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## Indian Immigrants and the East African Slave Trade

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# 13 Indian Immigrants and the East African Slave Trade

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## INTRODUCTION

Indians living today in East Africa are the descendants of traders who traveled across the Indian Ocean to take part in the economic complex stretching from India to East Africa before the establishment of national borders. For them, crossing the vast waters of the Indian Ocean was no more troublesome than moving across the lands of the Indian subcontinent. They were savvy traders, adept at cultivating relationships of trust under the protection of local rulers. The key to their success was avoiding dangerous areas and never harboring political ambitions. The Indian merchants decided according to their own wishes whether to call their families to the new land or to return to their homeland. That decision in fact rested solely on economic factors. In this manner, the Indian immigrants opened new frontiers and expanded commercial networks. The history of the Indian immigrants can be divided into four periods according to the change in rulers and accompanying shifts in administrative policy.

The first is the period between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when East Africa was ruled by the Portuguese. During this period, the Portuguese, who had advanced into the Indian Ocean, gave preferential treatment to the Hindus as a way to thwart the expansion of the Muslims. Indian merchants were visible and active at all the ports occupied by the Portuguese. This first period ended, however, with the suppression of the Portuguese by the Islamic forces of Oman. After successfully capturing the port of Muscat from the Portuguese in the middle of the seventeenth century, the Omani rulers went on to completely expel the Portuguese from the coastal regions of East Africa, bringing the intermittent conflicts to a conclusion by the end of the seventeenth century.

The second period is the age of the Omani Sultanate, which continued until the colonization of East Africa by the European countries. During this period, Indian merchants secured a strong foothold on the East African coast as a direct result of the actions of Sayyid Sa'id bin Sultan. Sayyid Sa'id constructed a city called Stone Town on Zanzibar Island and from this base reigned over the territory of the Omani Sultanate extending along the entire East African coastline, which is now Somalia, Kenya and Tanzania (Figure 1).

