belonged to this tribe.

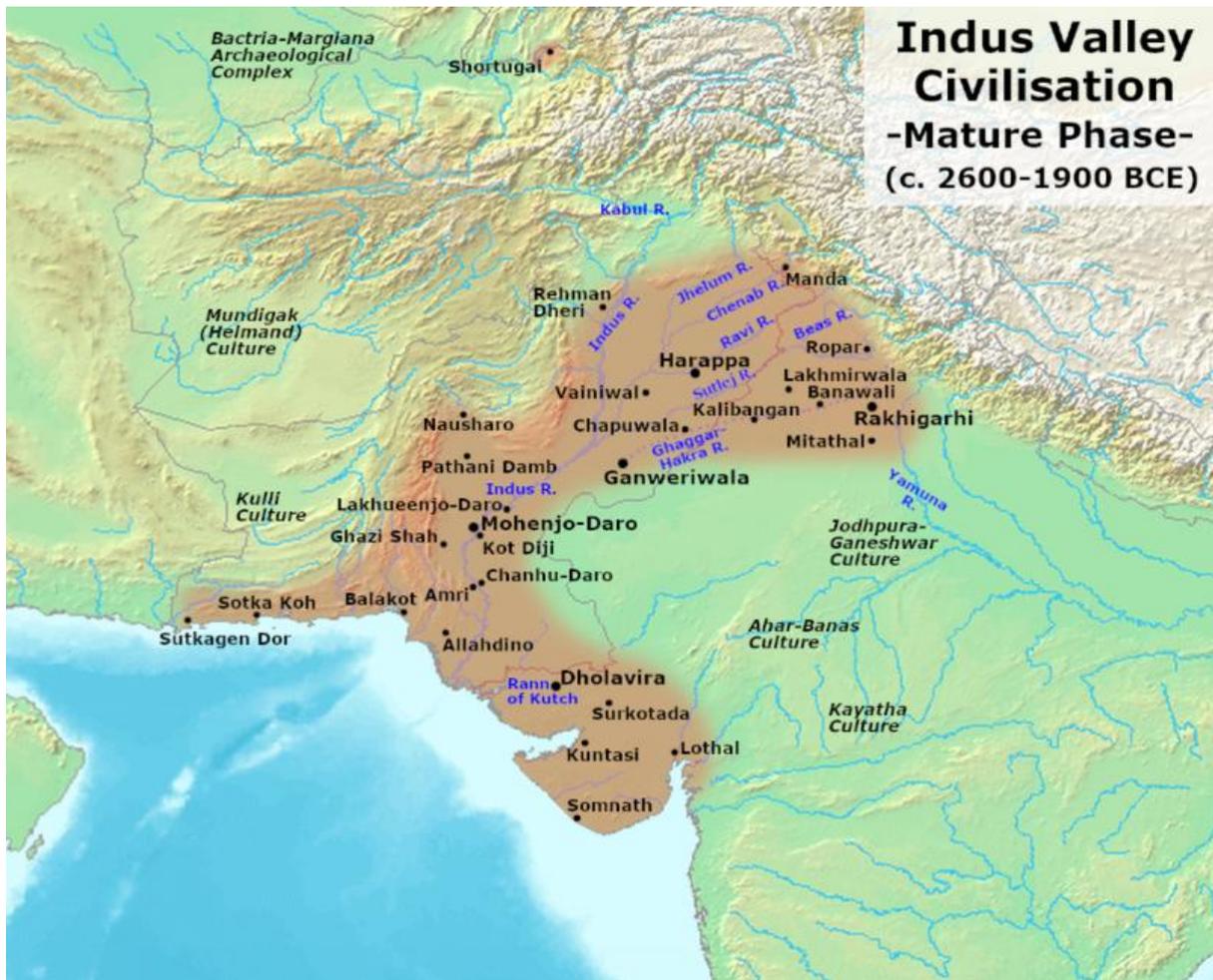


Figure 3 : Mohenjo-Daro and surrounding areas

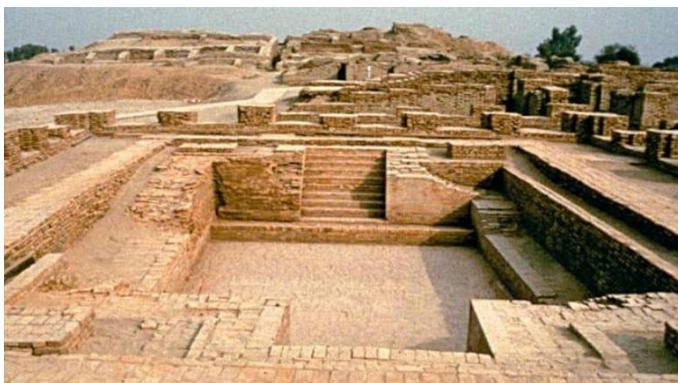


Figure 4 : The lost city of Mohenjo-Daro

The most ancient and revered sage Valmiki, the author of the Ramayana is said to have belonged to this tribe. Even today, the Ramayana is referred to as Koli Valmiki Ramayan in Maharashtra State. Teachings from Ramayana form the basis of our Indian culture :

- The great king Chandra Gupta Mourya, and his line of descendent kings belonged to the Koli tribe.
- Both Lord Buddha's mother and wife belonged to the Koli tribe.
- Sant Kabir (1440-1518), a mystical poet and a weaver by trade, ended several of his bhajans with '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 17th and 18th century all belonged to the Koli tribe. Their life and reputation were described in their biographies and in articles printed in the following publications - Mumbai Samachar, Nutan Gujarat, and Parmarth Niketan.
- In the State of Maharashtra, Shivaji's Commander-in-Chief and several of his Generals belonged to the Koli tribe. Shivaji had a favourite Koli General, Tanaji Rao Malusare, and nicknamed him 'My Lion'. Tanaji later died fighting in the victory for Kodana Fort which Shivaji renamed to 'Sinh Ghadh' (lion fort) in his memory. 'A History of the Marathas' (see Ref 3) notes with pride the bravery of Shivaji's army consisting mainly of Mavalis and Kolis.
- During the uprising against the British Raj in 1857, a number of Koli women fighters played an important role in trying to save the life of Lakshmibai (1828-1858), known as the Rani of Jhansi/Warrior Queen, one of the leading figures who became a symbol of resistance (see film Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi (2019)).

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 around 1050, is mentioned continuously through the centuries - way back to Mohenjo-Daro (in Pakistan) and beyond. Historians and scholars record that the Koli tribe of Kshatriya 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. Thus the Koli Samaj has produced great sons and daughters to the world and their history is of both universal importance and relevance to modern day living.

King Mandhata

Archaeological findings of Mohenjo-Daro are estimated to date back to the period BC 5000-3000. The stone inscriptions there describe the great Koli Kings and their Panchayat Raj (Panchayat means assembly (ayat) of five (pancha) and rule (raj)). Traditionally, Panchayats were elderly and wise people chosen by the local community, to settle disputes between individuals and villages. The leader of the Panchayat (Mukhya or Sarpancha) would apply this method of administration in their kingdoms.



Figure 5 : King Mandhata

The details described here are a translated and condensed version of an article written in Gujarati by Shree Raghunath Brahambhatt (Ref 4).

King Mandhata is estimated to have lived around BC 6000. Long after him were born the great souls Shree Ram, Shree Krishna and Lord Buddha. However, the greatness of King Mandhata's achievements were such that a household phrase came into universal use to this day when comparing with other great leaders – 'Was he as great as Mandhata?'

King Mandhata has been likened to the brightest star in the Sun Dynasty, born in the 15th generation of Brahma. The great Manu was of the 5th generation and Mandhata was of the 10th generation after Manu. Shree Ram is said to have been born in the 25th 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 (which later got divided into nine major sub groups : Malla, Janak, Videhi, Koliye, Morya, Lichchhvi, Janatri, Vajji, and Shakya) all claiming their roots to the Kshatriya caste(b).

Indian mythology – the birth of Mandhata.

King Yuvaneshwar had a hundred wives but none of them bore him a son. So, he consulted many Rishis, of which Bhargav Rishi agreed to perform a yajna to beget him a son. At the end of the yajna, a pot of mantra-charged-water was put aside for the King to offer his Queen to consume the next morning.

However, during the night, the King became thirsty and went looking for water in the Ashram - he saw the pot and drank the potent water. In due course the King carried a child, a son, who was delivered by cutting open the King's abdomen. The God Indra heard of this unique incident and came to see the infant. As to the question who will feed and protect the child who was crying for milk at the time, Indra said- "Do not weep, child, you shall drink wine (Mān Dhātā)" and the child suckled his forefinger. From this moment, the child was called Mandhata who later learned the art of warfare from Indra and acquired his unconquerable archer's bow. King Mandhata, with his superior strength, knowledge and well-equipped army went on to conquer many surrounding kingdoms, reinstating those defeated kings in return for the payment of an annual tax for which an ambassador was also installed in each such kingdom to ensure compliance and good governance. Those kings would also enjoy the protection of King Mandhata who once had to fight and defeat his own Godfather Indra, who later challenged him to fight the demon, King Lavnasur.

Soon, an opportunity for a battle with King Lavnasur arose - King Mandhata and his army marched right into Lavnasur's kingdom without any resistance. As evening was approaching, King Mandhata decided to camp for the night, planning to capture Lavnasur the next day. However, Lavnasur's soldiers infiltrated the camp that night and killed King Mandhata in his sleep.

The descendants of King Mandhata played a vital role and our ancient Vedas, epics and other relics mention their important contributions in wars and state administration.

Early history – Lord Buddha

It was during the year BC 566, 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, 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 married

Yashodara, and they had a son, Rahul. Very soon after the birth, Gautam left home aged 29, to find answers to the ills of the world and led a reclusive life. After six years of searching, Buddhists believe Gautam found enlightenment while meditating under a Bodhi tree. He spent the rest of his life teaching others about how to achieve this spiritual state. Yashodara, later on in life became a Buddhist monk.



Figure 6 : Lord Buddha

Lord Buddha

After years of severe penance, study and meditation, Gautam 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 were 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, driven to live in jungles and other remote places, to be cold-shouldered by others, and neglected by the rulers.

The period AD 1000 onwards

The persecution must have proved too much for the Koli kingdoms and the prolonged deprivations of the once powerful hardworking, skilled, loyal, self-sufficient (but easily provoked into war) Kolis lost their central position in the highly complex Hindu society. For a Koli tribe that founded and built Bombay (now Mumbai), they find it hard even to this day to get into positions of political or academic influence. For centuries now, other tribes have looked down upon the Koli (of Kshatriya caste) and the resulting psychological effects were devastating for this entire community, humiliating and little better than being on the bottom rung, even late into the 18th century. The majority of them were powerless and homeless, they were constantly in search of work and ran up debts. Having fallen into this cycle of poverty, they were heavily exploited by the upper castes of Hindu society. Generations were tied to bonded labour(c) and treated badly; for a once-proud people, their frustrations were such that they engaged in gang robberies, plundering, looting and piracy on the high seas.

