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Through a saffron-tinted looking glass: reminiscing, remembering and melancholia. The story of a small Indian South African town: 22 years after apartheid

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Through a Saffron-Tinted Looking Glass

Reminiscing, remembering and melancholia.

The story of a small Indian South African town

22 years after apartheid.

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ABSTRACT:

Apartheid helped create enclaves of safety and familiarity for some communities in South Africa, making those communities impermeable to outside influences, preserving class, culture, caste, religion and race into neat little packages. The demise of apartheid broke those enclaves, changing the landscape of those comfort zones and forcing them to reimagine a new sense of community. Clutching onto the remnants of this past, yet wanting liberation and economic change, these communities are fast learning that some things have got to give. Tongaat, a town constituted like most other South African Indian townships, is one that I grew up in. This research project is my personal journey in which I recount my own memories of the town's culture, caste system and racial divides using the safety net of being an outsider yet having the privilege of being an insider. Through interviews I investigate if the residents of the town have taken possession of their new political freedoms since the end of apartheid from a class, culture, caste, race and economic perspective. I examine the policy interventions that were introduced in relation to land reform, housing, education and socio-economic empowerment to enable change on the social front. Have these interventions impacted on the lives of the towns inhabitants and what is the future of Tongaat?

CONTENTS

PART 1: LONG FORM NARRATIVE REPORT

Abstract	Page 1
My story	Page 3
The nuances of a Gujerati family	Page 5
How the English stole the Cape Baroque architecture	Page 6
Melancholia	Page 8
Government's redemption plan	Page 11
Some interesting characters	Page 15
Numbers, colours and contrasts	Page 18
In Black and Brown	Page 19
It takes a village....	Page 23
The new sugar barons	Page 27
And now, what happens?	Page 31

PART 2: METHOD DOCUMENT

Overview & Aims	Page 33
Research question	Page 34
Why Tongaat?	Page 34
Family history	Page 36
A divided community	Page 37
Economic Developments	Page 38
The Tongaat Hulett Group Limited	Page 39
Literary review	Page 40
Methodology	Page 45
Risks and Challenges	Page 47
Conclusion	Page 47
References	Page 48

PART 1: LONG FORM NARRATIVE REPORT

My story:

I always wanted to run away from Tongaat.

Tongaat is a village. A one-street village where everyone knew each other's business. It has got that too-close-for-comfort kind of familiarity, and growing up I always had to live with the stigma attached to being the shopkeeper's daughter who came from the Gujerati community. Eventually I did run away, chasing after the big city lights of Johannesburg, but more so, chasing after my kindred spirit who was not from the same community as myself. It was the sexiness of being defiant, being different and challenging the privilege of my birth.

I ran away 21 years ago and never regretted the decision to do so. Presently at the age of 42, I have no qualms about not knowing my neighbours in my previously White suburb, eating the holy cow, not having a shrine in my home or raising my two daughters with no religion, and having a gay best friend. Life in Tongaat precipitated my defiance and subconsciously pushed me to leave and pursue another world. The town in its smallness, its myopic enclave, its racialised, class and caste-based community ironically spurred my flight on.

A one-street village/town, the sugar industry and other small-scale farming activities continue being the main employment drivers that feed through the town, stimulating its economy. The African community which served as the domestic and labour force to the Indian community and the surrounding sugar industry lived in the peripheral areas and only intermingled based on employment necessities. The town prided itself in cultural, religious and educational achievements and was at one stage a prominent town in the Indian community in KwaZulu-Natal.

Having left Tongaat just after the 1994 elections, I intermittently returned to see my folks a few times during the year. As the years advanced, I returned home less frequently. With the sole aim of wanting to understand why I ran away, why I won't return and question if I will return, I extended my stay in Tongaat to do the unravelling.

Is Tongaat worth a return? Has the community changed from being class, caste and race conscious? Am I being too harsh on Tongaat, as most Indian towns have the similar issues?

Am I hoping for a utopian change in order to rush back and settle in Tongaat? Or am I just longing for a sense of community, familiarity and belonging that Jo'burg offers on a superficial level?

Having the privilege of knowing the community intimately and still being the shopkeeper's daughter, I have access to a rich variety of voices. Of course these voices that I have privileged access to come with bias, so please bear this in mind as you read along.

My family are Gujerati-speaking and both parents come from the caste *Kumbhar (*clay pot makers). My paternal great-grandfather, Lakha Bhagwan, arrived in Durban with cousins from India. Having dabbled in various start-up business ventures, he eventually settled in Tongaat and opened an Indian sweetmeat store catering for the indentured labourers in the town. Indian sweetmeats or *mithai* are delectable and colourful sweet and savoury vegetarian treats that are consumed on religious and celebratory occasions. My grandfather, Bhaga Lakha, was then brought in from India to help with his father's business. He purchased land which is still situated on the main street of Tongaat. The property was divided between my Dad and his four brothers, my grandfather's two brothers and their four sons. All of them are shopkeepers.

Tongaat only had two prominent Gujerati families, the Lakha's and the Vallabhjee's, and as the years went on, a smattering of other families settled. The indentured Indians came from the Tamil, Telugu or Hindi speaking language groups. The indenture system was a system of labour wherein Indians were transported to various international British sugar plantations to provide menial labour over a contracted period of time for an agreed amount of money.

My family were among the most well-known from the Gujerati community in Tongaat. Almost all from the community arrived in South Africa either as entrepreneurs or professionals. Having arrived later in South Africa and not during the time of the indentured labourers, as well as having the Gujerati affiliation with Mahatma Gandhi, the community always saw themselves as financially and socially wealthier. Several still maintain their ties with family in India. This is not possible for those that arrived as indentured labourers as almost all have lost touch with family in India and embraced a merged Indian, African, Western culture. Hence my community had a superior notion of itself as being more "pure" than the others.

The consequences of language, class, cultural and caste idiosyncrasies amongst the Indian communities played itself out during my teenage years when my hormones were raging and the need to defy my "old fashioned" parents played itself out, with me dating a non-Gujerati teenager. This was unheard of, as inter-language and inter-caste relationships were forbidden. The differences in the social hierarchy started to poison my naivety. They forced me to become aware of social inequalities within the Indian community. Wealth played a crucial role and being the daughter of a shopkeeper kept me in this enclave. What I have realised recently after having spent time in the town, is that being the daughter of a shop-keeper has no resonance in a town that is failing economically.

The nuances of a Gujerati family:

Ambaram Bhaga Lakha is Dad's name, but he was affectionately known in Tongaat as Uncle Amboo. He is a short, round, bespectacled man with a receding hairline of baby soft white hair. He is unpretentious, unassuming and far from being flamboyant in any sense. Dad could get lost in a crowd easily and I think that his desire to go unnoticed originates from his stutter. He had to learn the value of money at 16 as he was required to support his widowed mum and five younger siblings. As a child I was highly respectful and fearful of him as he reigned over his four children with an invisible rod. These days my children say that *Aajabapa* (maternal grandfather) is caught in a time warp, with his trousers worn way too high, pulling the belt way too tight, resulting in him looking even much shorter.

My fondest memory of my mother, Omia Gopal Lakha, whom I call *Baa* (mother or woman who is the village elder) and so did everyone else including the neighbours, was her scent. Her clothes smelt of coriander, cumin, cardamom, and *masala chai* (spiced Indian tea) and her skin whispered of rose fragranced talcum powder. *Baa* always wore a sari, until 20 years ago. Now she wears flowing kaftans. Her long hair is always in a single plait with a middle path, her face is a mosaic of freckled brown spots with dark patches under the eyes. She never forgets to wear her big red *bindi* (a red dot worn on the centre of the forehead by married Hindu women). *Baa'*s parents owned a general dealer store in a small town near Ermelo, Mpumalanga called Kaffir Spruit. Her marriage to Dad was arranged with the respective families trading a daughter, so *Baa's* brother married Dad's sister.

My parents' worldviews on relationships and marriage are steeped in the era from which they came. This was their proverbial umbilical cord to India together with its language and caste system. Living in an apartheid state worsened the divide and highlighted the differences. The age-old Indian idiom "*Matha, Pitha, Guru, Deivam"* translates into Mother, Father, Teacher, God. Its meaning refers to the order in which one should offer reverence. So respecting, abiding and obeying your parents comes above God. My folks only socialised with people from their community. Neighbours, workers in the shop, those you regularly bump into at the market were just colleagues and were not welcomed into the intimacy of the family and reticent community. Despite there being one other Gujerati family in the town, they came from a different caste, so fraternising with them only occurred during religious events.

Dad's mum was married off at the age of eight together with all her female cousins in India. She only went to her husband's home once her menstrual cycle began. My parents saw each other for the first time on their wedding day. My siblings, too, are all married to Gujerati-speaking partners of the *Kumbhar* caste. So my relationship with a non-Guajarati man whom I ended up marrying was likened to having a relationship with a *Harijan* (untouchable). Nobody in my family or extended family had done it before and shockingly in 2017, none have bucked this system from my paternal side with the exception of me. My husband, Avanash Singh, comes from the Hindi-speaking community and he is from the *Rajput* (warriors) caste. The irony is that when it comes to caste and not language, a *Rajput* is of a much higher social order than a *Kumbhar.*

How the English stole the Cape Baroque architecture:

Tongaat was selected in 1846 by a government commission as one of a number of villages to be established through the Indian indentured labour system. Originally named Victoria, the town grew successful because of the cultivation of sugar cane. The initial settlers attempted the cultivation of cotton, arrowroot and coffee but the sugar plantations succeeded the most and the town became synonymous with this form of agriculture, thereby asserting themselves as a distinctive force in the cultural and political spheres of the region's social history.

The growth of Indian indentured labour gave rise to the establishment of an informal community that required a system of management which led to an experiment in social welfare to provide the housing, health, cultural and recreational needs of a diverse

population. A form of local government was formalised as the Tongaat Town Board in 1944 and in partnership with the Natal Sugar Company provided housing and public facilities to its employees. This partnership resulted in the increased provision of services and infrastructure development as well as a number of housing projects that has distinctly shaped Tongaat into the town it is today. Today, the distinctively shaped buildings and houses are still a relic of Tongaat's past.