Zanzibar is now a part of the United Republic of Tanzania and has a

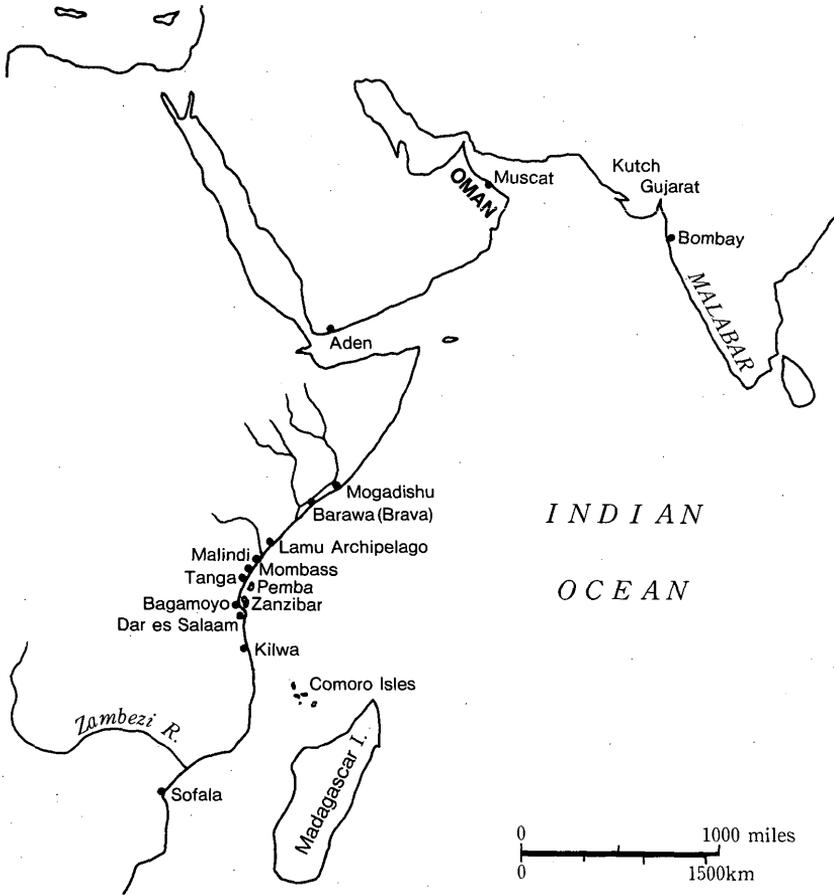


Figure 1. The western Indian Ocean

population of about 640,000. Geographically, it is located between the latitude of five and seven degrees south, about forty kilometers from the mainland coast, floating like a poppy seed on an indigo-washed coral reef. Why did this tiny island attract the attention of the Arabs and Indians? The reason is quite clear. Zanzibar was blessed with excellent ports for the *dhow*s that were indispensable for long distance trade. Pure spring water and various kinds of fruit were also abundant on the island. As a result, Zanzibar quickly developed into a major center for the collection and distribution of slaves and ivory, and a city appeared with a white stone palace and clusters of merchant houses and warehouses. Indian merchants, who were already inextricably bound to the prosperity of the Sultanate in Muscat, gathered here, and immigrants from the Indian subcontinent were welcomed as well. Sultan Sayyid Sa'ïd assigned Indian immigrants to the task of customs collection and relied heavily on their services. Thus, a large number of Indian merchants settled on Zanzibar and established the first Indian community in East

Africa.

The next important period begins from 1885. During the following decade, the Omani territory of East Africa was divided and colonized by England, Germany and Italy. This area includes what is now Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Somalia. Indians flooded into the regions colonized by the British, particularly Kenya, and by the end of British rule, the Indian population in East Africa had reached a record-breaking 350,000.

The fourth period begins with the achievement of independence by the African states. As a result of the Africanization policy adopted by the newly independent African governments, Indian residents faced persecution in the form of deportation, nationalization of property and forced intermarriage with native Africans. Most of the wealthy Indians fled to Britain and Canada, and by 1984 the Indian population had decreased to one fifth of its peak level (Tominaga 1992: 151).

Indian immigration to East Africa was characterized by the fact that most of the immigrants chose freely to immigrate. There were exceptions, such as the approximately 40,000 Indian laborers indentured for construction of the Uganda Railway, but only fifteen percents of these laborers remained in Kenya after the expiration of their contracts (Gregory 1971: 55). Thus the Indian community in East Africa developed differently from its counterparts in Mauritius, Fiji and the Republic of South Africa, where most residents arrived as indentured laborers.

Although the descendants of the free Indian immigrants to East Africa have been relegated to the rank of secondary citizens since independence, they retain the ability to play a central role in a free market-oriented economy. Where will this energy lead the immigrant Indian community in Africa? Only time can tell.

On the basis of the above history of the Indian community in East Africa, the present study will focus on the dynamics of Indian merchants and their involvement in the slave trade, a subject which has not yet been sufficiently explored. Until now, Arab and Swahili merchants were believed to have been the main protagonists of the slave trade, with the Indian merchants playing a limited role as financiers of slave caravans. Is it correct to assume that the Indian merchants did not engage directly in the slave trade? If not, which caste was involved in the slave trade, and to what extent? What were the economic and political implications of involvement in the slave trade? The objective of this study is to shed light on these questions while referring to British Foreign Office correspondence and contemporary records.

I will confine my discussion to Zanzibar and the coastal towns of East Africa in the nineteenth century, or the second historical period. The contents of the paper are as follows. In the first section, I will describe the trade structure of nineteenth century Zanzibar and the organization of the slave trade in inland Africa, with particular attention to the role of the Indian merchants. In the second section, I will look at how the Indian community was formed and how it evolved in Zanzibar, with special reference to the northwestern Indian city of Kutch from which most of the immigrants originated. In the third section, I will analyze the involvement of Indian merchants in the slave trade. Finally, I will introduce the current status of

Indian society in Tanzania with reference to the results of a field survey undertaken in 1989.