Koli exodus from Punjab

Around AD 1000, King Badhshah of Afghanistan attacked and conquered the Punjab. He and his soldiers committed great atrocities against the Hindus –

- They were forcefully converted to the Islam religion
- The women kidnapped and raped, many of whom then committed suicide. Others were converted to Islam, and married to soldiers in Islamic ceremonies.
- Swami Sachchidananda (d) has recorded that over a thousand years ago the forefathers of the present day Patels suffered great hardships in Punjab near the famous Takshila University (situated in modern Pakistan).

Many Hindus left to escape from these atrocities, they were from Leava, Karad and hundreds of other villages of the Gujranwala district in Punjab, Pakistan. Even today, there are people of the Kanbi and Leava caste in the villages of the Punjab Pakistan as verified by the records (Vansavadia, Vahivanchas) kept by the Barots (an Indian caste native to Gujarat and Rajasthan, traditionally worked as genealogists and mythographers).

The exodus from the Punjab led to a journey for Marvad with what little belongings they could fit on their bullock carts. At that time, Marvad was ruled

by Parmar kings and in particular, King Raja Bhoja who was widely known as a great scholar and builder, was a prime reason for the travellers being attracted to that region. Marvad was very densely populated and it was not possible to acquire enough land to make a living from, so after a short residency they left for Khambhat (Kheda District) in Gujarat, which was then ruled by the Solankis. The Petlad Taluka had plenty of uncultivated land, and so the newcomers requested that the King grant them this land. An area equivalent to about one Gam (village) was granted to each family and many settled on this land.

The refugees, being hard workers, cultivated the land with great benefits and in return were required to give one twelfth (approx 8.5%) portion of the crop to the King. However, due to the high cost of collecting this portion from each farmer, the king drew up an agreement, appointing a headman for each village to control the farmers and collect crops for the king. The agreements were kept in the custody of the elders in the family of the headman and all records of the kingdom and the crops were kept in the PAT (record or log book) hence the record keeper was known as a 'PATLIKH'. The title Patlikh was shortened to Patat which then later became PATEL. The people that came from the village Leava became known as Leva Patels (Leuva Patidar) and those that came from the village Karad became Kadwa Patels.

The Kadwa Patels settled in the Northern part of Gujarat and the Leva Patels settled in the area around Khambhat.

Kolis as farmers

The settlers were both industrious and intelligent – their farming was very productive and in a short period of time, the state of Gujarat began to prosper. As time went by, the kings and size of kingdoms changed, as did the size of portions of the crops demanded by the kings. The main industry of the region was agriculture – hence the kingdoms were sustained on the income from the farms, and this resulted in the increase in portion size for the king to being doubled to one sixth (approx 17%) of the crops cultivated.

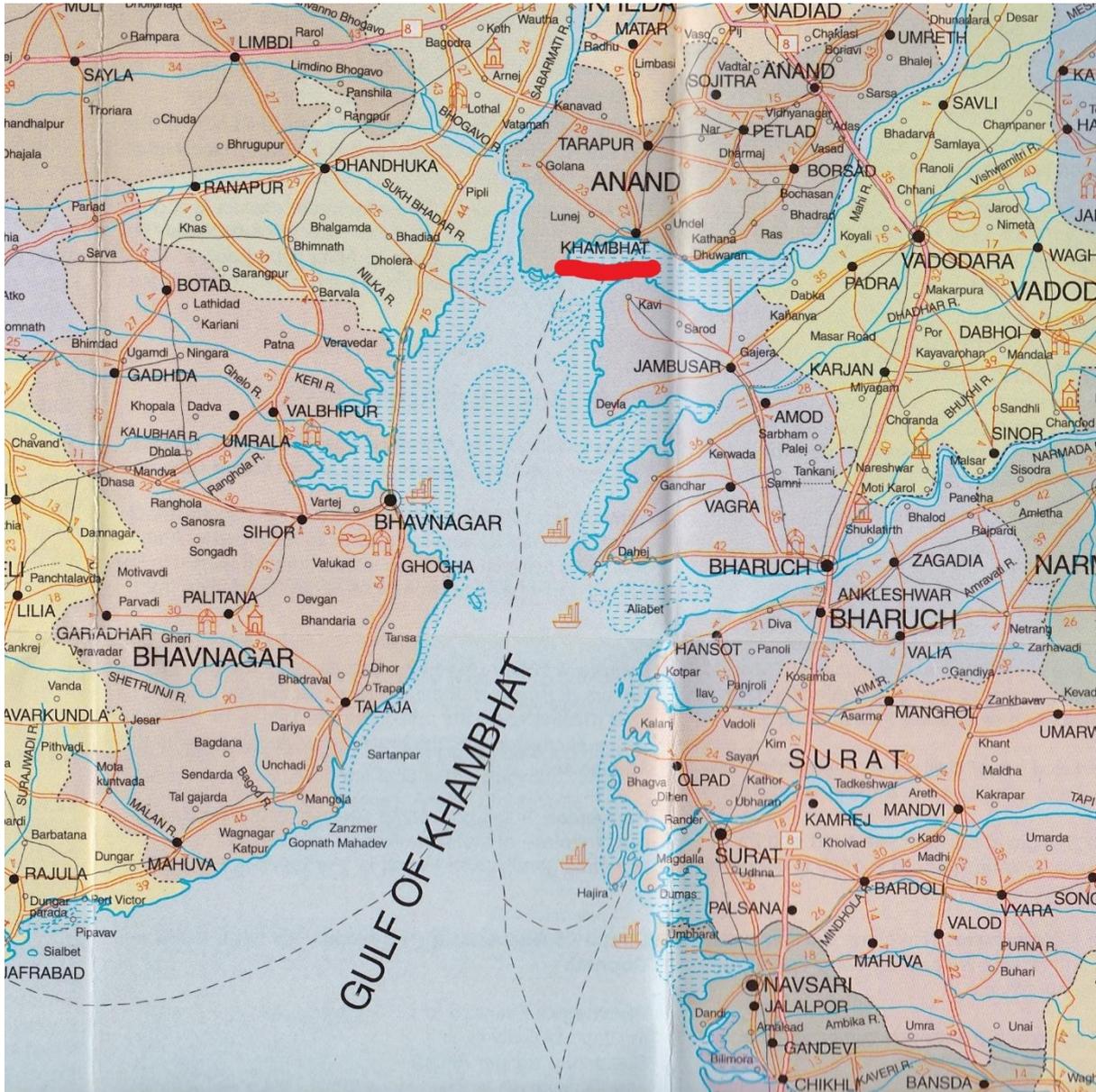


Figure 7 : Khambhat region

The Khambhat region became the kingdom of the Mauryavansi and the volume of crops collected from the farmers varied each year, probably due to the weather conditions. Depending on the financial need of the Kings, the crop portion collected was high when the yield was good, low when the yield was poor. This part of the kingdom became known as Charotar (from Chad “climb up” and Utar “climb down”).

Between AD 1300 -1400, King Alauddin Khilji of Delhi and his soldiers captured Mauryavansi and ended the rule of Hindu kings. King Alauddin told his subas (clerks) that the power of the farmers was in their wealth and therefore to squeeze as much crop as possible from the farmers without making them

completely destitute, leaving only enough for the farmers to sow the following year's crops. As much as fifty percent of the crop production was collected in payment from each farmer which left them extremely poor.

King Alauddin Khilji (e) ruled Gujarat for 15 to 20 years and was succeeded by Mohammed Bagdo (f) who decreased the portion allocated to the King from half to one third of all crops and outlawed any stealing. To improve crop farming, he appointed the best farmers from each village and handed them the land to cultivate, in return asking the chosen farmers to improve the farming, provide security for that village, make the village prosperous, and pay the kingdom on fixed amount of cash (Bandhi Avak). Thus, the tradition of giving part of the crop to the king was abolished and replaced by cash payment, and permanent ownership of the land granted to the farmers. The land owner got the title Patidar which changed to Kanbi Patidar and then eventually Patel Patidar. The Patel Patidar became the owners of each village and maintained their title, bringing in hired labour to cultivate the land, enabling the villages to prosper once again.

Around AD 1600 Akbar the Great (g) conquered Gujarat. Akbar had the land measured by the 'Todarmal' (introduced by his Finance Minister, Todarmal who overhauled the revenue system) and established the 'Vindhoti' (land tax) system, which is known as the 'Mayshul' system today.

As the villages slowly became overpopulated, this caused a shortage of both housing and agricultural land. In the beginning each family had about 5000 viga (one viga equates to approx 1330 square metres) and that land was passed on to successive generations, and as a consequence, the share to each family would become progressively smaller, making the families poorer than their predecessors.



Figure 8 : Map of Surat District

Kolis settle around Surat

From AD 1820 to 1830 to escape their poor conditions, some families moved towards South Gujarat and were joined by the Leava Patidars from other densely populated villages, eventually settling in the area around Surat. The surrounding areas of Surat were dense forests which they cleared and cultivated, houses were built from the harvested timber and more than 50 villages were established. Initially, there was a strong link between the people of the Kheda district and that of the Surat district but transportation was difficult due to poor infrastructure and the link started to weaken. The main means of transport at that time were bullock carts, horses and camels (the railways arrived post 1844) taking at least 10 days to travel between Charotar and Surat. Relatives from Surat and Charotar visited each other but the contact

gradually diminished over successive generations as did marriages between the people of the two districts.

New houses of the settlers

In Surat they built big houses as there was plenty of land. The 'khacho' (empty land at the back of the house) also known as 'vaado' in Surat, was large and so each house had it's own water well. They also had stables built 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 for each house plan, an improvement on Charotar, where they were not planned in.

Dual religious practice

One interesting story is about a group setting out on a pilgrimage to see the Kashi Viswanath Temple (near Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh) in around AD 1840. En route they met a pious Muslim called Imam Shahi who promised to give them the 'darshan' of Viswanath on the spot - some took up the offer, later accepting Imam Shahi as their Guru and so started the dual religious practice of Hindu and Islam.