Tongaat is situated on the KwaZulu-Natal North Coast, on the banks of the Tongaati River. The 30-minute drive northwards along the coastline from Durban to Tongaat is sprinkled with palm trees and suburbia on the left and sand dunes creeping with foliage on the right. The town is situated in one of the economic development nodes located in the northern parts of eThekwini Municipality and covers the area for Ward 58, 61 and 62 which encompasses the whole town of Tongaat including the surrounding villages and areas of Hambanathi, Emona and Isnembe. Aesthetically, the town is English colonial and has influences of Cape Baroque architecture which was very fashionable during the early twentieth century. In 1936, during the time of the sugar barons, Cape artist Robert Gwelo Goodman was requested to upgrade the design of the housing of sugar cane workers and Eurocentric aesthetics were applied. Ironically, it was done with the aim of improving race relations and the living conditions of the indentured labourers and African workers. Hence Tongaat is one such anomaly in KwaZulu-Natal, with its heritage buildings mimicking architecture that you would normally find in the Cape.

The Tongaat Hulett Group Limited is the key employment driver in Tongaat and is also the biggest land owner in KwaZulu-Natal. They are listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange with a market capitalisation figure of R17, 8 billion. The company has a portfolio of more than 8 000 hectares of developable land in prime locations in KwaZulu-Natal. Over the years it has created further employment opportunities along the North Coast. Currently the Tongaat Hulett Group is converting some of its agricultural land into development zones for either upmarket housing or economic initiatives. None of these developments have yet to impact directly on the residents and businesses of the town, as many of them are on the coastline.

Melancholia:

Spending time with Dad in his store, Bhagwan's Outfitters, for a week was wearisome, as the interval between the few customers entering the shop was vast. Dad was dozing off in one corner, his autistic 78-year-old brother, Govan, who has been working in the shop since time immemorial, was dozing off in the other corner. I sat on the high bar stool behind the cash register, and paged through old Farmer's Weekly magazines, making inane conversation with the tailor from India who was renting space in the shop. My mind wandered off to school holiday periods when the shop was bursting at the seams. The business began as Bhagwan's Cash Store – an eclectic mix of clothing, shoes, school uniforms, African beads, Indian prayer goods, planting seeds and the odd dagga pipe that was sold under the counter. I recall migrant *AmaMpondo* (African ethnic group) sugar cane workers from the Bantustan, Transkei (now the Eastern Cape) being transported from their Tongaat Hulett hostels on pay day to Tongaat to shop during the month end. Some had cash and some had cheques. The retail stores offered to cash these cheques (the banks would only do so after a seven-day clearance period) provided that goods were purchased from their stores only. Usually and because they provided the transport to the village/CBD, these migrant workers were either bullied to purchase or charged ridiculous rates for basic goods when they needed to cash in their cheques. My job as an eight-year-old was to stand outside the store, and shout out, "*Ngena mama"*, (come inside mother) to all African passers-by.

Ten years on, my brother Paresh or, as I affectionately call him, *Bhaiya* (brother), transformed Dad's business into a thriving high-end boutique store catering for the new aspirant African and Indian residents of the town. The shop was renamed Bhagwan's Outfitters. The brands he stocked included Crockett and Jones, Lady Jarmin, Sabagos and Pierre Cardin while still maintaining a small section of planting seeds. The business had a lay-by and a six-month account system. *Bhaiya* perfected his *isiZulu* and was at pains to ensure he spoke it fluently, wooing the residents of the African township, Hambanathi. Customers were predominantly teachers, nurses and administrative staff from the textile factories and Tongaat Hulett offices. Our family prospered and the business managed to pay for the costs of expensive Hindu weddings and overseas holidays, which is an accomplishment for a town like Tongaat.

Twenty-one years later and 22 years since our new democracy, the shop is so far removed from its eclectic concoction. Seeds, seedlings, and low-end men's clothing sparsely populate the store. I would be surprised if Dad made a R100 business on the Thursday in that week I was with him.

Walking through the main street of Tongaat, Dad warned me to be vigilant with money and my mobile as muggings were a huge problem. As I headed north, I discovered that Tongaat was in essence a flea market. The Singhs, who own the property and businesses next to Dad's shop, now operate outside the sheltered structure of their shops, selling goods on tables and competing with the informal traders. From children's cotton panties, face cloths, pirated Bollywood DVDs, illegal alcohol, mango pickle and Rosa tomatoes – it is all traded here. I could have made a few rudimentary yet interesting purchases.

In order to boost the economy of Tongaat, the eThekwini municipality built informal trading shelters for previously disadvantaged vendors. These shelters are situated just a few meters from the entrance of the established businesses and competition has become fierce, with established businesses losing their frontage, resulting in having to display their goods on tables and under umbrellas alongside the informal traders. Pavement trade has taken over the regular shop trade in the town.

As I sauntered along, I realised that 34 years later, the town has changed with no *AmaMpondo* migrant workers visiting at month end. The proliferation of Chinese and Nigerian owned stores was evident with cheap knick-knacks hanging outside the stores and them now calling out "*Ngena mama*".

The Tongaat Fresh Produce Market – a principal establishment in the town – still exists in its Cape Baroque-style building with predominantly Indian stall owners selling the same thing at varying discounted prices. You could purchase fresh vegetables, cackling chickens, ground ginger and garlic paste, chilli powder, traditional African *muthi* (medicine) and grass brooms. As I walked through the market recognising the faces from my high school days, a feeling of nostalgia enveloped my senses. I recognised these faces as being farmer's daughters from Emona and Isnembe with huge red *bindis* selling the produce from their farms. Despite being familiar with the market place, I was clearly a fish out of water. My Jo'burg swagger, notebook

in hand, and slightly haughty demeanour caught the eyes of many stall owners. I was still Amboo's daughter, and in that moment still the privileged Gujerati shopkeeper's daughter.

I left the market at the rearmost end and found myself in the refurbished taxi rank. Goolam's Takeaway, the place to buy the best masala steak roll and slap chips was no longer there. In its place was the new heart of the town – the revamped transport hub. The transport hub of Tongaat had a facelift with more space given to taxis, parking bays and the addition of a thoroughfare leading away from the main street adjoining the back end of the town. Tongaat's railway station also resides in this vicinity.

Today the middle class Indian and African families from Tongaat, Hambanathi and outlying farming communities that have access to a disposable income and their own vehicles have found the lure of the nearby malls of Ballito, Umdloti and Umhlanga more appealing. Having spent time observing the town, and dinner chats with Dad, I now understand the severity of the impact these new upmarket developments have had in Tongaat. Businesses have closed, residents have moved to affluent, gated suburbs, and a brain drain with the educated moving to other provincial areas in which affirmative action still ranks an Indian as previously disadvantaged.

Those who are set to live out their days in Tongaat are feeling the economic stress and manifest their resentment in various forms. When I asked, "How's business *Kaka* (uncle)?" to one of locals, his response was, "NP (National Party) days were good. These days the Africans have too much money and the ANC (African National Congress) makes them believe they own everything." *Kaka* was comfortable sharing his disdain with me since he knew me. His anger toward the ANC was explicit, and so was his racism.

In his book *Melancholia of Freedom*, Danish anthropologist Thomas Hansen details the mistrust between the African and Indian communities in the Indian township of Chatsworth in KwaZulu-Natal. The damage to the relationship is so deep that in the first democratic elections, 64% of the votes in Chatsworth were for the National Party. *Kaka* obviously shares the very same sentiment.

The downturn in business has affected Dad more than he admits. He has deteriorated significantly over the past ten years. During his pension years (Dad is 83 years old) he has

become extremely frugal with the shop business having subsided. Everything is expensive for him, and everything can wait until he has more money. Property owners don't get a government pension, so my parents who are married in the community of property arrangement jointly own the property that the shop resides on and are dependent on their small returns from their retirement annuity and meagre income from the shop. "I have no regrets about my life. Things change and we need to change. The town has changed and we need to find a new way of doing things," he said.

Whilst working my way back to the Main Street, I was surprised by the change of the frontage of the old Tongaat Town Board administrative building. During the NP days, small towns were run by a town board that managed its own municipal services. It constituted the town clerk, administrators, members of the community and the Tongaat Hulett Group. The Town Board offices were situated on the Main Street of the town in a multiple story Cape Baroque style building, parquet floors and cottage pane windows.

The Town Board building was the epicentre in Tongaat with its manicured lawns and fountain. I recall sepia-tinged photographs of *Baa* in a sari lounging on the lawns, images of children cycling and others playing in the water fountain. Today the scene is tragically unambiguous. There is no lush, green foliage. Instead it is littered with concrete park benches.

The building is still the municipal administrative hub of Tongaat and has been renamed *Sizakala* (profit) Centre. Since 1994, local town boards have been merged into the eThekwini municipality, with Ward Councillors sitting once a week in Tongaat and the rest of their time in Durban, 30 km away from the town.

Government's redemption plan:

Tongaat is one of eight economic zones in the eThekwini municipality falling within the northern area that is bound by the Umgeni River in the south, the Tongaat River in the north and the rural tribal area of Ndwedwe in the west. eThekwini is South Africa's third largest metropolis with a land area that is much larger than other South African cities. It is also the leading tourism destination in South Africa due to its warm climate and busy port. Geographically Tongaat is surrounded by the following areas: Ballito and Stanger in the north, Pietermaritzburg in the west, Durban in the south and the Indian Ocean in the east. Tongaat

is located in one of the highest growth potential areas in KwaZulu-Natal as it is found on the Durban and Richards Bay corridor development and is part of the sugar belt coastal estate developments. This strategic location coupled with its proximity to the Dube Trade Port/King Shaka International Airport (DTP) which opened six years ago, means that Tongaat is supposed to hold exceptional growth and development potential.

The DTP development, situated 6km from Tongaat, is meant to provide many job opportunities and in an ideal world is meant to be a considerable economic boost to the greater Tongaat area. The transport hub in Tongaat adds to the town being an access point for surrounding rural communities.

The approach towards local economic development in greater Tongaat since apartheid has been *ad hoc* and fragmented. A Tongaat Local Economic Development (LED) Strategy was commissioned in 2008, citing the development of the DTP as a growth stimulator for the area. Eight years later the plan is still in its infancy.