## TRADE SYSTEMS IN ZANZIBAR AND THE SLAVE TRADE

### The custom policy of Sayyid Sa'id bin Sultan

The statistics recorded in the 1859 British Consulate report give an insight into the structure of trade in nineteenth century Zanzibar. Aside from silver and gold bullion, ivory was the top export item from Zanzibar, accounting for approximately 41% of the total value of exports, followed by cloves (15%), cowry shells (14%) and copal (9%) (a tropical resin from which varnish is made). Among the import items, cotton products accounted for 58% of the total import value, followed by beads, metal wires, rifles and bullets, each of which accounted for less than 6% of the value of imports.

Among the export items, only cloves and some of the cowry shells were produced in Zanzibar. Ivory and copal were transported from the continent. Among the imports, cotton products, beads and metal wire were mostly re-exported to the continental regions.

Zanzibar's top trading partner was British India, with exports and imports to and from India accounting for 30% of Zanzibar trade. The U.S. ranks second, followed by France, Germany, Western Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Though direct trade with Britain in this period was minuscule in terms of value, British products were brought to the Zanzibar market indirectly by American and Indian traders (Russel 1961: 343-344).

The statistics from the Zanzibar Sultanate customs records shed light on the slave trade. The slave trade accounted for 18% of total tariff revenues during the 1867 to 1868 period. However, since Indian merchants were prohibited from taking part in the slave trade by this time, it is safe to assume that the figure given above is a very conservative estimate, and far below the actual<sup>1)</sup>.

This pattern of trade shows that Zanzibar was an entrepôt for trade with the African continent on the one hand and with Europe and the regions around the Indian Ocean on the other. Sayyid Sa'id revamped and reorganized the customs system with the aim of bolstering the position of Zanzibar as an entrepôt in international trade.

Sayyid Sa'id began by introducing the same customs system to Zanzibar as that implemented earlier in Muscat. In Zanzibar, the authority to collect customs had been traditionally farmed out to the Arab governors and administrators. But Sayyid Sa'id consigned this right to the Indian merchants, with a limited term of five years. The benefits to the Sultanate were twofold: the troublesome task of collecting customs would be handled by Indian merchants, while the Sultan obtained the consignment fees. The price to be paid by the merchants for acquiring this farming right was increased from 150,000 Maria Theresia dollars in 1837 to

220,000 in 1856. This amount accounted for more than 70% of the total annual revenue of Sayyid Sa'id.

Sayyid Sa'id restructured the customs system itself. There were two main methods of collecting customs, both of which were geared to the trade structure of Zanzibar. One method was directed to foreign commodities entering the port of Zanzibar via the Indian Ocean and the other to long term trading commodities that flowed from the African continent. We will look first at the latter (Tominaga 1990: 287-316).

Sayyid Sa'id introduced two innovations to increase customs income; one was the establishment of the Mrima monopoly and the other was the introduction of different customs rates depending on the region of production. Mrima is the Swahili name for the coastal regions of what is today Tanzania. Sayyid Sa'id prohibited European and American traders to deal in ivory and copal at the ports that dotted the Mrima region, thereby effectively establishing the Mrima monopoly. The objective of that policy was to exclude European and American merchants from the continental ports, to ensure that the two most popular export items, ivory and copal, would be collected and placed under the control of the Sultanate, and thereby to secure customs revenues from the two items. Furthermore, import tariffs could be collected from the white men, who were now restricted to trading in Zanzibar Island alone. As for the different custom rates, the more volume a region produced, the higher were the customs levied. For example, central and southern Tanzania, which were the main producers of ivory, would be levied nine to fifteen dollars for every predetermined volume in weight of ivory, while Northern Tanzania, which only exported a limited volume of ivory, was only levied one to four dollars for the equivalent weight<sup>2</sup>).