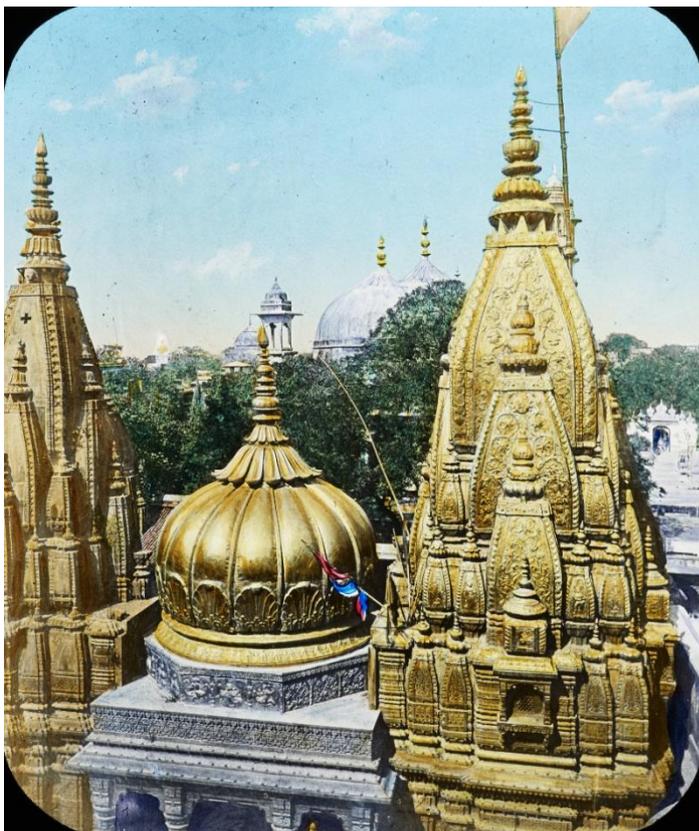


Figure 9 : Kashi Viswanath Temple

Centuries of interaction between Islam and local Indian religious traditions have given birth to a number of reformist sects, new communities and liminal groups that cannot be neatly classified in any sense as unambiguously either 'Hindu' or 'Muslim'. One of the largest and most influential groups are the Imam Shahis, who number almost a million and are scattered in various parts of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Unique in terms of its harmonious blending of Hindu and Muslim forms and concepts, the Imam Shahi sects, or Satpanth ('The True Path') as its followers call it, is today under grave threat today as right-wing Hindutva(h) groups seek to forcibly absorb it into the amorphous Hindu fold.

Koli Groups

In present day India, Kolis can be found in Jammu & Kashmir (the northernmost state) stretching down to Kanya Kumari (in southernmost state Tamil Nadu) and are known by slightly different names according to the regional languages. The following are just some of the Koli groups in existence :

Koli Kshatriya	Nagarkoli	Koli Raja
Gondakoli	Koli Rajput	Bavraya
Koli Suryavanshi	Tharkarda	Koli Mahadev
Pathanvadia	Koli Patel	Mein Koli
Koli Thakor	Koyeri	

and of course, Mandhata Patel. The present day Kolis are a product of much intermarriage both within and across the groups.

Kolis of Gujarat

Both Reginald Edward Enthoven (i) and Professor Jon Wilson (j) who were prominent historians, believed that the original settlers in Gujarat were Kolis and Adivasi Bhils.

The very diverse ethnic groups (including the Nagar Brahmin, Bhatia, Bhadela, Koli, Rabari, Mina, Bhangi, Dubla, Naikda, and Macchi-Kharwa, Parsis - originally from Persia, and the Adivasi Bhil tribe) present in Gujarat are classified as being either :

- Vedic (of the religion of the ancient Indo-European-speaking peoples who entered India about BC 1500 from the region of present-day Iran)
- or Dravidian (relating to or denoting a family of languages spoken in southern India and Sri Lanka, or the peoples who speak them).

In Northern Gujarat, the people of Kanbi and Patidar caste had been marrying those of Koli caste for generations, and it was 1918-19 that a Patidar introduced an Intercaste Marriage Bill to establish/formalise the practice. The social hypocrisy of asserting upper caste status appears to be for no reason other than their ego; self and group vanity. While Kolis and Bhils may have been the original inhabitants of Gujarat they lost ground to the later arrivals and appear to have settled near the west coast and hills. Kolis in particular, with their affinity to Buddha suffered severe discrimination in society; being of the Kshatriya (fighting/warrior) caste, their characteristic of being easily

provoked into a fight did not help. They may also be described as ruggedly individualistic more so at that time. For a majority of them, life two hundred years ago was one of severe hardship, bonded labour and indignity; that was the price they paid for submission to the higher castes.

The Kolis suffer more hardship

This remainder of this chapter is mainly based on a doctorate by Dr. Arjun Patel (Ref 5).

The glorious past that Kolis enjoyed in ancient times began to dwindle after Lord Buddha. Kolis were persecuted at the hands of the upper religious Sanatan and Vedic groups and this drove them to wherever they could find safer ground. Living in fear and deprivation reduced them to resort to crime and other social vices. For their own survival, the Kolis had to rely on their wits, being poor, hungry, unskilled and uneducated right until the middle of the 1800s. It is most likely that other people/families/groups in such conditions all over India may also have been simply lumped together, classified as Kolis, hence the large Koli population. The caste system identified these people as backward, little above the Dalits and Untouchables, and being generally depicted as villains. Surprisingly, the Kolis are still labelled as such in many parts of India even today and are officially categorised as Other Backward Class (OBC).

The upper class Hindus have always recognised that a Koli's touch does not damage purity in any way and Koli chiefs of pure blood are difficult to distinguish from the Kshatriya Rajputs(k) with whom there is frequent intermarriage.

British subdue the Kolis

During the failed Indian Rebellion (1857-58) against the rule of the British East India Company, (which functioned as a sovereign power on behalf of the British Raj) in what was a major, but ultimately unsuccessful move, Koli soldiers and generals played a significant part in the Shivaji's Maratha army. However, the British respected the misguided but secretive, loyal and trustworthy band, lavishing 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 bloodshed for its own sake, and neither do they mutilate, torture, nor burn the subjects of their cupidity or revenge like the far worse dacoits'.

Kolis of South Gujarat in detail

Records suggest that Kolis have lived in Gujarat since the 1400s may even be the oldest inhabitants there. The 1931 census recorded the population of Gujarat and Kathiavad to be 1.73 million, of which the Kolis were 24%, and of this number, a quarter lived in Surat district (over 100,000). They were mostly residing in 8 talukas (an administrative district for taxation purposes, comprising a number of villages) of Surat and 6 talukas of Navsari. This large proportion is said to be because the census lumped all 1050 or so Koli subgroups into one, and also non-Kolis who settled in the plains and the coastal areas! A vast majority of the Koli tribes have very little in common with each other apart from their religion, Hinduism. Depending on their geographic location in India they may/may not dress according to their occupations, or speak a variety of languages, or observe different customs or even a combination of all.

Kolis also formed a large part of the adjacent Indian Kingdoms, particularly Gaekwad, spreading to Vadodara (formerly Baroda) and the Sachin State (a princely state belonging to the Surat Agency, during the era of the British Raj). It's capital was also called Sachin, and had a total of about 600-700 villages.

Among the higher castes in south Gujarat, the Kolis were seen as having both highly positive and negative reputations :

The positives - since the 1800s, they were described as brave and courageous, conscientious and hard-working, nationalistic and independent in spirit, reliable and said to be remarkably loyal.

The negatives - the old picture of thieves, robbers, pirates and plunderers of the high seas meant the higher castes looked down upon the Kolis.

Alice W Clarke(l), a scholar who studied the peoples of Gujarat, believes that it was easy and rather opportunist to blame the Kolis for criminal activities, and David Hardiman(m), a historian of modern India also had the same opinion. Unfortunately, the Kolis negative reputation has tainted them for a very long time, and the stigma has not fully worn off. Even the fictional literature of that time described the villain characters as being Kolis!

In Bharuch and Surat Districts, the Talapadas (a subcaste of the Kshatriya Koli Community) form the main groups, the highest caste Kolis are called Mandhata Sororaria (or Mansororaria), Koli Patel or Mandhata Koli Patel. It is possible

that they are the descendants of the Thakurs of Gujarat who fled to the hills in the time of Sultan Mahmud Begada's (1458-1511) persecutions but later returned and settled as farmers; They are distinct from the Kolis of the Deccan Plateau (southern Indian peninsula).

The religious beliefs of Kolis, are thought to have been based on the epics - Ramayan, Mahabharat and Puranas which were enacted by visiting troupes/travelling actors. They worshipped Siva, Ram and Krishna and were prone to the prevailing superstitions. Their belief in the Sanatan Hindu Dharma(n) made them a God fearing people and kept them on a straight path. Right until the beginning of the 1900s, their main occupation was agriculture and farm labour, in which they excelled. Most Koli farmers had 3 acres of land or less and a vast number were landless labourers. The land would be traditionally handed down from father to sons - successive generations saw the farm being divided into a smaller and smaller size. The land would usually be of a lower quality than that held by the higher castes. Agricultural labour was seasonal work, so for generations, the landless labourers were tied to bonded labour. In the off season they would settle for menial jobs and were rarely paid in money but with a bare minimum of food instead. This meant the vast majority of the Kolis were forever in financial debt to their bosses, chiefly the Kanbi, Anavils, Parsis and other non-Kolis. If they had no security to offer against the debt, they were charged double the interest rate. The most common forms of security would be land, domestic animals or household goods. The lender would insist on interest being paid every year, this was a lucrative source of income and defaulting on payment sometimes resulted in Kolis losing their farm animals, land and even eviction from their ramshackle house.

Those living on the coast developed fishing and shipping of goods by sea. In general, right until 1925, Kolis and other lower tribes were exploited by other higher castes not just in Gujarat but all over India. Alice Clarke has recorded that it was this exploitation that drove Kolis to criminal activities adding that the British Raj introduced what is thought to be the Fugitive Offender's Act in 1831 to thwart the Kolis further, but enforcing it allowed the rich and powerful to make it easier to take advantage of the Kolis, which led to a large number of them became enslaved, living in pitiable conditions.

Up until the 1850s, few Kolis could read or write. There were no schools in the villages and only a few available in the bigger cities; however, only a handful

could afford to send their children to city school. Thus the largely uneducated Kolis mainly worked in/as :

- Farming and farm labour (seasonal)
- Fishing
- Transporting goods by sea
- Procurement of juice (palm wine/toddy) from palm trees - this was a skilled and dangerous job, but poorly paid. It involved climbing high up, ensuring the trees remain undamaged when cut to extract the juice and carrying down the filled pots
- Delivering milk door to door
- Spinning cotton
- Textile mills and ginnery (cotton) employed many women and young girls in the cities and towns. They worked long hours in unhygienic conditions, breathing cotton lint (leading to lung infections such as byssinosis/brown lung disease) and quite often sleeping rough in the factories, others would return home in ill health, suffering from exhaustion. Another common disease was tuberculosis (TB). These dangerous jobs were poorly paid.
- Construction work and civil and mechanical engineering - job opportunities opened up in 1844 after the Governor-General of India permitted private entrepreneurs to set up a rail system in India. The construction of roads and bridges also brought in work and the Koli Patels of Navsari District were particularly sought after.