The LED states that *"The most important economic resources in the town of Tongaat are its people; the road and rail transport facilities; the surrounding land uses that includes the agriculture, industrial, commercial and tourism related activities; the existing infrastructure and the opportunity of relocating the international airport to La Mercy. Tongaat also has the potential to develop into a town that could be developed into a significant transport, industrial and residential hub, responding proactively to the airport and industrial development zone initiatives that will be taking place."* Eight years on from the LED strategy, and six years on from the DTP, the town is yet to live out any of these growth areas.

Economic growth of the area has not been in line with the increasing population growth of Tongaat and the surrounding areas. The area still faces a number of service backlogs and challenges including the increasing levels of unemployment, poverty and skills shortage. Therefore, with the above economic constraints, a highly localised community and no strategic economic development plan the town is running the risk of stagnating.

The neighbouring towns of Ballito, Umdloti and Umhlanga, are part of the burgeoning KwaZulu-Natal North Coast. These towns have seen substantive economic growth over the past six years and are becoming preferred destinations for families migrating from the

traditional suburbs of Durban and for those wanting to purchase a holiday home in one of the area's most sought after luxury estates. Whilst Umhlanga was the playground for the wealthy in KwaZulu-Natal, Ballito has taken the lead and has become a haven for the rich holiday makers from Johannesburg.

Developments in Tongaat, on the other hand, include a few townhouse complexes, an incomplete mall and very little economic influences in the surrounding African townships. Driving through the town is like driving through a time warp. The central town consists of one main street, a transport hub behind the main street, small-scale manufacturing industries and suburbs surrounding the town.

The eThekwini municipality's North Local Council identified Tongaat as a key centre. Its Integrated Development Plan recommended that a Tongaat Central Business (CBD) District Urban Design Framework be developed which was done in 2000. The aim of this plan was to understand the development issues impacting and affecting the Tongaat CBD and to develop an urban design framework with an implementation plan.

Steve Angelos, programme planner, responsible for the monitoring and co-ordination of operational and capital projects implemented within the South Durban Basin (SDB) in the city of eThekwini, was at that time the project manager tasked to implement the Tongaat Urban Design Framework of 2000. "With the amalgamation of Durban into one municipality, Tongaat got absorbed into this demarcation. As a result of that arrangement, urban programmes for the main towns such as Umhlanga, Tongaat, Amanzimtoti, Verulam and Pinetown were developed. There must have been a realisation that these towns will go into a slump if nothing is done to revitalise them," said Angelos. "This is not unique to Tongaat, it happened in Umhlanga as well. But also note that this is an international urban problem, the degradation of towns, as people start moving out and inner city offices start relocating. This is a common urban problem."

Angelos' responsibility was to take forward the implementation plans. "The Tongaat plan was aimed at revitalising the town. It proposed how the streets, public parks, sidewalks and informal trading should work, and suggested new road connections within the town centre to improve circulation. It also looked at re-zoning of properties and how to deal with urban landscaping and designing.

“By the time I got involved in Tongaat, much had been done. Despite it having looked like the town bought into the plans, the public participation was not done thoroughly and there was resentment from the community. There was not enough space for people to park and the town had lost its ambience. Trader shelters were put up, and visually it looked terrible. It seems as though things were done with the right intention, but it did not have the same effect.”

Angelos indicates that there was a broader understanding at that time that it could not just be an urban upgrade, “It soon became clear that something had to be done to revitalise the area.

In 2008 a Local Economic Development plan was done for Tongaat. Its vision statement: “*By 2010 and beyond the Greater Tongaat will be a preferred investment destination with superior and continuing quality service delivery; thereby providing sustainable employment and addressing social ill for the majority of the people.”* Seven years later, I wondered if Tongaat came close to that vision.

“The LED strategy came up with some programmes. The main aspect was to connect Tongaat with the Dube Trade Port and the development of a textile hub,” said Angelos.

“However the biggest challenge was the day-to-day urban management of operations, cleaning, sweeping and fixing. We tried to create an urban management forum in Tongaat, and did walk-abouts with the business owners, but without real authority and budgets this forum would have no say.”

Angelos cited the example of Umhlanga being a success story. “The business owners rallied together and agreed to pay a percentage more in rates that would go into a kitty to assist with extra security, cleaning and management. This would add to the services the city was doing. These businesses took control, and the turn-around resulted in a reinvestment in the area.”

It was like listening to the tale of two South African cities. One town being African and poor and the other being rich and white. Angelos could sense my irritation. “Why didn’t this happen in Tongaat, you ask? It could be different socio-economic conditions. Even though the

municipality upgraded the streets and put in urban décor, the renewal happened only from one end. The private sector in Tongaat did not complement the changes."

After being probed further, Angelos indicated that a reason for the lack of private sector input was that the residents of Tongaat placed the responsibility of the town in the hands of its democratically elected municipality. "People did not take things into their own hands. If the property owners came to the party, then things would be different. The small towns have lost their identity. They used to have their own boards where the town clerk was held accountable. The centralised model has taken that away."

Angelos concluded that even though the best intentions were at play, working with the town folk was no joke. "We tried to organise a Tongaat Development Forum including them in all the decision making processes, but there are some really interesting characters in Tongaat that made it very hard to get anything done. People in Tongaat need to reinvent themselves. The towns need to learn to adapt to a new clientele in order to save themselves."

Some interesting characters:

It was easier to get through to Steve Angelos, a senior government official, than to reach the BIG interesting characters in Tongaat. Some responded but the majority ignored my repeated messages to meet. Names that were given to me by my dad for me to speak to were Professor Michael Abrahams, former Ward Councillor and political party hopper; Siva Naidoo, activist and ANC stalwart; Logie Naidoo, former Deputy Mayor of eThekwini and ANC stalwart; Jeeva Pillay, Chairperson of the Tongaat Civic Association; Harold Maistry, former President of The Tongaat Child Welfare; Rajendra Desai, renowned Tongaat businessman and Dolly Munniyen, current DA Ward Councillor for Tongaat.

After many attempts, Jeeva Pillay and I finally communicated via text message. He invited me to attend the Tongaat Civic Association monthly meeting which is held on the first Tuesday of every month at the Tongaat Central Library. The committee was made up of representatives from every region in Tongaat with Pillay as chairperson. One of their core mandates is to solve issues where there is a lack of delivery from the municipality. They act as the voice of the people to the ward councillors who need to relay the message back to the local legislature.

As I ran into the library drenched from the rain, I sense they were anticipating my arrival. There was heavy silence, with all eyes on me as I tried to dry myself. The room was filled with predominantly middle-aged Indian men, one White man and two Indian women. Pillay sat at the trestle table at the helm of the room, and others were on chairs scattered around him. Middle-aged and slightly pot-bellied with greying hair tied up in a pony tail, he commanded respect from this audience. Pillay knew how municipalities operated, the ambiguous political landscape, the current gossip, the gossip from the past, who was sleeping with whom and Tongaat's history. In the two hours I spent with them, I realised the meeting could have easily gone on for four hours if Pillay was allowed time to talk.

"Tongaat was at one time a busy industrial hub with David Whiteheads and Company, the leading textile firm which was owned by Tongaat Hulett being the main employment driver. Other textile companies such as Celrose and Edgon also contributed hugely to the employment in the town. When David Whiteheads closed down because of competition from the Chinese markets, the other textile companies followed creating unprecedented unemployment in the town. Although this happened in the early 2000s, the ripple effect still continues," said Pillay.

"eThekwini's LED plan is only about housing, housing, housing and nothing about getting industry or finding the right type of investors. The problem with housing is that it needs jobs for those people who have now been housed. The apartheid government built Umhlanga by offering incentives to business owners. They charged them no rates for many years in order to get the business and tourism sector going. Models such as those needs to be considered."

In full Indian colloquial repartee he added, "With the previous bloody government, the laws were rubbish but the administration and operations were perfect. This government has amazing laws but rubbish administration."

Despite the apartheid legacy, the Tongaat Hulett Group seems to be everyone's favourite grandfather in Tongaat. Pillay complimented the company, saying that they have the right recipe of bringing light and heavy industry to the surrounding area. "Government works in reverse. They bring the people in first and then look at the employment later."

With respect to the decline in business activity in the CBD, Pillay once again was very loud and honest. “I don’t feel sorry for the business people. For years we have been in consultation with them. Plans for urban renewal were drawn up by eThekwini. They have not risen to the challenge. Tongaat businessmen don’t want to look further. They want it all to stay the same. With globalisation, the reality is that you can’t stop change. The reality is that if they don’t change, in the next 20 years they will be dead. They need to understand that the dynamics have changed in the way cities operate these days.”

Pillay grimly stated that the current Deputy Mayor of eThekwini, Fawzia Peer, confidentially told him that Tongaat and Verulam were dumped onto them. These two towns are step-children; hence there is a lack of attention.

In a discussion on Africa entrepreneurs in Tongaat, former Ward Councillor, Professor Michael Abrahams, added, “There are no African businesses in Tongaat. You would only find small-scale businesses running out of makeshift spaces. Africans find it very hard to enter the mainstream economy in Indian towns. Therefore eThekwini instituted the shelters for the informal traders to allow them to enter the economy.” Pillay chided back, “But the current government is stupid and does not do their research properly. How do you put an informal trader in front of the business owners shop frontage? Each one is competing with the other. The solution is to have a situation where you don’t undermine each other.”

The Tongaat Civic Association then moved onto their regular agenda items having dealt with me. Housing and illegal electrical connections were hot topics. As the discussion proceeded in walked Dolly Munniyen, the current Ward Councillor for Tongaat.

She won 48% of the votes during the 2016 local government elections and is a member of the Democratic Alliance (DA). Since 1994 Tongaat has been an ANC stronghold, having given former President Nelson Mandela the Freedom of Tongaat award in 1989 before he was released from prison. He only received the award in person from the Tongaat Civic Association in 1994. For the DA to have won an ANC stronghold town after 22 years was telling of the irregular political state of affairs.

Munniyen was not what I expected. If Pillay spoke with a deep colloquial Indian slang and accent, Munniyen was in a completely different league standing heads above him. I arranged to meet her the next day.