On the other hand, products imported to Zanzibar via the Indian Ocean were subject to duties according to the provisions of a treaty which granted special commercial privileges (capitulations) to European and American merchants. American merchants were the first to be granted this special privilege in 1833. With the signing of the treaty, import tariffs were reduced to 5% across the board, and the traditional export tariff was abolished. The agreement also included provisions for the opening and jurisdiction of consulates. The same treatment was later accorded to Britain, France and Germany with the signing of identical treaties.

As we have seen, while on the one hand Sayyid Sa'id prohibited trade along the Mrima coast by Caucasians and levied high tariffs on special products, on the other he made efforts to attract foreign merchants to Zanzibar by reducing the tariffs on products imported from the Indian Ocean region and by abolishing export tariffs. This policy resulted in the customs management consignment fee, which merchants paid to obtain farming rights.

Sayyid Sa'id's custom policy attempted to concentrate the merchant network, which until that time had been dispersed over the Indian Ocean area, in Zanzibar, and thereby to establish a mechanism which would ensure that the profits of the merchants remained in Zanzibar. Sayyid Sa'id now reigned over two major centers

of trade, Zanzibar and Muscat, where identical mechanisms were enforced.

The Indian traders, with their close links to British India, were the only "foreign" merchants to be accorded the freedom to trade in the Mrima regions and thus achieved a uniquely advantageous position from which to pursue trade in Zanzibar.

### **The structure of the slave trade**

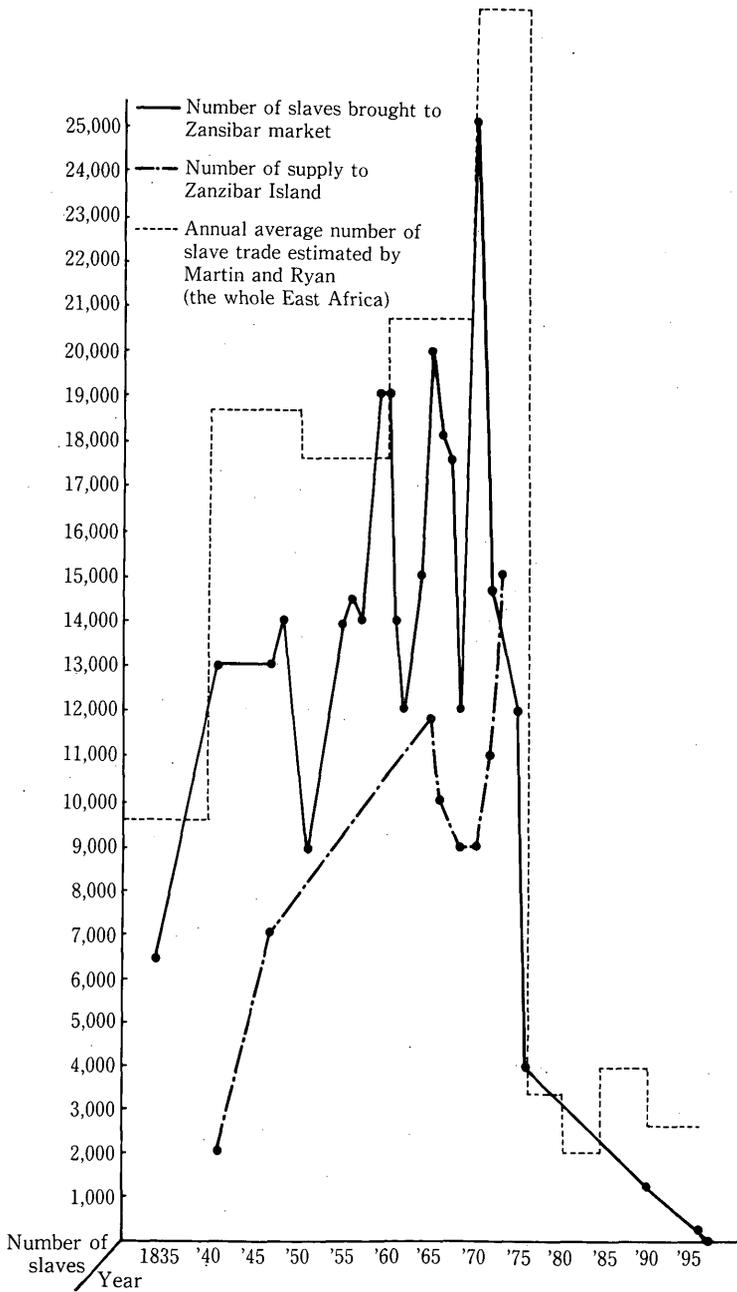
Figure 2 shows how the slave trade developed in East Africa in the nineteenth century. About 6,000 slaves were traded per annum in the 1830s, but by the 1860s that number had increased to 15,000, reaching a peak in the 1870s. After 1880 the number of slaves being traded dropped drastically as a result of the total ban on slave trading enforced in East Africa from 1873. The figure also illustrates the fact that most of the slaves brought in from the coastal regions after the 1850s were sold in Zanzibar for plantation labor. It is clear from this figure that nineteenth century Zanzibar was a society based on slavery. A British commander serving the Zanzibar sultanate in those days noted that slaves accounted for over 60% of the population of Zanzibar (Bennett 1978: 180).