Kolis as worthy workers

Some of the famous bridges (e.g. Narmada Bridge in 1881) were built by Kolis, mention the name 'Patel' and he was immediately given such a job. For landless Koli labourers however, there were long periods of unemployment. Many went to distant cities and towns, firstly on their own and later when they had a secure job, the family would follow. Eventually, large numbers settled in these towns and cities doing a wide variety of jobs. Bombay was a popular destination - it is often said that the initial settlers were Kolis. They established their goddess Mumba Devi as their icon in Bombay (hence the city later renamed to Mumbai) In 1918, Kolis numbered just over 3000 living in Kolaba, Kalbadevi, Bhuleswar, Bangalipura, Mandvi Bazaar, Khadak Majgam, Tardev Grant Road, Girgam, Chopati, Valkeshvar, Parel, Kot districts in Mumbai. As the years passed, more and more Kolis from villages joined their relations and

friends in the big cities, including Ahmedabad and Vadodara and settled there. A number of Koli fishing villages were set up in Bombay, and those not skilled in fishing or transport were engaged in occupations such as in horse/carriage transport, printing works, semi-skilled work, clerical work and primary school teachers. Later, they trained themselves to become turners, fitters, joiners, metal workers, getting better paid jobs.



Figure 10 : Mumbai districts

From the late 1700s and early 1800s, the South Gujarat Kolis travelled in search of work and a better life in India and overseas. The bold among them did achieve their dreams - in 1918 Shree Vallabhbai of Viraval in Navsari District founded a company called 'Japan Bazaar' and had branches in Shanghai, Burma, Kobe and Hong Kong.

Prior to the start of a railway line construction between Mumbai and Vadodara (completed in 1864) most large scale transport of goods by sea, Surat being the main port. All along the South Gujarat coast there were many more small Koli port villages - Vansi, Borsi, Umbhrat, Dandi, Onjal, Sultanpur, Dumas and Suvali for example. A two-way transport of goods operated between the ports of South Gujarat to places as far as Calcutta, Java, Sumatra, Malabar, Singapore, Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) and to the West as far as Abyssinia. Building of the railways however, later curtailed much sea transportation of goods. Kolis therefore had some knowledge of distant lands. In the later part of 1800s, many stayed for long periods in those countries and some settled for good, later bringing their families over. However, a vast majority of the Kolis in Gujarat and elsewhere in India still continued to suffer serious penalties and discrimination at the hands of higher caste Hindus and others. Bonded labour was common among Koli labourers and lasted well into the 1920s.

Kolis had little political power until the arrival of Independence. From the 1960s some of the educated among them gained greater political support and power as a result of their large numbers. Steadily, they started taking responsible positions in villages and towns - today, Kolis are to be found in both the State and National Parliament.

Kolis of Navsari, Surat and Surrounding Areas

The Koli people who settled in the coastal area of Jalalpore and Navsari District (formerly a part of Surat District) area are a tribe known as 'Koli Patel' or 'Mandhata Koli Patel'. The author, KJ traced his own ancestry to six generations back (from the most recent Keshavlal – Jerambhai – Somabhai - Morarbhai – Valia – Makla, the oldest) going back about 150 years and believes his great-great-great grandfather Makla Bapa put his roots down in a village now called Bodali. Makla Bapa's home developed into a falia called Dhuna Falia where his descendants lived in the houses now standing there. For many Kolis today, this is perhaps a similar background. Whether this area was virgin land or there were other inhabitants there he does not know, but as the villages developed, a few families of Kanbi and Desai probably migrated there

(Desai Falias are present in a number of villages). The Barots visited all the villages every two years in Gujarat recording births and deaths and any noteworthy events or incidents.

There are no records of bonded labour so we may assume that the Kolis in these villages had a slightly different background than the remainder Koli population in South Gujarat. Disappointingly, the overall financial position of the people spread over some 50 villages was poor. They were mostly uneducated and a majority of them led a simple life, often in debt. For the vast majority of them work was confined to their own farm or labour at another. The nearest town to Bodali was Navsari, 10 miles away and Surat, the main city some 30 miles away. Transportation was tediously slow by bullock cart, and their financial and geographic constraints meant life for the majority of them was confined within the limits of their surrounding villages. Thus, in the early 1900s, social contact among people living more than 10 miles away was very limited. Any parent deciding to give their daughter in marriage to a suitor in a distant village would have to consider not seeing her again for years on end. For a family, marriage, birth and death of close ones were the main events in life. Most importantly, death of the head of the family/income earner in the family would cause a time of great stress, plunging the families not just into grief, but also financial debt and worry – indeed, religious festivals and events must have provided welcome relief for them.

Late 1800s and early 1900s

Around this time, a slow but sure change was taking place for the social and economic progress of the Kolis - it seems a giant had awoken. Slowly at first, but gradually picking up speed, over the course of time men and women found the courage and strength to realise their talents. More and more of the youths of these villages ventured further afield looking for work and fortune.

Shree Ashokbhai Patel (Kanbi) discovered from the records of people who had left the villages that there was a general exodus of Hindu people from this area.

For overseas travel, the larger sail boats still required wind power and for many, their journey usually started from Calcutta. The travelling youths first had to make the journey from Gujarat to Calcutta (approx 2000 km/1250 miles) before boarding a boat, usually as a paid work hand to help fund their

passage. Yet many set off that way to Burma, Fiji, East Africa, South Africa, New Zealand, UK, Brazil and West Indies.

Impact of Gandhi Bapu on Kolis

The catalyst for a change of life in the 50 or so villages in the Jalalpore and Navsari District came about as a result of Gandhi Bapu's return to India from South Africa. After what Gandhi had achieved in South Africa, he was hailed as a leader in India. One important programme in the fight against the British for Independence of India was the awakening and motivation of people in the villages, and as part of this, he sent out volunteers to promote education, home crafts and general awareness in preparation for Independence. The villages had become aware of Gandhi's work in South Africa through correspondence with their relations who had settled there. As a result, when the Independence movement gathered speed, the Koli people were informed and ready before anyone else in Gujarat. The period between 1910 and 1920s was one of great awareness, despite the problem of poverty, there was a delicate balance with the need to participate in the Independence Struggle. In this respect the idealism of the youth was unstoppable. Clandestine groups were operating in the villages, the network of news and information lines informed of the latest developments and movements of the leaders and their thoughts. Letters and visits from relations in South Africa kept people informed of developments there. Gandhi returned to India from South Africa on 9th January, 1915 with supporters, a number of them were Kolis, such was the rapport Gandhi had with them. When the time came to decide the destination of the 1930 Salt March it was no accident that he chose the Koli village Dandi, despite pressures to choose other towns. This was because he was convinced of the courage and understanding of Kolis in completing this project successfully, and so it proved during the 1930 Salt March and thereafter until Independence.

The National Salt Satyagraha Memorial/Dandi Memorial in Gujarat, honors the activists and participants of the salt march, an act of nonviolent civil disobedience in colonial India led by Mahatma Gandhi. The memorial is spread over 15 acres (61,000 m²) and is located in the coastal town of Dandi, where the Salt March ended on 5th April 1930 and the British salt monopoly was broken, by producing salt by boiling sea water.



Figure 11 : Dandi Memorial Salt March museum

The fight for Independence takes pace

In 1942 any assembly of public meetings was prohibited under rule 56 of the Defence of India Rules. The arrest of Gandhi and Congress party leaders led to mass demonstrations throughout India. Thousands were killed and injured in the wake of the 'Quit India' movement when the British forces opened fire on the peaceful demonstration. Many demonstrators filled the jails and three of them lost their lives. They were :

- Morarbhai Panchabhai Patel of Karadi aged 45
- Ranchodbhai Lalabhai Patel also of Karadi aged 22
- Maganbhai Dhanjibhai Patel of Mokhla Falia, Matwad aged 16
- Another 10 suffered serious bullet wounds and had to be treated in private hospitals; one of them was KJ's maternal grandfather, Ranchhodbhai Lalabhai Patel of Vahan Falia, Matwad, who carried him on his shoulder to the demonstration.
- Another 11 who were wounded were treated locally. There is a memorial in Matwad dedicated to their heroism.

In South Gujarat, Mandhata Koli Patels played an important role in the struggle for Independence. Dandi, Karadi, Matwad and other nearby villages were central to this effort and thousands of people of this area made supreme efforts, many suffered severe police brutality and long jail custody. Hundreds interrupted their studies becoming actively involved in the fight for Independence. There are hundreds of names, and stories of valour and bravery are recorded in a number of books written in Gujarati (Refs 8,9,10 and other books on the Dandi Salt March). Their contribution in the struggle for freedom is unique and one such individual is Shree Panchakaka whose personal Satyagraha(o) was hailed by Gandhi. Quietly and staunchly sticking to his vows, Panchakaka became an inspiration to Indians all over India.

Panchakaka

Panchakaka is not a well known person; he did not leave a string of achievements to account for his long life, yet he got the highest accolade from Gandhi for the one vow he adhered to throughout his life. Panchabhai 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 of garments. He was a religious man and organised satsang at his home on Saturday evenings. Bhajans by Kabir, Narsih Mehta and Mirabai were his favourite and he would recite them from memory. He came across a book translated by Balubhai Parekh on Gandhi Babu's life story and instantly took to both the Gandhi Way and Philosophy.

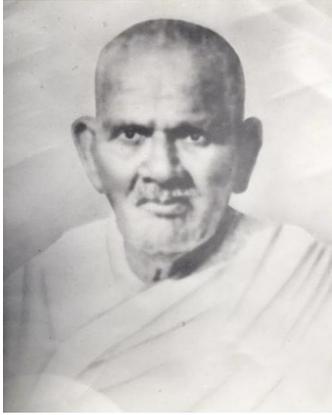


Figure 12 : Panchakaka

In the programmes that Gandhi presented to the Indian Nation on his arrival from South Africa in 1915, Panchakaka was at the forefront in participating and implementing in his village. From the 1923 Nagpur Zanda Satyagraha to the 1930 Salt March to Dandi episode for which he went to jail, Gandhi knew him personally and admired his courage.

In 1921 Gandhi was to start Satyagraha from Bardoli where he was to suggest land owners withholding payment of land tax but because of an incident the demonstration was called off. However, Panchakaka took a vow not to pay the land tax on his small holding until Independence (or Ram Rajya) came to India. Indian Congress workers argued with him that since the programme where Gandhi was going to suggest non-payment of land tax had not taken place he should therefore pay the tax. Panchakaka was not convinced and so he went to Sabarmati Ashram where Gandhi lived to consult with him. Here is a short dialogue :

Gandhi : Why did you take this vow?

Panchakaka : You have written in “Navjivan” that anyone who stood up against injustice could not be subdued, so decided it for myself.

Gandhi : Would carry on with the fight even if no one is with you?