Numbers, colours and contrasts:

According to Statistics South Africa 2011 Census, of the five largest cities in South Africa (Johannesburg, Tshwane, Cape Town, Nelson Mandela Bay and eThekwini), eThekwini (Tongaat is based in this municipality) is the second most residentially segregated city in the South Africa. The census also says that the total population of Tongaat is in the range of 43 000. Given the history of Tongaat, it is not surprising that Indians are the dominant race group, representing 51% of the total population. The African population follows at 46%. The southern precinct houses the highest population of Indians. The highest number of African people is found in the northern precinct which consists mainly of low-income housing settlements. The majority of the White population are to be found in Tongaat Beach and the majority of the Coloured population is to be found in Tongaat South. Coloureds and Whites only represent 0.6% and 1.9% of the total Tongaat population respectively. The gender profile of Tongaat reflects those of South Africa and KZN in general, with a higher percentage of females. In terms of education levels, almost 27% of people have Grade 12, followed by 17.3 % with Grade 10 and 11.

The Statistics South Africa report, Poverty Trends in SA 2006 – 2011, indicates that the poverty gap differed significantly between the population groups in the years 2006 to 2011. In 2006, Black Africans had a poverty gap of 31, 6%, which was almost twice as large as the gap for Coloureds (17, 0%) and significantly larger than that for Indians/Asians (3, 3%) or Whites (0, 2%). While the poverty gap for Black Africans had decreased to 22, 6% by 2011, it was still more than twice as large as for any other group. With the Indian population the level decreased to 1, 1% in 2011. This is still 22 times less severe than the Black African group. The severity of poverty was similarly more than twice as large for Black Africans than for other groups at each point in time. In addition, the severity increased from 2006 (18, 3) to 2009 (20, 1) before it fell to 13, 1 in 2011.

In Black and Brown:

I recall that I actually never entered the municipality offices whilst I lived in Tongaat. There was no need to as only the adults entered the building to deal with queries on their bills. It was easy enough. As I signed in, I wondered about the lack of grandeur. I expected a formal reception area with a government administrator guarding the diaries of officials, shiny, polished parquet floors, and pictures of the Mayor on the wall. Everything was simply mediocre.

Munniyen was on the second floor, office 61. Her receptionist, Bher Pillay, was between fielding calls and attending to members of the community who were waiting for her. Many were simply looking for her to sign off on proof of residence. An older Indian woman was in tears. Her 38-year-old single daughter had recently passed away after a heart attack and left behind three grandchildren for her to support. Munniyen needed to help her apply for the social grant as she was a pensioner and illiterate.

Munniyen's English is quintessentially Tongaat: "oi yos, an all, Hinglish, came way" with quick sentences and very simple adjectives. She has a restless, tensile, energy about her. Her short, wavy thick black hair curls at the back with wisps of straight hair folded over in the front. With hard features and workman's hands, Munniyen has not had an easy life. She worked at Celrose, the textile factory, and prior to them closing down, she took a retrenchment package. Since then she has been involved in various forms of community service assisting with issues of failing schools, crime, racism and poverty.

As she dealt with the crisis in her office, Bher Pillay, who knew I was Paresh's sister (the town was already abuzz with my arrival) felt comfortable chatting to me with complete honesty. He also worked for the previous Ward Councillor and came across as being a tad bit patronising of his current manager. He warned me, "Don't speak high English to her. She won't understand you. You need to come down to her level of English."

Instead of just talking about the town, Munniyen decided to show me parts of Tongaat that I never knew existed. I jumped into Munniyen's car, and was taken on a road trip. Rows and rows of low-cost standalone housing and apartment buildings that were built over 40 years ago for the Tongaat Hulett Group and David Whitehead workers spanned the horizon as we

drove towards the suburbs of Buffelsdale, Belvedere and Belgate. Memories of visiting Dad's shop staff at these apartment blocks flooded in. One such complex, Chelmsford Heights, was opposite my parent's double-storey, four-bedroom and three-bathroom house. Chelmsford Heights had four levels with about six flats per level, each having one bedroom, one bathroom, a lounge and kitchen. I recall having two friends who lived in these flats, but was never allowed to hang out with them at their homes. The Tongaat middle-income community associated the apartment blocks with overcrowding, drug abuse, child abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence and other innumerable social problems. Seeing it through my adult eyes, I realise that these problems emanated from the apartheid system of governance. Poor infrastructure, lack of recreational facilities unemployment and poor service delivery leads to a dehumanised community.

As we drove up past Buffelsdale towards Belvedere, Munniyen informed me that this is her suburb. "I live with my constituents, and I pray at the temple in the area. I am with my people, and not someone who is living in a posh suburb."

Loud *chutney (*indigenous local Indian music found in South Africa and Caribbean Island sugar producing countries) music, Golf GTIs, the smell of curry and interspersed with each other was Buckingham Palace, the biggest block of low-cost apartment buildings in Belvedere. On the other side of the Palace was Umbayi, our final destination. The road turned to gravel as we went downhill into this township. It had to be navigated very slowly as the road into the township was a single lane dotted with loose illegal electrical cables.

There were no traditional brick and mortar houses here alongside the main Umbayi gravel road. The houses: some had tin roofs, others had plastic sheeting. Some had a door, while others had a piece of corrugated metal which served as a door. Some had shattered windows, others had no windows at all. Everyone had one room. No one had a toilet and running water and everyone had illegal electrical connections stolen from the transformers near Buckingham Palace.

Everyone used the communal toilets that had no doors. Everyone received water from the communal taps. Everyone was poor.

The people: African and Indian alongside each other. Apartheid did not exist here. Poverty, the unifier.

Umbayi was originally called Rajkumars. The Rajkumar family owned the property and sub-let to the informal settlers. They also ran the local tavern. Recently the landowner sold off parts of his property for the low cost housing development to the eThekwini municipality.

As I took in my surroundings, Munniyen was slowly surrounded by members of the community. A resident quietly asked to talk to her confidentially. She listened, shook her head, and then held his hands, attempting to calm him down. I saw a creased brow, red face and then sadness all moulded into one as he nodded at her comments and walked away. Munniyen seemed to understand their language of poverty. She comforted and assured residents that she had their back. “All of them voted me in,” she said.

Munniyen is particularly proud of the make-shift crèche in the vicinity. “Come see *Isibonani* and then only will you understand what it means to live in this community.” The crèche is run out of a three-metre by three-metre shack built from corrugated sheeting. Its two staff members manage almost 50 children from new-born to five-year-olds. “Most of these mums are domestic workers. Although the fee is R150 a month, many can’t afford it. I supplement the costs of running the crèche when I can,” said Munniyen.

“The people of Umbayi have been living here since before democracy. It is heart breaking to see this continue year after year. Only now something is happening. There are 1 200 families in Umbayi but government is only providing 807 housing. When the numbers were counted during the planning phase, we had 807 households. The houses will be built in phases and people will be relocated whilst the construction takes place.” Munniyen estimated that it will be complete in two years.

We drove further down the gravel road to the community centre. I smelled before I saw the plundered toilets. They had no doors or running water and it was an open cesspool of diseases. The toilets were filled with flies, maggots and rubbish and children were playing nearby against a backdrop of rolling sugar cane hills, “There have been two babies abandoned in these toilets and many women have been raped here. How is it that we allow our country to deteriorate to such a low level?” she questioned.

I know extreme poverty exists, I know that it exists within the South African community, I've seen poor Indians in India, but it was my first time to see poor Indians in South Africa. Was I really raised to be a spoilt princess not knowing my neighbours?

As we drove out of Umbayi Munniyen received a message from her office asking her to make a "house call" into the Emona farming district which was on the other side of Tongaat, up the hill from Hambanathi. A complaint was lodged about a stolen electrical transformer. "Every day is like this, with people complaining about one thing or the other. And they call me, because they know I won't ignore their request. If I cannot make it, then I send my team," she said.

Emona was once a sugar cane farming district but these days has small-scale industrial activities. "Many farmers in the area have huge pieces of land in which they practise small-scale farming or convert their land to run an industrial business. Some farmers' land has been encroached by informal settlers who burn down the cane to make way for land to live on. I think they have given up trying to get rid of these individuals as they fear for their lives."

We approached a farm road where there was a gathering of farmers and a vehicle from eThekwini's electrical department. The wooden pole that held the transformer had been hacked off at the base. The transformer, which supports 2 000 consumers in the area, had been stolen. "This is the third transformer the municipality had to replace in the past month at a cost of R46 000,' said an irritated electrician. Munniyen whispered to me, "Before the elections, people from Gwala's farm (an informal settlement in Emona) were promised electricity. One hundred applied and only 40 received. When people don't get their electricity, they resort to stealing. Previous councillors have told them that if they don't receive electricity from government, they must just steal it."

Seeing that it was getting fixed, there was nothing more she could do, but take this back to the KwaZulu-Natal legislature and follow up on the progress of electrifying informal settlements.

It's clear that Munniyen with her lack of "high English" warmed my heart with her generosity of spirit. She left an indelible dent in my heart. As we parted ways, she said, "Love you Reshma. Remember Dolly delivers." I backed away quickly; tears welled fiercely in my eyes.

It takes a village....

Thinking it's the same old, same old, I went to the Tongaat Child Welfare (TCW) offices that I volunteered at as a young journalist. Wrong building, incorrect street, ill-informed me. Their new premises are now at the old Tesco Club – which was the old drinking hole for the Tongaat Hulett Group staff members. A piece on Tongaat won't be complete without mentioning that the TCW is the oldest organisation in the town.

Established in 1939, as the welfare arm of the Tongaat National Indian Congress, the TCW was nurtured by community activists and was the only protagonist that stood up to the socio economic iniquities of the apartheid system. Being a volunteer at the Tongaat Child Welfare was cool. You got to mix with struggle icons, participated in anti-apartheid demonstrations, and gained the title "activist". I voluntarily worked on their annual report design and layout for two years. These days the TCW is plodding along doing what it did 73 years ago. I have embarrassing memories of dancing on stage at the TCW annual Tongaat Charity Faire. Let's hope my next interviewee does not remember.

