

A Tragedy of Empire.

The treatment of British Indians  
in the Transvaal

# A TRAGEDY ~~OF~~ EMPIRE.

---

The Treatment of British Indians in the  
Transvaal.

---

AN APPEAL TO INDIA.

---

By HENRY S. L. POLAK,

Attorney of the Supreme Court of the Transvaal; Assistant Honorary Secretary of the Transvaal British Indian Association; Delegate to India from the Indian Community of the Transvaal.

## FOREWORD.

---

IN the following pages, which are devoted to a brief study of the origin, history, development, and effects of the present struggle in the Transvaal, an endeavour has been made, in as simple a manner as may be, to lift the veil from the sufferings that have been undergone patiently, self-sacrificingly, and patriotically by a handful of British Indians, men, women, and children, during the last three years, in that British Colony. The Writer's hope is that the narrative of this sombre tragedy will awaken something more permanent than mere verbal expressions of sympathy in, and will evoke something more tangible than mere academic resolutions of protest from, the people of India, whether of Asiatic or European descent.

Bombay,  
21st August, 1909.

H. S. L. P.

## APPENDIX.

The writer reproduces from *Indian Opinion* brief biographies of his co-delegates, who were arrested shortly after their names had been announced, and who are now addressing their compatriots from within the Transvaal goals:—

## PERSONNEL OF THE INDIAN DEPUTATION.

MR. NADIR ARDESHIR CAMA was born in Bombay, in the year 1870. He is the son of a well-known Parsee gentleman of that city. Mr. Cama was educated at the Free Church of Scotland School and College, under Dr. Mackichan, where he studied for six years. He matriculated at Bombay University in the year 1888, and, in the following year, passed the Previous, now Intermediate, Examination of the University. From 1891 to 1895, Mr. Cama was an official of the Bombay Port Trust, and, in 1895, came to South Africa. For a few months, he held a position with Messrs. Dada Abdulla & Co., of Durban, but, early in 1896, shortly after the Jameson Raid, he came to Johannesburg, where he was appointed to a position in the Post Office. Prior to the war, he took some part in the Indian public affairs of the Colony, and remained in the Transvaal during the war. In 1906, he became a member of the Committee of the British Indian Association, at the time of the passive resistance struggle, in which he has taken a very prominent part. When the situation became acute, at the end of 1907, he was informed by the Government that his services were dispensed with, as he refused to register, and, at the beginning of 1908, he was arrested. On the 27th January, the Magistrate ordered him to leave the Colony within fourteen days, but, three days afterwards, the compromise was arrived at and, as a result of negotiations on the part of the British Indian Association, Mr. Cama, together with other Government employees, was reinstated in his old position. When the struggle revived, in the latter half of last year, Mr. Cama again threw himself into the breach, and, in September, he was once more dismissed. On the 17th February last, he was arrested, and immediately sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labour, for failing to produce a certificate of registration on demand, and refusing to give means of identification. He served for three months, and, less than a month after his release, he has again been arrested on a similar charge and is once more serving a similar period of rigorous imprisonment. Mr. Cama is married, and has five children, the youngest of whom was

born whilst he was serving his last sentence. His family is in the Transvaal. Mr. Cama has, on many occasions, boldly and courageously denounced the action of the Government in fluent speeches, and it is probably on account of his uncompromising attitude towards the breach of faith on the part of the Government that he has been specially singled out for punishment.

MR. EBRAHIM SALEJI COOVADIA was born at Ghala, in the Surat District, Bombay Presidency, in the year 1878. He is the third son of Mr. Saleji Hassanji Coovadia, a merchant of that place. He studied in the Vernacular School at Ghala, and, as a young man, came to South Africa, in the year 1889, with his brothers, Moosa Saleji and Amod Saleji. The three brothers settled in Natal, and opened business at Ladysmith, Newcastle, and Charlestown. In the year 1892, they came to Johannesburg, where they have since been carrying on large business transactions. In 1897, replacing his elder brother, Mr. Coovadia was appointed Treasurer of the Johannesburg Indian Committee, of which, at that time, Mr. M. H. Nazar was Secretary. Upon the outbreak of war, Mr. Coovadia went to Durban and thence to India, where he worked hard in order to secure a post-office and a library for his native place, the efforts of himself and his colleagues in that direction meeting with success. He returned to the Transvaal in 1902, and the business of himself and his brothers was resumed. In 1904, he was appointed Treasurer of the Transvaal British Indian Association, and, in 1907, of the Hamidia Islamic Society, of which Society he is a foundation member. Mr. Ebrahim Coovadia has been one of the staunchest passive resisters, and has set a magnificent example to the community. When the Natal leaders came to Transvaal in August of last year, he was one of the brave band of ten who crossed the border at Volksrust with the intention of sharing imprisonment with them, but instructions were sent to the officials at the border not to arrest, and Mr. Coovadia's mission was doomed to disappointment. Upon the arrest of Mr. Ebrahim Aswat on the 2nd March last, Mr. Coovadia was appointed acting Chairman of the British Indian Association, but he had held the position for scarcely a day when he, too, was arrested on the charge of failing upon demand to produce his registration certificate and give means of identification, and eight days thereafter was sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labour, which period he served at the Johannesburg Fort. Upon his release, he threw himself once more into the struggle, and, on the day of the mass meeting summoned to approve of the nominated delegates to England and India, he was arrested in the offices of the British Indian Association, having been re-appointed Acting Chairman of the Association only the day

before, upon Mr. Cachalia's imprisonment. On Wednesday, the 23rd ultimo, he was sentenced once more to three months' imprisonment with hard labour, which, of course, he cheerfully accepted. Mr. Coovadia has three children—two boys and a girl—who, together with his wife, are to-day in the Transvaal.

MR. N. VENOOGOPAL NAIDOO is the son of Mr. M. Narayanasamy Naidoo. He was born at Papanasain, Tanjor District, in the Madras Presidency, in 1873, where his father was at the time carrying on the trade of a brass-monger. In 1880, on the death of his mother, Mr. Naidoo migrated to Mauritius, with his father. Here he resided until 1898, with the exception of one year, which he spent in Madagascar. Mr. Gopal was educated at the Flaqq School and at the Normal School in Port Louis. He served for a time with the firm of Messrs. V. Subraya Chetty of Pondicherry and Mauritius, and in 1894 opened business on his own account. In 1898, he removed to the Transvaal *via* Port Elizabeth, where he has remained ever since. Mr. Gopal has always taken a keen interest in public affairs affecting his community, and was for a time Honorary Secretary of the Pretoria Branch of the Tamil Benefit Society. He has thoroughly identified himself with the passive resistance movement in connection with the Asiatic Act of 1907, and has been to gaol twice—the first time, in January, 1908, when he was sentenced to a term of three months' imprisonment with hard labour for not being in possession of a registration certificate under Act 2 of 1907, but was released five days after his arrest, on account of the compromise entered into with the Government; and, the second time, in February, 1909, for failing to produce a registration certificate under Act 36 of 1908, when he was illegally ordered to be deported to Natal by Major Dixon. He returned immediately, and was sentenced at Volksrust to a term of three months' imprisonment with hard labour, an alternative fine being imposed, which he declined to pay. He was finally transferred from the Volksrust to the Houtpoort prison, Heidelberg. Mr. Gopal Naidoo is a member of the Theosophical Society. During Professor Parmanand's visit to South Africa Mr. Gopal became his disciple. On the 18th June, almost on the point of departure for India, Mr. Gopal was again arrested, and he, too, will speak to India from a Transvaal prison.

---