Panchakaka : Yes. I am quoting Rabindranath Tagore’s ‘Go Alone’ poem - “I will fight alone”.

Gandhi : You have my blessing, I am impressed and don’t pay the land tax.

At that time, Panchakaka was the first and only 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, it was decided to hand back land taken away from freedom fighters who had refused to pay the land tax. Panchakaka refused to take his land back.

In 1946 when Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel joined the Delhi Government, a further request was made to Panchakaka to take back his land he again refused saying that India was still not fully Independent.

On 15th 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 a living until he died on 15th February 1951.

Panchakaka requested Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (Home Minister in 1947 and was the first Deputy Prime Minister of India) to see that the Independence they got for India ensured that the poor earned enough to eat, but to this day, the problem still exists.

This is one of many stories, which symbolises the bravery and iron resolve of Mandhata Samaj Koli Patels of Kantha Vibhag.

Kantha Vibhag

The Kantha Vibhag area comprises of approximately 53 villages (gams) and sub-villages (falias) including – Avada Falia, Bodali, Dandi, Jalalpore, Machhad, Matvad and Viraval etc, the full list is available in Appendix A.



Figure 13 : Kantha Vibhag region

Education in Kantha Vibhag district - 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 Ref 15). At the beginning of the 20th century, there was great surge in the awareness of the people in both national and local developments. Letters from those who had emigrated to South Africa reported the great foundation in the work of Gandhi. When Gandhi returned to India many were eager to hear and learn from him. Several teams from a number of villages attended Gandhi's meetings in cities such as Ahmedabad and on their return, they were bubbling with enthusiasm to put into action what they learnt from Gandhi who was proposing actioning the following programmes:

- Communal Unity
- Abolition of Untouchability
- Swadeshi (one's own country) clothes made from Khadi
- National Education.

These programmes were enthusiastically welcomed by the villagers. Spinning cotton for a few hours a day became a regular activity for everyone, schools were started in people's homes with one or two teachers, people were encouraged to keep one or two buffalos for milk production and it formed a large part of the family income. Solving social and family problems the non-violent way started to become the norm. Gandhi and Indian National Congress (also known as the Congress Party or INC) were seen to be united as one; many were said to have become Gandhians. The villagers were fast becoming part of Gandhi's army of freedom fighters. The 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 schools were basic, but a few villages ventured to set up Rastriya Shala(p). The villages of Karadi, Bodali, Matwad and Onjal developed their own schools but they relied heavily on voluntary funding and donations. As a result, Karadi was the only Rastriya Shala that remained and in 1935 it was named Bharat Vidyalay, based on the curriculum set by the Gujarat Vidyapith in Ahmedabad, founded by Gandhi to action the National Education Programme. This institution also played an important role in educating and preparing students from all the nearby villages for India's Struggle for Freedom, particularly after the arrival of

Acharya Manibhai Patel in 1928. The following pioneered the establishment of the original Rastriya Shala in Karadi :

- Unkabhai Makanbhai
- Naranbhai Bavabhai
- Ramabhai Gosaibhai
- Kanjibhai Chhibabhai
- Vallabhbhai Punabhai

To accelerate the emancipation of villages Gandhi called upon able and educated youths to go out and live among the villagers and put into practice his proposed programmes. The arrival of these volunteers high in Gandhian skills proved to be a catalyst for the programme - Acharya Manibhai Patel became the Principal of Bharat Vidyalay, Karadi in 1928 and Dilkhushbhai Diwanji who developed the spinning and weaving activity in the villages. They both carried on their great work until the end of their lives; their contribution in our emancipation is invaluable.

After over 50 years, the school buildings in Karadi were showing signs of wear and tear and perhaps no longer suitable for modern day facilities. So on the initiative of UK-based Karadi Sangathan Mandal, a new school was constructed on a nearby site with full teaching and extra-curricular facilities. Science and computing subjects became compulsory, and a library, swimming and drama facilities were made available to all students. This project became possible due to the foresight and hard work of volunteers such as Babubhai Rama, Maganbhai Karadia, Maheshbhai Karadia, Ranchhodbhai (RC) and others native to Karadi.

The example of schooling in Karadi has been a typical story of the development of education in the other 50 or so villages in Kantha Vibhag. There were pioneers in each village who set up schools, developed dairy farming, encouraged spinning and weaving, kept the Talavs (lakes of fish) regularly maintained, started Bhajan Mandals and local Gam Seva Mandals to ensure that the village was well kept and provided arbitration services so that the residents enjoyed fair play in any contentious issues.

Further development of Karadi and other gams was initiated by their natives settled overseas, and simultaneously other villages were also helped 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 supporting hard work and fund raising have made what the local villages are today.

South African Contribution

It was around 1875 that Koli villagers began emigrating to South Africa. There, many of them met with Gandhi Babu and even stayed with him in the Ashram he had established where they actively participated and supported him. A few even returned with him to India, giving up their residency in South Africa. Although they had little education, they were perhaps the first to realise the need for education for their fellow villagers. They formed the 'Transvaal Koli Hitwardhak Mandal' in Johannesburg and collected funds to promote education of their villagers in India. In 1917 they bought a property in Navsari, converting it into a residence which they called The Koli Vidyarthi Ashram, for students from the villages to stay while studying in Navsari schools.

They also set up an annual scholarship and student loans scheme. During the first thirty years, Koli Vidyarthi Ashram played a crucial role in the development of the students – over time, hundreds stayed and studied there. The Ashram was also the hub of the Freedom Movement in the area; those very students led the Freedom Movement programmes and later became the leaders of their communities.

In the early 1970s the Ashram Building was knocked down and replaced by a five storey complex with shops and offices on the ground floor with student and visitor accommodation and community hall on the upper floors. By this time, however, the need for any accommodation was much reduced and the with the community hall being on the top floor, the building is little used. The South African emigres made great personal contributions both monetary and supportive, to help uplift the local Koli Patel Samajs in Kantha Vibhag.

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. Alas, this plot remains undeveloped and is locked under internal disputes.

In 1947, a plot of land of more than one acre 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, the South Africans bought another four acre plot of land with a substantial building on it and registered this in their own branch organisation 'Transvaal Koli Hitwardhak Trust – Navsari'. 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 local resident Navsari management, which proved to be not as efficient, and this site too is now run down, dilapidated and mired in internal disputes. It's 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 (10s of millions) of rupees; this is a great letdown of their dreams.

Mandhata Koli Patels Abroad

From their own lips we have heard how a few young men from the Koli villages found construction jobs building railways in Surat and other nearby cities in the mid-1800s. They would return to their villages for holidays and report that more work was available which led to more youths joining them. At work they came in contact with other peoples and particularly the English who valued their construction knowledge. This broadened their horizons - when opportunities came their way to work for railways in East Africa and plantations in South Africa and New Zealand, many packed their bags and went looking for work abroad.

The period prior to the Second World War (1939-45) saw many emigrating in large numbers. Passports had become easily available, so hundreds of youths left home, boarding sea-going clippers in search of a better life. Some perished during the dangerous journey but for the many who made it, life was very, very hard in every respect; many suffered from homesickness.

The Big Wave of Emigration

The catalyst for a large social and economic change was the arrival of the British in Surat. In the 1830s/40s men confidently ventured out not just to the nearby cities but to the far corners of India and overseas to New Zealand, South and East Africa in large numbers, the turning point was the requirement for skilled people in construction, especially in large civil engineering and bridge building projects. From 1850 into the early 1900s, young men from the villages proved their worth working Indian Railways projects. More and more joined them; this was a time when a Patel from Navsari or Surat would be hired without questions being asked. The work experiences prepared them to take on larger construction projects. In between jobs, these young men would return to their village, fired with ambition and ideas; they spoke of education as a key necessity, and financed by wealthier farmers in the community, they introduced schools. A Renaissance had begun.

British agents in Surat were recruiting for railway construction workers for East Africa which would involve a 2000 mile journey across the Indian Ocean in a 30 foot boat relying on nothing but favourable winds! This was also the time when many sailed for South Africa and New Zealand. In New Zealand Indians were not eligible for Government/administrative jobs and other employment was just as difficult to find. Over there, their natural survival skills and practical talents led them to self-employment and eventual prosperity.

In South Africa there was the additional handicap of the apartheid system; they struggled hard to make a living and suffered the apartheid indignities. Many joined Gandhi and became his close associates in the struggle for Independence.

Thousands of young men from the villages migrated initially to South Africa, East Africa and New Zealand then later to UK, Canada and the USA. The 1950s saw their wives and children emigrate to join them. 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; they found the caste division and the associated status preceded them in these countries also. The lower caste groups 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.

United Kingdom

Following the Second World War, many of the youths who worked with reputable companies in India obtained recommendation/reference letters, which entitled them to passports. Work permits were not required, so as soon as they could raise enough money for their passage, they boarded steamships, which took after a journey lasting around two months would dock at the ports of Portsmouth, Southampton or Liverpool. Others paid large fees to passport agents to ensure their travel. Most of the early arrivals started their life in UK in Coventry. Many worked in the mines as this absolved them from doing compulsory National Service(q). Life was most basic, few earned more than five pounds a week, but they would contribute one pound to the pool to send to a family in India each week mainly to repay their travel debts. Many of the people who ventured overseas to the UK and other countries could not have made it without the financial and other help from their relations, friends and neighbours. Indeed, for many descendents residing overseas, they are most fortunate to have had relations who supported their cause.

Here are some of the first to arrive in UK from Navsari District in 1930s:

- Shree Makanbhai Parshottambhai (known as Lakhoti) of Matwad
- Dayalbhai Dahyabhai from Bodali.
- Vallabhbhai Unkabhai of Matwad, Vallabhbhai Bhagal of Machhad, Lalbhai Jerambhai of Bodali.

- During the World War II 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 students to come to UK was Shree Parhubhai Parshotbhai of Kothamadi. He studied Law and returned to India and practiced there. After the end of the war many more students came to UK.
- During the years 1949/52 :
 Shree Narshibhai Hirabhai (Matwad)
 Shree Bhanabhai Lakhkhubhai Budhia and Bhanabhai Lakhkhubhai Sukha (Aat)
 Shree Gandabhai Parbhau, Shree Keshabhai Master, and Shree Lallubhai Narshibhai (Kothamdi)
 Shree Dayalbhai (Aat)
 Shree Gopalbhai Ravjibhai and Shree Chhaganbhai Bhagabhai (Maroli).
 Brothers Shree Morarbhai Unka Chhapi and Shree Chhimanbhai Unka (formerly of Matwad and then West Bengal).

These were just some of our main pioneers in UK and kindly accommodated the large number of arrivals from East Africa in the late 1960s. Some of the early arrivals started their life in UK at Coventry, where two brothers who had bought houses welcomed the 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 day and night shift workers came and went. Many worked in the mines, as this absolved them from doing compulsory National Service.