Harold Maistry, the former President and current Chair of the Finance Committee, was late. His day job is as a Human Resources Manager at eThekwini Municipality so I gather he does have other work to do. When Maistry arrived, we began with the usual Indian banter of where you went to school, what year did you matriculate, who is your family, where do you live, and so on. Once the connection was established, I did not centre the interview on social welfare in Tongaat as that would be an entire new story in itself. The focus was on the role of millennials rising to the call of community service.

"From 1990 to 2005 Tongaat had leaders of integrity. We've seen strong political movement, good credible leadership and there was clear distinction between party and state. It was a lovely trajectory and councillors acted in the interest of the community. Our civic movement laid the basis for good political leadership in the community once the ANC came into power," he said.

"These days we've seen a fall of activism. The sense of community spirit is lacking. We try very hard to get the youth involved but it's a struggle. These millennials are not taking up the call

and it traverses across all organisations. The lack in activism and volunteerism is one of the pitfalls of democracy."

I asked about the role of the schools in raising community volunteerism, and that too was highlighted with an adverse remark. "Schools are a very complex thing. Gone are the days when teaching was a passion. It is the current culture of the educators that is the problem. I suspect it's a generational thing. Complacency is the new order."

Maistry indicated that a study was done on the quality of education in South African schools during the apartheid era. "The House of Delegates (HoD) which was responsible for the Indian constituency had the best administered education from all the race groups. We have not capitalised on that good system, we have short-changed our children and dropped the standards in pursuant of a quantitative as opposed to a qualitative measurement.

"The social issues also compound the situation further, hence the millennials care less. Parental involvement is lacking. When you send your child to school the child becomes someone else's problem. We have developed a homework centre with computers and internet facility for the disadvantaged children. We want to ensure that poverty is not a reason for a lack of success. Poverty cannot be a reason to say that you can't help your child, there are avenues open. Perhaps the children that come to the centre will take up the call."

He concluded by adding that because life has become faster and the demands greater, people who do have the calling would rather do an EFT transfer.

After a sobering chat with Maistry, the next journey was to discover another part of undiscovered Tongaat. I had an idea of where Hambanathi was. Drive through the CBD, and up Gandhi's Hill, turn left, heading towards the Indian suburb Vanrova Gardens and then take a right into Hambanathi. Feelings of remorse overcame me as I typed Nkosibomvu Secondary School into Google maps. Disappointed in myself, disappointed that I was complacent as a young adult, disappointed at how naive I was, disappointed that it took 43 years to enter Hambanathi. Jonny Steinberg, in his book *Midlands*, is very honest about his experience as he immersed himself into the African community. He revealed the dichotomy he faced being White. Going into Hambanathi being so naive also forced me to deal with my *Indianness* whilst trying to understand the community that lived adjacent to the town.

The school looked like any other government school. All the main buildings in a dark brown brick façade, screed grey floors, red polish on the outside veranda of the administrative block, old wooden benches and the smell of chalk and crayons. The standard prefab classrooms were on the periphery allowing for more teaching space. It was after three on a miserably wet day, and I waited for Principal Henry Cebekhulu's arrival on the wooden bench outside his office.

Cebekhulu's office was simple and traditional. Big wooden desk strewn with documents in brown files, book shelves, a glass display cabinet falling over with trophies from the inside and on top, a massive notice board behind his desk with certificates and notices from the Department of Basic Education, a stand-up fan, pictures of his daughter and no computer. There was no mistaking that he also looked like a typical school principal with glasses that sat on the brim of his nose, his striped black and white jersey, pink shirt and tartan tie. There was something boisterous, yet stern about him...I couldn't quite understand what. Perhaps that is what a school principal is meant to be like.

Cebekhulu is as pukka a "Tongaatian" as they come. Aside from being born in Tongaat, he has been principal at Nkosibomvu since 1996. "It was opened in 1989 by the Tongaat Hulett Group. They donated the land to the Department of Education and Training. We have just under 2 000 children at this school presently and for the past 15 years our matric pass rate has averaged 90%."

Cebekhulu has witnessed first-hand the jubilant rise of the morale in the community after apartheid's demise to the steady deterioration in recent years, "Economics never mattered previously when it came to education. A child from a poor background in the school could easily perform better than a rich child. But these days this is not the case. A child from a poor background is performing dismally. There is a lack of support from the family, no role models and no value system. I recall being forced to attend church so that we mix with and learn from those that have the same value system as my family," he said.

"These days very few poor homes are self-motivated. I think some people have washed their hands off looking for work because there is a dependency on social grants. This has made people less creative on how money is managed. Nkosibomvu draws 20% of our learners from

homes where parents are semi-skilled. I have memories of my grandmother saving from her pension to put me through school. Education was valued and cherished back in the day."

He added that parent involvement in the school is minimal due to the lack of education and high unemployment. He said he believes that some parents in Hambanathi have lost the moral high ground.

"Too many of the learners only realise after matric that there was the need to perform better. We push, and push, yet in many instances it's futile. Our teachers are doing what they can, given the situation we have.

"Unfortunately Tongaat is a depressed economic area. Poverty in Tongaat is across the two races. Those that can vaguely afford to, send their children to the private schools or to Seatides Combined School, the 'lily white' school that attracts children from privileged backgrounds. They don't have more than 60 students in matric," he added.

Some of the children from Hambanathi attend the previously Indian schools in Tongaat, but then return to Nkosibomvu for their high school. "Indian teachers have this reluctance to understand African culture and the children use this against them. I attribute that to being ignorant and arrogant. They are not willing to learn themselves." He added that a big problem he also faces is that many of the previously Indian schools don't offer *isiZulu* as a second language. "How can these schools still teach Afrikaans in a town that has so many *isiZulu* speaking families?"

The wealth and class divide is huge. "La Mercy Primary school closed down because more and more children from informal settlements began attending the school, and the Indian parents started moving their children to the cities. The teachers at these schools don't encourage integration."

My alma mater, Tongaat Secondary School, which was originally called Tongaat State Aided Indian High School, was a top achieving school in KwaZulu-Natal, showing off with exemplary matric results each year. Memories of the principal, Mr Rama, come flooding back, even those of when I was called into his office and whacked on the palm with a cane stick. I was proud to hear from Cebekhulu that Tongaat Secondary was a pioneering school as it was the first in

the area to admit African children in 1992. However, he said that there had been an exodus of teachers from Tongaat Secondary. “They were all poached to other schools.”

Cebekhulu thereafter startled me with his comment: “Hambanathi benefited from apartheid as it was under the white administration because of the Tongaat Hulett Group involvement. We never had shortages of books under apartheid. Not like now. The government made sure those areas under their administration were looked after. Those who lived and worked for the sugar giant were safe, because they assisted in running the backbone of the sugar industry. Tongaat Hulett used to provide food parcels to its workers who were employed on the farms, hospitals and clinics. They fed and stabilised the area. There was little political activity those days because the workers who lived here received everything from Tongaat Hulett. The area was protected during apartheid.”

As we concluded our discussion, the rain was pelting down. It is after five and Dad was trying to get hold of me. He was worried that I was out this late in Hambanathi. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

The new sugar barons:

We headed out to the northern section of the town, past the Tongaat Sugar Mill, the Cape Baroque style building that used to house the upmarket Spar that was meant for the white staff members of Tongaat Hulett Group, the IFP (Inkatha Freedom Party) stronghold township Magwaveni on the right, and up towards Fairbreeze. We turned left at the Fairbreeze Hotel and the rolling green carpeted hills of Tongaat’s Isnembe farming district lay outstretched ahead of us. I had thoughts of Alan Paton and his rolling hills of Ixopo. The landscape felt primeval, ancient and pure. Everything that spells human feels synthetic. What does this landscape do to one’s soul? I wondered what freedom and democracy feels like amongst these rolling hills. Was this ever accomplished?

Japhane Mbokazi sported a threadbare straw sun hat, mud-encased gumboots and a toothpick in his mouth. His small slanting eyes were almost Asian-like – years of toiling in the African sun had left their mark on his 72-year-old face. His demeanour was coarse yet undemanding, being the proud father of 12 children. Softly spoken, with a frozen smile, Mbokazi offered to take me on a tour of his sugar cane farm in Isnembe in his rickety blue

Toyota 4X4. Driving up the muddy dirt road, he was at pains apologising for the bad roads leading to his farm. It had been raining since I arrived in Tongaat after months of drought, and although he was grateful, Mbokazi hated the resulting surge of stagnant pools of water and tractors carrying sugar cane to the mills getting stuck in the deluge.

Like his father, he began his career in the railways, but always had the blood of his ancestors beckoning him to take on farming. Once he saved enough money, he bought a truck and began transporting cane for the Tongaat Hulett Mill and other small-scale farmers. Slowly his business grew and he began small-scale farming on tribal land.

We reached the top of the farm where the farmhouse and workers' quarters resided. As I jumped out of his bakkie, I was embraced by the cool pelts of sugar cane stalks, the smell of light drizzling rain and damp irrigation furrows. Mbokazi wanted to show me his thriving vegetable garden that he planted using the seeds from Dad's shop. I was not interested in his mealie and green bean plants, but in the view of the rolling green carpeted hills of sugar cane that he owns.

As I was sizing up his vast property, he suddenly said, "You look same like your father, Amboo. Short and small." My laughter infected him and he began talking animatedly about his farm, "80 hectares of land. That is what the Tongaat Hulett gave me in 1997 when I signed up as a medium-scale farmer in their Black Economic Empowerment deal. They asked for a deposit of R20 000 for the 80 hectares. The conditions were that I can only sell my cane at the price they give me, and I am not allowed to sell the farm in the next 20 years. I was granted a loan with Ithala Bank. "

Mbokazi very proudly stated that his R1, 2 million loan with the bank is paid up, and the land is now his. With the aim of expediting sugar cane supplies, positioning itself through these initiatives as the partner of choice and positively contributing to the communities that surround their cane growing operations, the Tongaat Hulett Cane and Rural Development Unit (CRDU) ensured that small- and medium-scale private and indigenous farmers received the support required for them to be sustainable into the future and included unlocking land for sugar cane development and grant funding from government.

“The Tongaat Hulett guides us on the type of crop, the variety we should use, and what types of fertilizers to use. They send in their own consultants to train us and even at times those consultants do the manual labour of spreading the fertilizers into the ground themselves. All of us who signed up with them felt as though they didn’t trust us. Now they still send extension offices to check the quality of the cane before we send it to the mill,” he said.