There followed a mass emigration of families leaving Kenya, in a hurry due to the forthcoming immigration controls in 1969(r). These fairly large numbers of arrivals from Kenya at UK airports were left to their own devices to settle the best they can.

The families came with a reasonable knowledge of English, some with skills and a little money but suffered discrimination and had to take up jobs much below their skill and capacity. Housing the families was difficult, in some cases a family would live in one room with a shared kitchen, but it was tolerable – they were both patient and understand of the situation. In a year or so most managed to buy a home. This generation of immigrants suffered many difficulties and made the necessary sacrifices to make for an improved life for

their children both materially and educationally, as proven by what we see today. Accommodation for the new arrivals was the biggest problem, and it was to the credit and efforts of their relatives and friends who had settled earlier and bought homes in which they were invited to share. The resilience of the people shone through against the challenge of unfamiliar weather, language, job and accommodation, but they managed to settle in very quickly.

In Uganda President Obote was ousted by General Idi Amin(s) in 1972 who soon ordered all Asians to leave the country and gave them just two days to do so, giving up their homes and allowed to take very little money with them. In a matter of just one week thousands 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, the British government in a very statesman like manner, welcomed the Uganda Asians and helped them settle. This was, however, a politically very difficult time as various politicians like Enoch Powell (Conservative MP 1950–1974), were making inflammatory speeches of ‘Rivers of Blood’ times to come, suggesting that mass immigration would cause numerous social and welfare problems etc. Unlike the first generation of Indians who came from East Africa mainly being labourers, the first generation of Indians who came from Uganda were educated, well versed in English, skilled and experienced and many had run thriving businesses. Yet they had to prove themselves in the job market, suffering much discrimination. Many of the skilled and well educated had to take up factory floor jobs to make ends meet. However, it was not long before their employers realised their abilities, and eventually a number moved into positions of responsibility.

The women took up jobs in local shops and factories and their children settled down in their schools, proving to be successful in their studies. Within a few years of arriving in the UK, most of those families could afford a mortgage for their own homes. In a relatively short span of time, there was a large Indian population in many cities; it was as though the East African communities had replanted themselves in the UK.

The community associations set up in East Africa started emerging in the UK too. The communities were hundreds strong and boldly asserted their identity, building a platform for celebrating Hindu religious festivals, cultural programmes and sports clubs.

Within a few of years after arriving from Kenya, they set up 'Mandhata Association/Mandals' in each of the cities/towns they lived in; there are some 22 active Mandals in the UK. West Bromwich were probably the first community to have their own premises - a church which was converted to a Shree Krishna Temple. A few years later, an umbrella organisation, 'The Association of Mandhata Samaj UK (AMSUK)' was set up to bring together all Mandhata Samajs at least once a year. Almost all our Mandals now have premises of their own, run Gujarati Language and cultural classes for children, celebrate religious festivals and arrange trips bit locally and abroad. Luncheon clubs have been established, well supported by the retired folk. Many Mandals have a youth section to promote and run sports activities, and AMSUK(t) has a subsidiary, AMSUK Youth Forum, who do this on a national level, as well as supporting Matrimonial and Professional networking services.

The Mandals set up here fund major projects for building Temples, roads, schools and various other projects to help Gams in India. Similar financial help has also been flowing from Koli communities settled in other countries. Some years ago, a project to develop Navsari Assets (acquired by our forefathers in 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.

Today, many of the current generation will not have faced the hardships and discrimination that their fathers and mothers had to endure, but will be better educated, most of them graduates and professionals, confidently running their own businesses and practices, some on an international scale. Some have progressed in politics, becoming MPs and ministers in government. In business and finance, Indian Asians are an important force in Britain, to which our Koli community has made a significant contribution.

A visitor from India to UK and to other overseas countries is most likely to get the impression that our Koli community has truly arrived. They will find that each household boasts graduates and professionals, a large number of whom hold positions of great responsibility and power. Unlike their parents, the youths/current generation have completely shed their inhibition of caste, creed and colour. They live life with complete confidence and shoulder to shoulder with any other citizen. They have integrated into the cosmopolitan British way of life and intermarry both within caste, religion and race, integrating into their environment.

On a personal note, KJ believes that period from the 1970s in the UK is only a partial success, achieving financial independence is just one pillar, aside from our material gains, saying “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”.

A typical emigrant’s story

Here is a story of Ashok’s father who emigrated to the UK in search of a better life - Ukabhai Maganbhai Patel (of Chutta Moholla/Potaliyawad, Navsari) gave up study at the age of 15 when his father died aged around 40, leaving 9 children, so he took up work to help feed the family. His main wish was to go and find work abroad, either in South Africa or the UK, opting for the latter where he had more friends. He left his factory job as a machinist and sailed from Mumbai in 1954 leaving his wife and only child, a son aged 3 months at the family home. He sailed via the port of Aden to Liverpool. Like many, having never made such a journey before, the seasickness took some getting used to, with the boats heaving to and fro. After disembarking at Liverpool, he took the train down to London, having very little knowledge of English.

He was fortunate to have a friend who received him and put him up for a short while and then moved onto accommodation in Whitechapel. At the time, there were no shops selling Indian foods, the weather was cold, and there was much to adapt to, and just a Sunday cricket game with friends to look forward to in the summer months. Inevitably he became very homesick, but on departing from India, a relative who gave him a loan for his passage to UK instructed him not to return but to make a life at his new home. This stuck in Ukabhai’s head every time he contemplated coming back! Indeed, he knew of others who returned homesick to India, but some would then return again to the UK at a later date!



Figure 14 : Sunday cricket at Hampstead Heath late 1950s/early 1960s



Figure 15: Multiple families in a 6/8 room residence in Belsize Park

He saved enough money from his job, ironing garment linings and called Ashok's mother and brother over from India in 1959. They moved to a flat in Belsize Park, Camden, the local area was popular with Asians. After Ashok's birth in 1961 he bought a house and settled in Neasden. The house had 2 reception rooms and 2 bedrooms upstairs, and a garden. All rooms were used as bedrooms, his family in one and the remainder 3 were used to accommodate a number of friends and relations temporarily, who, like Ukabhai had left their families back in India in search of a better life here in the UK. A few years later, he moved his family to Wembley. This story is typical of many immigrants not just here, but around the world. Through family and friendship ties they supported one another and this smoothed the way for a better educational and family life for the immigrants who took that opportunity.

Many arrivals settled in towns where there were big industries – from the post war decade of the 1950s and into the early 60s the UK was a manufacturing

giant, work was easier to find, such as Bolton and Leicester (cotton and textile industry) and Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley (manufacturing metals and components industries).



Figure 16 : Teatime in a London factory

It became common practice for the mothers to go to work in the factories once the children were of schooling age - the extra wage was most important in making families lives more comfortable. It was common to see members of a family working in the same factory.

South and Central Africa

India is surrounded by sea on the south, east and west, hence the transport of goods to nearby and distant lands was by sea and provided work for 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, such as Durban in South Africa. Most of the ships going to Durban at that time sailed from Calcutta. Some of the first Indian settlers in South Africa were the people of Madras including a large number of Muslims.

One of the first Mandhata Koli Patels go to Durban was Shree Vallabhbai Parshotbhai from Viraval in 1875. Many soon followed him from the villages of Karadi, Matwad, Bodali, Samapur etc but they all had to travel to Calcutta first to commence their sea voyage which must have taken a week and more in those days.

Gandhi had relocated to South Africa from Bombay in 1893 after accepting a year-long contract position with an Indian business firm based in Durban in the

province of Natal. There was already a large settlement of Indians there but South Africa was fast sliding into a socially segregated society and practising strict apartheid based on the colour of peoples' skin.

Gandhi stayed on after the end of his assignment to fight against laws legalising apartheid. Many Kolis joined him including Nana Sita (Matwad), Jasmat Nana (Karadi) and Fakira (Aat). They and others suffered jail sentences also and it is said that Fakira carried out guard duties at the Ashram where Gandhi stayed near Ahmedabad. In return, after Gandhi when he came to Dandi at the end of the Salt March in 1930 he visited Fakira's home in Aat. Fighting for their human rights in South Africa during the time of Gandhi and afterwards, Nelson Mandela, Kolis contributed with great heroism :

- Maniben (Rupen Talav near Aat) spent 22 years in jail
- Naranbhai Jasmat spent 18 years in jail.
- Dahyabhai Govind (Bhatpore) died in the struggle.
- Jasmat Nana, Chhotu Makan and Ramlal Bhulia were close associates of Nelson Mandela. The Kolis, as in India proved fearless and reliable freedom fighters.

Many who arrived in Durban and found life in South Africa not to their liking moved further north to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Zambia.



Figure 17 : South African subcontinent

Transvaal Koli Hitwardhak Mandal

The Koli settlers in South Africa were the first to take an enlightened view of the Community and were instrumental in uplifting their kindred back in India. They formed the Transvaal Koli Hitwardhak Mandal, in Johannesburg in 1914, collecting donations from Kolis locally and in Rhodesia. The money raised was used to purchase land in Lunsikui, Navsari where they built a residential home for students from the villages to stay during their study in Navsari schools and colleges. An unnamed couple from Samapur who had returned home permanently from South Africa managed the student accommodation and named it 'Koli Vidharthi Ashram'. A trust was set up to fund scholarships and loans to encourage higher studies and also the printing of a monthly magazine, 'NavPragati'. This was indeed an act of far reaching vision and this philanthropic work continues today.

Today there are a large number of Kolis in Johannesburg, Durban and various other towns and cities of South Africa. In the earlier days they toiled in all sorts of skilled, unskilled and menial jobs but today, they and their descendants are substantial businessmen, professionals and politicians.

East Africa

Kenya

Mombasa was the main port of call. From here many continued to other large cities like Nairobi, Nakuru, Mombasa, Kisumu etc in Kenya, Kampala in Uganda and Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania. As the main thrust of Koli Patels from Surat district started to come to East Africa, other communities from the Punjab and business people from Gujarat were already there in large numbers and had built their own homes. In the earlier years, those who came leaving behind their families would rent rooms which were quite often unoccupied shops or stores and often lived in groups of 10 to 15. These dens were called meshes. People from the same gam in India often lived together and so the dens would be called Matwad Mesh or Bodali Mesh accordingly. As the men progressed to better paid jobs and earned enough to rent for rooms/homes for themselves, their elder children would be called over and then their wives and other younger children.

The first generation Kolis in East Africa were mainly labourers or semi-skilled workers. Life there was lived almost exactly as in their home villages in India.

One member of the family would go out to work leaving them dependent on a single wage. After their wives and children arrived, the children studied to perhaps matriculation level and entered the job market mostly as clerks; few had the resources or knowledge to start a business. Financially, the majority of the families lived a frugal, mostly debt free but materially poor life, and even fewer owned a house.

Most of these families had been settled in East Africa for over thirty years held British passports. In East Africa the Koli Patels from Navsari district (Surat District at the time) adopted 'Mandhata' as the their community name. They identified themselves as belonging to the Mandhata Community and so all the Community Mandals were named as Mandhata Mandals. Some decided to hide their Koli roots, even changing their diet so they could pass as holy people of a higher caste.

KJ travels to Kenya

Both sets of KJ's grandparents – Ranchhodbhai Lala of Vahan Falia, Matwad and Somabhai Morar of Dhuna Falia, Bodali, went to Mombasa in 1919/21. This was soon after the First World War (1914-1918) when there was an intense political power struggle among the European countries and the British, while maintaining their Empire, were also digging in their feet wherever they went. KJ's grandparents went to work on the building of the Railways and stayed there for about three years and returned to India. They were perhaps among the first there and in their own words "life was terrible", living in tents in fear of the wild animals. For the first year or two they survived on boiled lentils with some pepper and salt and then later they grew chillies and ginger. Apart from singing bhajans under the dim light of a lantern, there was no other entertainment.

Until about 1935, East Africa was not the preferred destination for Kolis, but after that, more and more youths in their late twenties and thirties set sail for Mombasa. Their travel by sea was fraught with danger and during wartime even more so. Ships were mainly sail boats reliant on favourable wind and often took more than a month to travel from Bombay to Mombasa. KJ's father was on one such boat with many others from Bodali. In 1943 during World War II, the Japanese sank a steam ship carrying a load of passengers from Bombay to Mombasa. A few were drowned but most swam to safety. After the war a large a number came to East Africa and settled there. KJ arrived in Kenya in

1948 at the age of twelve with two other colleagues from Bodali aged 12 and 15.

Origin of Mandhata community title

How did the name 'Mandhata' come to be connected to our community? KJ had not heard of a credible explanation but it appears that someone from our community had read or heard that the 'Puranas' identified us as the descendents of the ancient powerful King Mandhata. This is now the name used by all our people residing in overseas countries – it is a strong trait within us that wherever we find ourselves in a fairly big group we unite as a Mandal, informally perhaps to start with, but formalised later. This is what he understands happened in Nairobi. A few people informally started to meet as far back as 1925, maybe over a social event or drink. They came to be known as 'Mandhata Mandal' although community work was rarely in their mind!

Formation of a Mandhata Mandal

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'. Hirabhai Vala, who had recently qualified as lawyer, was asked to prepare a constitution after which a working committee was elected.

Prabhubhai Rattanji was one of the founder members of that Mandal and KJ too, was a committee member for a few years from 1959. Keshavbhai Bhikhabhai provided a strong leadership and collecting donations of a few shillings from community members, built Mandhata Hall in Grogan Road in 1961.



Figure 18 : Grogan Road, Nairobi in 1950s

The hall was not used for long because from 1968 more and more people started emigrating to the UK ahead of the Independence of Kenya because it was feared that afterwards, those entering UK would come to a close as they were classed as British Protected persons and not British Subjects. The Mandhata hall was later sold for a song and the £10,000 received was repatriated to UK, handed over to the Association of Mandhata Samaj UK.

Mombasa had a big Indian community there and Shree Makanbhai Budhia Patel was instrumental in starting a community Mandal, donating land to build a hall and some accommodation. Visitors and those coming from/returning to India made use of this facility.

Exodus

The period between 1965/70 brought in a sea of political change; one by one the East African countries became independent. The eventual aim of these countries was the Africanisation(u) (the transfer/ownership of property, business and jobs to natives of that country) within the lower and middle classes of society. Apart from the businessmen and professionals, the vast majority of the Asians were middle class. The 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 missing their chance to emigrate. 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.

Uganda & Tanzania

In Uganda there was no immediate pressure under President Obote but he was ousted by General Amin in 1972 in a military coup. Soon after, 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 pressures on the people to leave; they were much smaller in numbers.

Mandals were also formed in Kampala, Dar Es Salaam etc. Unlike South Africa though, there was no major all-embracing project to help their home villages in India undertaken. What help was given was organised ad hoc by individual Gam Mandals for the benefit of their own Gams in India. In the main, financial assistance sent was sent for the welfare of the family members in the Gam and perhaps some contribution for the mandir or local school.

East Africa today

There are now perhaps only about fifty or so families remaining in the East African countries. Even then the remainder are usually just two or three family members, who are mainly there because of their business or professional connections; their wives and children would have settled in the UK or other country. The political climate/instability in some East African countries does not favour settlement there, for some, their personal safety is in doubt hence not an ideal place for family life.

Burma

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 World War II the Japanese invaded and occupied the country in 1942, but was then reoccupied by Britain in 1945. Many construction workers from Koli villages area went to Burma to build railways and railway bridges - Shree Lakhkhubhai Budhia and Khandubhai Manga both of Aat Gam were subcontractors there and took many to work for them. The Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League were fighting the British for their Independence. In 1948 when Independence granted, the Military Junta took over and all the foreign workers were driven off in a hurry. A number of these workers perished during their escape through the thick jungles, including many originally from Samapore Gam.

Fiji

A number of Kolis also went to Fiji and set up businesses there. Of the population, approximately 30% is made up of Indians. However, a number of military coups in the 1980s made it an uncomfortable place for the Koli business owners and community, this resulted in a number of them emigrating to New Zealand.



Figure 19 : Family business in Fiji set up in 1927

New Zealand

Shree Keshavbhai Daji at the age of 19 was the first man from Kantha Vibhag to go to New Zealand in 1902. He was followed in 1903 by Narottambhai Babar of Bodali and Keshavbhai Chhiba. They were followed later by the brothers Gulabbhai and Makanbhai Jivan of Amadpur. Looking back it seems amazing that these youths just passed their teens uneducated and could only speak Gujarati, travelled to Calcutta to board ships not knowing their final destination. 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 had already arrived 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/unskilled jobs. Keshavbhai Daji is said to have landed his first job of scrub clearing for plantation. Later, migrants to New Zealand were able to go travel from Bombay, so by 1920, hundreds from

Kantha Vibhag left for New Zealand. The early years were of great hardship, surviving on odd jobs like hawking, door to door selling fruit and vegetables etc and spending the nights in a 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. KJ when only 6, remembers mother's uncle, Dheda Lala (Dhhok) of Vahan Falia, Matwad who was on his second visit. Today Kolis 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 and have also 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 1972 Montreal Olympics New Zealand Hockey team which went on to become champions.
- Miss Shanta Patel who surfed at national level
- In cricket, Narottambhai Puna of Machhad and Dipak Patel of Dandi (formerly of West Bromwich, who played for New Zealand in the 1992 cricket world cup).

Most of our Kolis have settled in either Auckland or Wellington where they have active Indian 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 such as Dayalbhai Kesery, Chhotubhai Chhima, Pratimaben. Here are two important books have been published detailing early settlement of Kolis in New Zealand :

- 'Indian Settlers – The Story of a New Zealand South Asian Community' (see Ref 6)
- 'Machhad to New Zealand' (see Ref 7)

Canada

The emigration of Kolis to Canada and USA happened much later, both these countries offered great opportunities. When Canada started advertising for people to immigrate there and help work the great wheat belt many Europeans and Indian Punjabis – Sikhs in particular, took up the offer.

South Africa born Shree Chhibubhai Bhanabhai is credited to have been the first Mandhata Koli to go to Canada in 1960, having studied in India and then returning to South Africa he decided to emigrate to Canada, accepting a teacher's job in Toronto. He also became active in community work and was a regular host to Morari Bapu whenever he came to Toronto. Other emigrants include Shree Gijubhai Patel from Bori Falia (1964) followed by Ramanbhai B. Mulchand of Karadi in 1967 followed by more people from South Africa. In 1972 (when the Olympic Games were hosted in Montreal) a recruitment drive by Canada which resulted in entry and residential visas granted relatively easily saw a large number emigrate to Canada and Shree Chhibubhai Bhanabhai is said to have helped them to settle. The Canadian government allows immigrants settled there to sponsor their blood relations to come to Canada. The children of these the immigrants would return to India to get married and the sponsoring system enabled many families to settle in Canada.

Today, there are large numbers settled both in Toronto and Montreal and have active Gam Mandals. Montreal is in the French speaking Quebec State, yet a large community there settled comfortably and have constructed a multi-million dollar Shree Ramji Temple. The Mandhata Association there actively serve the social, cultural and religious needs - youths from each Gam have a thriving cricket team. Many of the immigrants from our Gams who were not qualified or technically trained had to take up manual factory jobs etc. and even the educated ones willingly took up manual work. However, their children are now very well educated and qualified with a fine job or very profitable businesses.

USA

One of the first to go to the USA 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 the USA operates to control immigration and admitting those with skills in demand. Some are resident in New Jersey but most of them are spread out as far as New York, San Francisco, Houston and Florida. Another previous method

of gaining residency in the USA for a number of people who had emigrated there for that purpose was to prove they had been living there for 3/5 years after which they would be granted a green card. One way of doing this was to purchase and run a motel business for 3/5 years (a 24 hour facility for which there is a demand) for a statutory 3/5 years and then apply??. As with Canada, USA also has a blood relation sponsorship system and this paved the way for many families being reunited.

Conclusion

This document is a brief and sometimes sketchy history of the Kolis - their origins, standing in society, movements in India and settling abroad. We Mandhata Patels are just one of the 1050 Koli sub groups. Much of the research has been based on a number of books and articles written by people who researched out of their personal interest or for their doctorate study. There has also been much interaction with the local village people and KJ has recorded his own knowledge both in the origins and migration of Kolis overseas. According to the inferences from the Shastras(v) and Puranas(w) we may have had a glorious past. If that was true, then we too have suffered the ravages of history where civilisations all over the world have been and gone; the once powerful races brought down by other more powerful races and made to serve the victors.

The period from the 1800s is of great importance in Koli evolution and the following points can be agreed on :

- The Kolis were overpowered and made to suffer the indignities meted out to a loser in those times; the conditions of slaves and bonded labour and it took many, many decades to make even small progress.
- Our forefathers took great courage in breaking from the shackles of discrimination against out caste and hearsay to make a better life
- Kolis were courageous in emigrating for work with little money and in many cases, little education
- Kolis are industrious
- We cannot continuously blame the upper castes for our present conditions.

As with many civilizations, history records the downfall of once powerful people who may have completely disappeared or been reduced to insignificance, but the Koli people still remain.

Mandhata Koli Patel diaspora (a scattered population whose origin lies in a separate geographic locale) 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 have created third and fourth generations.