Mbokazi stated that not all the farmers who signed up with Tongaat Hulett have succeeded. As we departed he pointed to the unsuccessful neighbouring property. “You can see the massive trees and shrubbery growing on his farm over taking the sugar cane.” The deal with Tongaat Hulett is that these farmers can only sell their cane to the Tongaat Hulett sugar mill, “And we have to take the price they give. They say it is market related.

“I never thought that I would one day own land that the *Mhlungu* (White) owned. My sons are not interested in taking over the business. They just want the money and not the hard work. Whatever it is, I have lived my dream and will die a very happy man.”

The following day I dove myself back to Isnembe, appreciating once again the view of the expansive, heaving hilltops cascading in sugar cane. The road coiled into bends and curves with the odd general dealer peppering the wayside. Preathlall Lekha was waiting for me at Boti Brothers general dealers. Lekha is one the highly successful sugar cane farmers in Tongaat, and a descendant of a pioneering Indian sugar cane farming family arisen from indentured status.

Lekha’s family and my family, the Lakhas, go a long way. Many confuse the surname and some think we are one-and the-same family. Whilst in high school when the confusion arose I was always at pains to say that my family were not the farmers. We were the town mice family. The Lekhas were the country mice. Lekha’s children were in high school with me, and his son Ravendra and I completed matric together. He went on to become a doctor.

I recognised Lekha immediately, having seen him as child when he visited Dad’s seed section of the business. Back then he always looked rugged. Plain, dark-hued shirts, denims falling off the waistline, mud-streaked all-terrain boots, fingernails caked in soft earth and a continually rushed appearance. These days you can see the contrast in his appearance as signs of prosperity exude his presence. This intrigues me, and I want to hear his story.

“My grandfather Narayan Lekha bought land after his tenure as an indentured labourer came to an end in 1896. He arrived on a five-year contract and instead of renewing it or returning to India, he began working for a white farmer and saved up. He met my grandmother in South Africa during this time and they both resolved to make their lives work in this country.”

After a few years of saving, Lekha’s grandfather purchased land in La Mercy where the current Boys Town facility is located. “A few years later he sold the land as the soil quality was not good for farming. He moved to Isnembe, the northern section of Tongaat, leased land from a White farmer and began planting bananas. After some time the White man chased him off the property without any sort of compensation. The family was homeless.

“My father was then a young man and he took over as sons usually do in our culture. They started running a hawker business selling bananas. Eventually in 1950 my father purchased 25 acres of land, and then began purchasing more and tracts of land. In 1966 I joined my father on the farm.

“This area was and still is home to a thriving Indian community. My father together with other interested Indian families saw the need to build schools in the area. The first school built was Doornkloof Primary. Eventually we had five Indian schools that were State-aided schools. The government saw funding this as an important means of maintaining a constant labour supply. The community also built a Hindu temple and the Muslim community put up a mosque.”

Lekha’s property size began growing, but the entrepreneur in him had the foresight to lease 120 acres to grow sugar cane coupled with vegetables. He began supplying the Tongaat Sugar Mill with cane and his profits began multiplying.

“After I leased 120 acres in 1976 I purchased 400 acres of land from Illovo Sugar Mill. Buying land back in the apartheid days was tough as the then Department of Agriculture needed to sign off on the permit, which cost R 1 500.”

Lekha was growing his sugar cane empire and whenever he saw an opportunity, he purchased more and more land. “I did get land from Tongaat Hulett as well, but it was via the soured Black Economic Employment deals. Despite Tongaat Hulett giving these farmers land, they had to bear the cost of their machinery. Government stepped in and gave them a grant to supplement their costs. We call them ‘new born farmers’.”

Being the sugar baron he is, Lekha shops around for the best price for his sugarcane. He is not compelled to sell his cane to the Tongaat Sugar Mill.

These days, Lekha has also retreated into what his ancestors planted – bananas. With the entrepreneurship blood flowing through the veins of his sons they have encouraged him to also dabble in macadamia nuts, “This is a very expensive exercise because it’s only after five years that we reap the rewards. These nuts are purchased by the rich countries. Tropical climates are the best place to grow them. It’s about the future and we need to refocus.”

With the amount of land he has accumulated, Lekha saw it fit to divide it between his sons Priyesh and Ravendra equally. “It’s very common for Indian families to fight when the parents die, so I ensured that this does not happen in my family. Although the management is done together these days, legally it’s split between the brothers.”

The success I smelt in his character when I originally met him was spot on, as Lekha indicated that the entire family, including his sons, live in an upmarket coastal gated estate. Almost 100 years later, they have moved out of Isnembe. In the year 2017, the Lekha family own 2 500 acres of land. The colour of the sugar baron has changed.

And now, what happens?

The tragedy in a Tongaat of today that lives within a democratic constitution is that it thrived during days of adversity. The Indian community moulded their lives around the indentured labour force. They then adapted their lives to apartheid. Adversity propelled them to understand the fine lines between resistance and harmony. Ironically both forms of hardship pushed them to be more.

Today Tongaat with its freedoms has lulled itself into complacency. Perhaps it’s tired of having had to push for so many years, perhaps it’s decided that now it’s time to take a rest and leave its future in government’s hands, because for far too long the residents had to wield the defence swords. Whatever it may be, the town is failing itself. Unless redemption is found, more and more will run away like I did.

The fear for the town is that when the current crop of community leaders, dedicated teachers and committed business owners take a bow, there won’t be anyone applauding or taking the

stage. *Bhaiya* places hope in the Dube Trade Port and the envisaged developments planned by the Tongaat Hulett Group. There is a spark of hope in him that Tongaat will emerge out of the ashes.

Tongaat was definitely worth a return as an insider observing from the outside. The communities have changed in response to democracy coupled with the economic downturn. This I suspect is true for many towns in South Africa, where democracy has provided freedom, but not necessarily economic freedom.

There is this odd axiom that does its rounds with Johannesburg Indians: "Put a group of Indians in a room and somehow we make a connection either from knowing the family, a distant cousin, the high school you attended or the town you lived in." I've had many of these with Tongaat being the connector. Tongaat was where good things happened. The high schools were excellent, the volleyball team members had their provincial sporting colours, the community and political engagements invoked political change and businesses such as Bhagwan's Outfitters thrived. However those like myself who give thanks to the town for our success have not returned home to say thank you and contribute to its redemption. Perhaps that is where the change needs to begin.

Ends.

11 735 words

PART 2: METHOD DOCUMENT

Overview:

This journalism research project was motivated by my personal interest in the reasons behind not wanting to go back to return home to Tongaat, a small, not so remote, and conservative one-street town in KwaZulu-Natal. I left home at 21 years, only returning sporadically at the beckoning of my aging parents. My personal search began from a desire to understand my rationale for leaving home, the rationale for not returning, and the poignant questions as to whether the fear of returning actually helped me subconsciously become ambitious. My personal motivation gave rise to the research questions of class, caste, religion, the role apartheid played in shaping the community and the economics behind it all.

Aims:

The central aim of this research project was to revisit the social history and personally lived, first-hand experience of Tongaat. In particular, I was interested in examining the ways in which the Indian-South African community of Tongaat survived and negotiated the apartheid years, and the impact of the demise of apartheid on what was a close-knit enclave.

This research project describes, through long-form journalism, the intimate experiences of my childhood 'superiority' experiences being born into a so-called superior merchandise class and the effects it had on my relationships. It looks at the present day class and caste contexts coupled with the demise of apartheid and helps me shed light on my personal investigation to understand how the town, apartheid and its people influenced decisions in my life. Tongaat is typical of many other small-town Indian-South African communities that have been historically segmented into hierarchies of caste, class, culture, religion, race and ethnicity. One of the key underlying questions I ask is how and to what extent the Tongaat community has transformed during the post-apartheid decades. Has Tongaat managed to're-imagine' and reconfigure its identity? In answering these questions I aimed to use the chemistry of personal experience, memory and melancholia.

This narrative also unravels the voices, anxieties, melancholia and hopes of the older residents of the town, querying if and how racial and class segregation still affects and informs their daily lives, religion, morality, notions of race superiority/inferiority and class hierarchy. Have

these very notions also impacted on the socio-economic developments in the town and in what way?

Research Question:

The "Through a Saffron-Tinted Looking Glass" part of the title refers to my personal investigation done through the safety net of a lens. "Reminiscing, remembering and melancholia. The story of a small Indian South African town 22 years after apartheid" is an autobiographical account of my personal story of self. This narrative research project is a series of interconnecting descriptions, taken from my own social history, bringing in anthropology, sociology, apartheid and economics. The research project attempts to answer, "How has post-apartheid policy impacted on the socio economic development of a rural KZN town, Tongaat?"

Why Tongaat:

Tongaat was selected in 1846 by a government commission as one of a number of villages to be established via the Indian indentured labour system. Originally named Victoria, the town grew successful because of the cultivation of sugar cane. The initial settlers attempted the cultivation of cotton, arrowroot and coffee but the sugar plantations succeeded the most and the town became synonymous with this form of agriculture, asserting itself as a distinctive force in the cultural and political spheres of the region's social history. (Tongaat Hulett n.d.)

The growth of indentured labour gave rise to the establishment of an informal community that required a system of management and led to an experiment in social welfare to provide the housing, health, cultural and recreational needs of the diverse population. A form of local government was formalised as the Tongaat Town Board in 1944 and in partnership with the Natal Sugar Company provided housing and public facilities to its employees, with the Tongaat Town Board also undertaking a number of housing schemes after the Second World War. This partnership of local government and the sugar company resulted in the increase of service provision, public buildings and a number of housing projects that has shaped Tongaat into the town it is today.

Tongaat is situated on the KwaZulu-Natal North Coast, on the banks of the Tongaati River and about 30 km from Durban. It is one of the economic development nodes located in the

northern parts of eThekwini Municipality and covers the area for Ward 58, 61 and 62 which encompasses the whole town of Tongaat including the surrounding villages and areas like Hambanathi, Emona, Isnembe and Maidstone. Tongaat is part of the KwaZulu-Natal sugar cane belt and supports one of the largest sugar-producing districts in the world.