- The current generation is now growing up in a completely new and different environment. Their values are somewhat reduced/leaner version of their parents values and are more akin to the western civilisation and beliefs where perhaps the individual is in the forefront rather than the family.
- The current 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 respect ability rather than birth.
- In a vast number of cases the more recent generations do not see India as their motherland, perhaps this is natural progression with successive generations? In such an atmosphere, the older generation can be grateful that the newer generation still remember and/or observe Indian culture.
- The older generations had a 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 villages and repaired or rebuilt their homes at exorbitant cost so they can visit the Gam every year. It is debateable if the sons and daughters will ever go to the Gam on their own - indeed, in many cases they only visit when accompanied/received by their parents.

As a community however, we must recognise that we also have a much deprived large population particularly in the gams consisting of our relations and distant nieces and nephews whose parents and grandparents our parents and grandparents. 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 see a duty to continue to help, but the same cannot be expected from the new/current generations; let us hope they will see this as a responsibility and take up the challenge.

A personal view from Ashok

With the economic position India and especially Gujarat towards the end of the 1800s and into the 1900s those living in large families had to make the decision to go further afield to make a living and as a result once settled, helped improve the lives of their immediate family by both sending money to them and also bringing them over to live with them and the same goes for extended families.

The families remaining in Gujarat have also moved on greatly in the last 30 years –

- Children are better educated and becoming well versed in English
- Further education is encouraged and a number have MBA degrees, for example
- They are computer literate and a thriving IT industry has been established
- Many apply for jobs abroad using their skills base to satisfy visa entry requirements
- Many also move to the bigger cities both inside and out of Gujarat for skilled work
- Generations no longer live in a single home but move out and acquire their own homes

As with progress, generations are leaving the villages and moving out for work which, for many, brings in a better/regular income based on a salary with paid holidays and benefits, than farming which can be a daily effort and is also is challenged by weather conditions. That generation does not have an urgency to emigrate to look for work, they are making a good life for their families which was not possible by their forefathers. The villages are becoming depleted, with many empty houses, some which are occasionally used by visiting expatriates. Gam life is being exchanged for city life.

The cultural change in living abroad has impacted successive generations such that it is highly likely that they will never relocate back to their motherland. For many, they may never see their ancestral villages/homes which may be closed up or derelict/neglected. Let's hope they visit from time to time and take an interest in their forefathers' home and culture and pass on the knowledge to their families and descendants.



Figure 20 : Jay Mandhata Koli emblem

Acknowledgements

Thank You to KJ for permitting me to update the first edition you wrote after much research, and for providing encouragement and making yourself available to answer my queries. It has been an honour to carry out this work – I feel more enlightened and proud of my ancestry and can now speak of my roots with greater knowledge and dignity. In doing my investigations I also found more historic detail about my own father and grandfather's hardship and efforts in migrating for work and settling down.

As well as updating and adding text to the original version, in this second edition I have and added maps, images, Appendices and a Glossary of terms to enhance the reader's awareness.

Ashok Ukabhai Patel

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- Ref 9 **Swatantra Sangram na Sansmara no**
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- Ref 10 **Zindadil Rastra Premni Gaurav Gatha** by Shree Maganbhai B Karadia (2010)
- Ref 11 **Vishva na Vivith Deshoma Jai Vasali Kantha Vibhagni Sahsik Prajano Sanshipt Itihas**
- by Shree Maganbhai B Karadia. (2008)
- Ref 12 **Raj Vansni Koli Komno Itihas RigVeda Jetlo Prachin Chhe** -
Pub. Feb 1979 in Mumbai Samachar Saptahik by Shree Ramijibhai Santola
- Ref 13 **Swatantrata Sangram Gaurav Gatha** by late Shree Dayalbhai Kesari
- Ref 14 **Swatantatra Sangram na Sansmaran –**
Pub. Itihas Samiti, edited by Mohanbhai Dandiker

Ref 15 **Our Finest Patriotic Years** by Maganbhai B Karadia – link
[Our Finest Patriotic Years - Maganbhai B Karadia](#)

Glossary of Terms, People and Places

- (a) Yajna - is to purify the atmosphere and the mind of the performer and those who join in it. It serves to elevate the human mind by enabling it to bless, praise and adore the divine giver of life and happiness.
- (b) Caste – a system used within a society (hierarchical in some) classifying purity and social status. The 5 castes in Hinduism are : Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudra and Untouchable and are listed in order descending order i.e. Brahmin is of higher status than Kshatriya and so on - See Appendix B for further information on Hindu castes.
- (c) Bonded labour - also known as debt bondage and peonage, happens when people give themselves into slavery as security against a loan or when they inherit a debt from a relative.
- (d) Swami Sachidananda - is an eminent thinker and a preacher in his own right with a deep faith in Universal truth and science. He is a social reformer, a humanitarian, a philosopher, a welfare activist and many more.
- (e) Alaudin Khilji - 1296–1316), was an emperor of the Khalji dynasty that ruled the Delhi Sultanate in the Indian subcontinent. He instituted a number of significant administrative changes, related to revenues, price controls, and society. He is noted for repulsing the Mongol invasions of India.
- (f) Mohammed Bagdo
- (g) Akbar (1542 – 1605) popularly known as Akbar the Great, was the third Mughal emperor, who reigned from 1556 to 1605. Akbar succeeded his father, Humayun, and as a young emperor expanded and consolidated the Mughal empire in India.
- (h) Hindutva – a concept of "Indian cultural, national, and religious identity".
- (i) Reginald Edward Enthoven (1869–1952) was an administrator in the Indian Civil Service of the British Raj and an author of publications related to India.
- (j) Prof. Jon Wilson was a Senior Lecturer in British Imperial & South Asian History, King's College.
- (k) Rajputs – they are a large multi-component cluster of castes, kin bodies, and local groups, sharing social status and ideology of genealogical descent originating from the Indian subcontinent.
- (l) Alice W Clarke - Independent Scholar, History Ph.D. based in Berkeley Gender and Society in India, Indian Historical Demography & Modern World History
- (m) David Hardiman – David Hardiman is a historian of and a founding member of the subaltern studies group. Born in Rawalpindi in Pakistan, Hardiman was brought up in England where and graduated at the London School of Economics in 1970 and received his D.Phil. in South Asian History from the University of Sussex in 1975. He is presently a professor in the Department of History at the University of Warwick.
- (n) **Sanatan Hindu Dharma** - in Hinduism, term used to denote the “eternal” or absolute set of duties or religiously ordained practices incumbent upon all Hindus, regardless of class, caste, or sect.
- (o) **Satyagraha** - is a particular form of nonviolent resistance or civil resistance. Someone who practices satyagraha is a satyagrahi.

- (p) Rastriya Shala – Commissioned in 1921 by Mahatma Gandhi, Rashtriya Shala is a learning center started with a purpose to impart new national concepts.
- (q) National Service - After the Second World War (1939-45), the young men of Britain were called upon to meet new challenges in a rapidly changing world. National Service, a standardised form of peacetime conscription, was introduced in 1947 for all able-bodied men between the ages of 18 and 30.
- (r) Kenya immigration controls 1969 – The 1960s were a turbulent time for Kenya’s South Asian community. As the decade dawned Kenya was fast moving to Independence. The Asians were apprehensive of their future in Kenya. In 1965, the imposition of exchange controls hit the community hard as many had their savings in British banks, or were educating their children in Britain or the US. Soon, they had to decide whether to take up Kenya citizenship as the two-year grace period was fast coming to an end. Some Asians took up citizenship but the majority remained unmoved. They thought the “lifetime” stamp to stay in Kenya on their British passports was enough security. In 1967, the Kenyan government passed the Immigration Bill requiring all non-citizens to get work permits. British Asians now had to decide whether to take Kenyan citizenship or emigrate to Britain. In January 1968, the Asian Exodus to the UK was building up; the story hit international headlines a month later. Britain announced quota vouchers for South Asians. The Asian Exodus was in full swing. The British High Commission in Nairobi was flooded with voucher applications from Asians.
- (s) General Idi Amin – In 1971, General Idi Amin overthrew the elected government of Milton Obote and declared himself president of Uganda, launching a ruthless eight-year regime in which an estimated 300,000 civilians were massacred. He expelled all Indian and Pakistani citizens in 1972.
- (t) AMSUK – The Association of Mandhata Samaj UK, was established in 1972 as an umbrella organisation of the 15 or so Mandhata Samaj Mandals in the UK who are representative of the community of Koli Patels originating from the Navsari District in Gujarat, India, a number of whom had initially migrated to East Africa. (Website <https://www.amsuk.org/>).
- (u) Africanisation - is the process of defining or interpreting African identity and culture. It is informed by the experience of the African Diaspora and has endured and matured over time from the narrow nationalistic intolerance to an accommodating, realistic and global form.
- (v) Shastra – is a Sanskrit word that means "precept, rules, manual, compendium, book or treatise" in a general sense. The word is generally used as a suffix in the Indian literature context, for technical or specialized knowledge in a defined area of practice.
- (w) Purana - The Puranas are Hindu religious texts. They contain narratives about the history of the Universe from creation to destruction and the genealogies of kings, heroes, sages, and deities. Some of the Puranas are discourses on cosmology, geography and Hindu philosophy. They are usually written in the form of a dialogue.

Appendices

Appendix A

List of 53 Gams comprising Kantha Vibhag :

Aat Abrama Alura Amalsad Athan/Ethan Avada Falia
Balapir Dargah Bhutsadgam Bilimora Bodali Bori Falia Butlav Gam
Chhapra Chhinam Gam (near Maroli) Chijgam
Dabhalay Dandi Dantej Delvada Dumas
Eru/Eroo Jalalpore Jespor Jogeshwar
Kachholi Kakrad Kalthan Karadi Khambhlav Kothamadi
Machhad Machhiwad Majigam Mandalia Mandir Mandria
Masa Gam Matvad Mokhala Falia Moti Pethan Movasa Gam
Nani Kakrad Nani Pethan Onjal Rupan Talav
Sagra Samapore Simalgam Sultanpur
Tavdi Vasan Vijalpore Viraval

Appendix B

1. The name **Mohenjo-Daro** is reputed to signify “the mound of the dead.” The archaeological importance of the site was first recognized in 1922, one year after the discovery of Harappa. Subsequent excavations revealed that the mounds contain the remains of what was once the largest city of the Indus civilization.
2. Hindu castes –
 - 2.1 **Brahmin** – the highest class, single spiritual power that Hindus believe lives in everything.
 - 2.2 **Kshatriya** – the 2nd class of the caste system; Warriors/Soldiers.
 - 2.3 **Vaishyas** – the 3rd class of the caste system were traditionally cattle-herders, agriculturalists, artisans and merchants. They are now associated with the middle-class and social advancement and make up around one fifth of India's population.
 - 2.4 **Shudra/Sudra** – the 4th class in the Hindu caste structure. Their jobs consist of artisans, labourers landowners, maids, cooks and blacksmiths.
 - 2.5 **Untouchable/Harijan/Dalit** – the lowest caste in the hierarchy.