The Tongaat Hulett Group Limited is the predominant employer in Tongaat and is also the biggest land owner in KwaZulu-Natal. Over the years it has dabbled in many other industries such as bricks and textiles, enabling the creation of employment on the North Coast. The company is nowadays converting some of its agricultural land into development zones for either upmarket housing or economic developments. They have four business units, being Tongaat Hulett Sugar, Voermol Feeds, Tongaat Hulett Starch and Tongaat Hulett Developments.

David Whiteheads and Company, a textile company, was another key employment driver for a semi-skilled employment force. Tongaat soon became a hub for the textile industry resulting in factories such as Celrose and the Edgon opening their doors creating an employment boom in the town. In the late 80s and early 90s Tongaat was a thriving economic hub. (Municipality, Tongaat Local Economic Development Strategy 2008 2008)

Tongaat as the research project was initially selected to bring out a story of religious, caste and class disparities within the Indian community using my own history and marriage as an example. Although these stories are very well known within the community, the stark reality is that it still continues and would have made for an interesting article for those who don't know these stories. Having conducted preliminary research, I discovered that aside from culture, caste and class, the town stagnated politically, racially and economically.

In my report I questions how the town has evolved from the apartheid days to its present day. What influenced its changes and what influenced its lack of change? What policy interventions were introduced and did it have an effect on the lives of the residents of the town?

Nowadays some call it "toxic Tongaat" due to the degeneration of the town. Businesses that once thrived in the 80s and early 90s are now facing an economic slump and suburbs that once commanded high real estate prices have dropped significantly. Once a leading town in

the Indian community, it was noted for its good schools, the Tongaat beach, the sugar cane plantations, the annual *Kavady* Festival and some notable struggle icons. Since the demise of apartheid the town has witnessed its educated leaving for opportunities elsewhere, never returning unless it's a visit to the parents. Its current residents too don't frequent the business establishments as they are opting for the more modern facilities in nearby towns. Of course the voices that I have privileged access to come with bias, and this I will reflect honestly upon in the narrative. The voices that come from impartial sources were found using a simplistic journalism approach.

The approach to the story is an investigation of a town that had to re-imagine itself after apartheid. The story of a small town that constituted itself under apartheid and despite the demise of apartheid after 1994 still did not reconstitute or re-imagine itself. I've used my *'Indianness'* as a vehicle of getting more depth into the piece, as it is one definition of the story. And by *'Indianness'* I mean the link to it being exotic which leads to racial stereotyping. In South Africa, *'Indianness'* refers to the symbols of the culture such samoosas, biryani and curry, Indian dancing.

Family history:

My family history, its language and caste group is the backdrop to the narrative and unpacks how my interpretation of situations changed from being a teenager to an adult. It will also lay down my caste and language prejudices upfront.

My paternal and maternal ancestors arrived in South Africa as entrepreneurs with the advantage of influence and money. The language group and caste they came from also carried weight, providing societal privilege that an indentured labourer did not have. This is because they arrived with knowledge of South Africa (from cousins who had visited prior to them), had access to other family members who braved the journey before them and remained in South Africa, as well as had access to Mahatma Gandhi (who was from the same language group as them) should the need arose.

My paternal great-grandfather arrived in Durban with cousins from India. He saw a gap in the market, after witnessing many indentured labourers craving a taste of home. He aimed to bring a little bit of home to them with his culinary skills and opened an Indian confectionery

store. My grandfather was then brought from India with his mother so that the family could be together. As the business prospered, he purchased land on the main street of Tongaat.

Within the Indian Hindu community in South Africa, there are four main language groups, each having their own caste system. My family are from the Gujerati language group and the caste is called *Kumbhar* (clay pot maker). The indentured Indians came from either the Tamil, Telugu or Hindi speaking language groups. The Gujerati community arrived much later in South Africa giving them a superior notion of being more "Indian" and more "pure" than the others. They believe this elevates their status in the community. Back home in India, the case would have been very different.

The narrative unpacks how these differences played itself out in the community, especially in my particular case of falling in love and later marrying Avanash Singh, who is from a different language and caste group.

A divided community:

Back in the apartheid days, the African and Indian communities only intermingled based on labour interactions. Domestic workers, gardeners, sugar cane labourers and the unskilled labour force were all African and lived in the areas of Hambanathi, Emona and Isnembe. Despite it being 22 years later, the narrative research project will question if the situation is still the same, with the communities only mingling based on labour interactions. The millennials still residing in the town also don't interact unless it's via a sporting tournament or a political meeting. Even those at school still interact with their own kind. It is a rare sight to have a Black/Indian friendship.

During the apartheid days, the Indian education system was run by the House of Delegates which was a body in the National Party's Tricameral Parliament. (Wikipedia n.d.) The Indian community was very proud of its excellent teachers and education system despite being caught up in apartheid laws. I attended the Tongaat State Indian High School which was amongst the top five Indian schools in KwaZulu-Natal, attaining excellence every year in the matric exams. Since the fall of apartheid, the school has lost resonance with many of the affluent in Tongaat who are now sending their children to schools outside of Tongaat or to private schools in the Ballito area. There is an underlying and silent belief that because the

schools have more Africans attending, and a single education system for everyone, quality has dropped to balance the education divide of the past. This sentiment is a summation of dinner table conversations that cannot be publically stated out of fear of recrimination. My close relationship with the Indian community has allowed for such candid conversations.

In order to ensure a balanced research report, the "then and now" is unpacked for those schools in the previously African suburb of Hambanathi. Has the single education system in post-apartheid South Africa benefited the children? Have things changed for the better or worse?

Economic Developments:

Tongaat is one of eight economic zones in the eThekwini municipality falling within the northern area that is bound by the Umgeni River in the south, the Tongaat River in the north and the rural tribal area of Ndwedwe in the west. Geographically Tongaat is surrounded by the following areas: Ballito and Stanger in the north, Pietermaritzburg in the west, Durban in the south and the Indian Ocean in the east.

Tongaat is located in one of the highest growth potential areas in KZN as it is found between Durban and Richards Bay corridor development and is part of the sugar belt developments. (Municipality, Intergrated Development Plan Ethekwini Municipality 2015 2015)

This strategic location coupled with its proximity to the Dube Trade Port/King Shaka International Airport (DTP), which opened six years ago, means that Tongaat is supposed to face exceptional growth and development. The DTP development, situated 6km from Tongaat, is meant to provide many job opportunities and in an ideal world is meant to be a considerable economic boost to the greater Tongaat area. The greater Tongaat area also provides road and rail access for the rural communities to the Durban Metropolitan area. It is also the first and most accessible area for other surrounding rural communities. Tongaat is therefore an important commercial transit node for many of the people living beyond the metro fringe. (Municipality, Intergrated Development Plan Ethekwini Municipality 2015 2015)

The approach towards local economic development in greater Tongaat is ad hoc and fragmented. A Tongaat Local Economic Development Strategy (LED) was commissioned in 2008 citing the development of the DTP as a growth stimulator for the area. Nine years later

the plan is still in its infancy. (Municipality, Intergrated Development Plan Ethekwini Municipality 2015 2015)

The Tongaat LED states that "The most important economic resources in the town of Tongaat are its people; the road and rail transport facilities; the surrounding land uses that includes the agriculture, industrial, commercial and tourism related activities; the existing infrastructure and the opportunity of relocating the international airport to La Mercy. Tongaat also has the potential to develop into a town that could be developed into a significant transport, industrial and residential hub, responding proactively to the airport and industrial development zone initiatives that will be taking place." Nine years on from the LED strategy, and six years on from the DTP, the town is yet to live out any of these growth areas. (Municipality, Tongaat Local Economic Development Strategy 2008 2008)

Economic growth of the area has not been in line with the increasing population growth of Tongaat and the surrounding areas. The area still faces a number of service backlogs and challenges including among others the increasing levels of unemployment, poverty and skills shortage. Therefore, with the above economic constraints, the town is now running the risk of remaining a village with a highly localised economy if there is no strategic plan for its economic development.

The neighbouring towns of Ballito, Umdloti and Umhlanga have seen substantive economic growth over the past six years. Developments in Tongaat include a few townhouse complexes, an almost built mall and very little in the surrounding Black townships. Driving through the town is like driving through a time warp. The central town consists of one main street, a transport hub behind the main street, small-scale manufacturing industries and suburbs surrounding the town.

The Tongaat Hulett Group Limited:

The sweetness of sugar is what Tongaat is about. What began as the Natal Sugar Company eons ago and what is now the Tongaat Hulett Group Limited is still one in the same. The company is the biggest land owner in KwaZulu-Natal and the largest contributor to employment on the North Coast. They have a portfolio of more than 8 000 hectares of developable land in prime locations in KwaZulu-Natal. (Tongaat Hulett n.d.)

Presently the developments with no timelines in place that are envisaged for Tongaat include that of:

- uShukela Drive which is a King Shaka International Airport linked industrial, retail and logistics development area. The development of this site could lead to the creation of 60 000 full-time equivalent construction jobs and close to 4 000 permanent jobs in a region with current high unemployment
- The Amanzimnyama Park development into an Aerotropolis space creating office, business industrial and logistics park. This development has the potential to yield R25 billion in property investment with significant job creation both during and post-construction an office, business and industrial logistics park.

Literary review:

There are no books written about Tongaat. Many books have been written about the arrival of the indentured labourers, the history of the settlement of Indians in South Africa and Mahatma Gandhi. My personal journey is from an outsider/insider perspective. I have drawn on a set of literary works that assists in developing a frame of reference that provides me with points of departure. The books I have reviewed have assisted me in better understanding writings on place, nostalgia, anthropology, migration and being Indian in the post-apartheid South Africa.

Steinberg, J., 2002. *Midlands.* Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers.

In this nonfiction novel *Midlands*, journalist Jonny Steinberg investigates the murder of a white farmer in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. The setting is in one of the most beautiful valleys in South Africa and is in the heart of Alan Paton country. Steinberg staggers into a festering battle between the White farmers and the Black inhabitants of the area. He wanders through the septic memories of apartheid and takes the reader to a part of post-apartheid South Africa that most South Africans fear.

The book has enabled me to understand how Steinberg enveloped himself into the town, making the town's acquaintance, ascertaining how people in it work, love, live and die. He is

also very truthful to his lead character, as he tries to explain to him that the truth has many faces. Despite him developing a relationship with the lead character, the story may turn out to not be in the interest of the lead character. And he does warn his protagonist. That is a journalist at work.

On interviewing the lead character he says, “The subject is doomed to be a failed propagandist. He imagines the book before it is written, he seems himself in it, and when the journalist takes out the paper and pen, he thinks he is becoming the being he imagines. He is always wrong. The moment he sits down to read the book and imbibes the being the journalist has created, he realises that he never did have a say in writing the rules. To be sure, the journalist and his readers are interested in what the subject says. But what really keeps the scavengers scavenging are the things he does not say, the things he says by accident, the things he betrays in a laugh or wince.” Steinberg is also very honest about his immersion into the Black community and reveals the dichotomy he faces being White. This narrative research report has also forced me to deal with my *Indianness* whilst interviewing residents of the Black community that lived adjacent to the town

Gevisser, M., 2014. *Lost and Found in Johannesburg*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers.

Lost and Found in Johannesburg is Gevisser’s childhood story of growing up in apartheid South Africa. He centres his narrative on a street guide called *Holmden's Register of Johannesburg*, which literally erases entire Black townships. Johannesburg, he realises, is full of divisions between Black and White, rich and poor, gay and straight; a place that "draws its energy precisely from its atomisation and its edge, its stacking of boundaries against one another". Here, Gevisser embarks on a quest to understand the inner life of his city. He uses maps, family photographs, shards of memory, newspaper clippings, and courtroom testimony to chart his intimate history of Johannesburg.

This book provides insight on how Gevisser deals with living in a space in close proximity to another race group, yet not having any interaction with that space. I grew up with a similar experience of never having ventured into Hambanathi, the Black township adjacent to

Tongaat. Embarking on this narrative research project has allowed me to see a part of my childhood that existed that I did not know existed.

Gevisser also traces back his Jewish history, and documents it using the imagery and pages of a map book. His creativity in bringing this section of his childhood to life ignites ideas into how the author would delve into this aspect of her childhood and its influences on her current life.

Hansen, T. B., 2012. *Melancholia of Freedom: Social Life in an Indian Township in South Africa.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

In his book *Melancholia of Freedom*, Danish anthropologist Thomas Hansen unpacks the wounds of more than a century of mistrust and misunderstanding has left on African-Indian relations in KwaZulu-Natal but more specifically in the town of suburb of Chatsworth. Hansen indicates that the damage to the relationship is so pronounced that in the first democratic elections 64% of votes in Chatsworth voted for the National Party rather than for the ANC.

The idea of the story on Tongaat began with my uncle indicating that the days when the National Party ruled were much better. The community and businesses prospered during those days. Nowadays with the ANC in power Indians have become marginalised.

Hansen demonstrates the complex nature of ordinary township life. While the ideology of apartheid was widely rejected, its practical institutions, from urban planning to houses, schools, and religious spaces, were embraced in order to remake the community. Hansen describes how the racial segmentation of South African society still informs daily life. Tongaat is very much the same, smaller but same. *Melancholia of Freedom* unpacks the difficult changes the Indian community endured after the demise of apartheid from an academic perspective. The research report unpacks this from a first person perspective, an insider looking from the outside 22 years later.

Bahadur, G., 2013. *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture.* New York: Hurst Publishers.

Bahadur's book was an absolute inspiration to write my story, as her novel spoke to my personal experiences and that of my ancestors. If anything, this book has inspired me to further my narrative research into something more.

Her book tells the untold stories of many of those who travelled as indentured labourers that disappeared into history. It served their purpose as their stories were those of hardship, survival, humiliation, compromise and regret. *Coolie* was the British name for indentured labourers who replaced the newly emancipated slaves on sugar plantations all around the world. Pregnant and traveling alone, Gaiutri Bahadur traces the story of her great grandmother and embarks on a journey into the past to find her. *Coolie Woman*—shortlisted for the 2014 Orwell Prize traverses three continents. Trawling through countless colonial archives, Bahadur excavates not only her great-grandmother's story but also the repressed history of some quarter of a million other *coolie* women, shining a light on their complex lives.

With only a single photograph and an emigration certificate from the British Guiana Government Agency for clues, Bahadur investigates the mystery of her grandmother's journey as a single pregnant woman. Was she a runaway, a widow, a prostitute, or just a rebellious adventurer? We may never know definitively. But thanks to her great-granddaughter's meticulous research in archives across three continents we can now make an educated guess about her experiences.

Bahadur was born in British Guiana and then immigrated with her family to the United States. Her story is an "outsider insider" narrative, remembering bits and pieces of her childhood in British Guiana as a now emancipated young academic living in the United States. At the crux of my story I too travel back to my hometown, an emancipated woman looking at the town through a different lens yet understanding the subtle nuances that make Tongaat what it is.

Coolie Woman is a mesmerising story of a double diaspora—from India to the West Indies in one century, Guyana to the United States in the next—that is at once a search for one's roots and an exploration of gender and power, danger and chance.

Fox, Kate. *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour.* London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2004.

I don't see why anthropologists feel they have to travel to remote corners of the world and get dysentery in order to study strange tribal cultures with bizarre beliefs and mysterious customs, when the weirdest, most puzzling tribe of all is right here on our doorstep."

“Participant observant. Honorary member of the tribe and detached scientist. My status as a native gives me a better head start on the participant angle of the story.”

Fox very humorously dissects English culture, class and tradition. Her writing enables me to further understand how to write as an insider from an outsider’s perspective. The narrative piece will require just that. I have the insider knowledge of Tongaat being my home town, yet an outsider’s perspective of having left home 23 years ago.

Dlamini, Jacob. *Native Nostalgia: A Memoir.* Johannesburg: Jacana Media , 2009.

In *Native Nostalgia*, Jacob Dlamini reminisces about his childhood in Katlehong, Gauteng. He uses the memories of his own childhood and unpacks the nostalgia that he claims Black people feel for the apartheid days.

He questions: What does it mean to remember a Black life lived under apartheid with fondness and longing? He does not romanticise apartheid, but says that despite there being poverty, crime and moral degradation, it did not determine the shape of Black life in its totality.

He begins his book where the idea for my narrative began. What does it mean when an old Black woman says that life was better under apartheid? I encountered the very same sentiment from a member of my family, but the difference in the narrative is that the struggles of apartheid was very different for an Indian family.

Dlamini also argues that all Black families were happy and sad in different ways. The differences between Black families extended beyond questions of domestic bliss or strife. There were class, ethnic and gender differences aplenty. These were determined at times by

the type of fence one had, or how much grass you had in the front lawn. Dlamini's narrative assists in developing my narrative as Indian families were and still are encased in class, caste, language and gender disparities.

Methodology:

- **Desktop research**

Desktop research will be undertaken throughout the narrative research project in order to collect provincial and local government information with respect to socioeconomic development issues in the area. The sources of information include policy and legislation documents, publications and research documents concerning economic development, annual reports and strategic documents of institutions involved in economic development and support, e-mail correspondence with officials involved in economic development and local newspapers.

- **Home stay**

Visiting the township of Hambanathi and the farm areas of Isnembe, Emona and Umbayi as these were areas that I have fleeting memories of when I was a child.

The Saturday morning vegetable market with the aim of getting a sense of the agricultural community. My father's business also sells seeds to the farming community, and he has deep relationships with many of the farmers.

- Visiting a High school in Hambanathi to understand the differences in the quality of education and resources allocation if there are any.
- Attending any association/council meetings that are taking place whilst I'm in town.
- Attending a local soccer/volleyball tournament to understand the millennial audience.
- Visiting the local pub/drinking venue and eatery.
- Observing at the local bunny chow establishment, listening to conversations.
- Driving through the town, the township areas, and the farms to get a picture of the scenarios.
- Engaging with farmers in the agricultural areas

- **Interviews:**
  - Farmers from the Isnembe, Emona and coastline area
  - Business owners on the then and now – economic downturn
  - School principals
  - Head of the Tongaat Civic Association
  - Head of the Tongaat Child Welfare
  - Head of the eThekwini municipality – Economic Development sector
  - Ward councillors for Tongaat and Hambanathi
  - Veterans of the town: Professor Michael Abrahams; Mr Jeeva Pillay
  - Family and friends

- **Voices:**

This narrative journalism research piece will be written in the first person using my own voice. It will allow for the reader to recognize the familiarity as well as a unique sensibility, a distinctive way of looking at the world, and provide an outlook that enriches the readers understanding.

I have used varied voices/interviews in the story. With every voice/interview conducted I have aimed to be upfront with respect to my relationship to the person or situation so that the reader understands the difference in the reportage.

- Voices of those that are familiar with me because of my connection to the town.
- Voices of those that only agreed to talk to me because of my father's relationship with them.
- Voices that I never heard as child – that being those from Hambanathi, Umbayi and Isnembe.
- Voices of officials from the civil society, the municipality and the Tongaat Hulett Group.

- **Approach via subheads:**

The story was unpacked using subheads that tie into the theme of the piece.

1. My story
2. The nuances of a Gujerati family
3. The village look (How the English stole the Cape Baroque architecture)
4. Melancholia
5. Government's redemption plan
6. Some interesting characters
7. Numbers, colours and contrasts
8. It takes a village....
9. And now, what happens?

Risks/Challenges:

A major risk is my own involvement in the story. The connection to the town gives the story strength, but also raises the potential of biases of various kinds. As indicated in my methodology, with every interview conducted I will be upfront with respect to my relationship to the person or situation so that the reader understands the difference in my reportage.

There is much written about indentured labourers in South Africa. There is much written about Indians as marginalised communities in South Africa but very little that brings out how apartheid benefited the community in retaining its cultural, ethnic and religious values. The questioning of key individuals has taken into account the sensitivity around race relations.

Conclusion:

This research project was motivated by my personal investigation into the reasons for leaving home. This search for the answers springs to caste, class, apartheid, indentured labourers and economics. It narrates stories that are often simply stories, but the research report helps bring this to life. The report's conclusion has touched a nerve in my psyche, as I question myself and the role I am yet to play in making a difference in a town that has made a difference in my life. The personal journey continues.

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