Africans living in the hinterlands of the coastal areas of East Africa were the main source of slaves. Prisoners captured in African tribal wars were sold as slaves to coastal traders. The surge in demand eventually led to an acute supply shortage, so the coastal traders organized slave caravans that penetrated deep into interior Africa. When were these slave caravans first organized? Although there is no clear evidence, it is widely believed that slave caravans emerged in the early part of the nineteenth century. Sayyid Sa'id also began to finance the slave caravans in the 1830s.

Three major long distance trade routes into the interior developed under the Mrima monopoly system. These were the Pangani, Bagamoyo and Kilwa routes from the north, the starting points of which were Pangani Port, Bagamoyo Port and Kilwa Port, respectively. Ivory was mainly transported over the Bagamoyo route, while slaves were mainly transported along the Kilwa route.

Arab and Swahili traders are believed to have organized the caravans that traveled the long distance trade routes. Who were the organizers of these slave caravans and how did they organize them? How did they venture into the interior and return to the coastal regions? The most important slave trader of the nineteenth century, Tippu Tip, provides a useful example.

Tippu Tip was born around 1830 in a rural village on Zanzibar Island. He was named Hamed by his parents, who were Omani Arabs. However, his maternal ancestor six generations removed was a woman of African descent, and so Tippu Tip had the appearance of a Negroid. He is said to have been deeply ashamed of his skin color. The name Tippu Tip is a nickname given to him after he became an adult. His father, Muhammad, was a wealthy slave trader. When Tippu Tip was twelve years old, he accompanied his uncle into the interior for the first time, and over the next twenty years he acquired a thoroughgoing knowledge about long



Sources: Sheriff 1971: 440; Martin and Ryan 1977: 74-76.

Figure 2. Slave trade in East Africa

distance trade. During his lifetime he organized three caravans, each of which took several years or more. The territory that Tippu Tip covered extended from the coastal regions to the eastern part of present day Zaire. Tippu Tip even accompanied and assisted Stanley and Livingstone in their expeditions into the interior of Africa. After the partition of Africa by the Europeans, he was appointed by the King of Belgium to govern the eastern regions of Zaire, and he died of malaria in 1905 at a ripe old age.

After retiring from office, Tippu Tip told the story of his turbulent life to the German Consul, and this was later published as a small book in Swahili. The biography was also translated into English. The following is an excerpt from the English translation.

I took goods to the value of more than 30,000 dollars, though I had borrowed from some twenty wealthy Indians and Banyans. At this time there was a famine on the Mrima coast. We followed the road to Urori, but the Nyamwezi porters refused to go as far as Urori because of its distance from their homes. The Zaramu also refused to act as porters, but when they felt the pangs of hunger they changed their minds. Each man got 10 dollars down for the round trip. Some wanted 1/4 and others 1/3 in advance for what they were after was millet and food.

I took 700 porters and left Zanzibar with the goods.... reached Mbezi, where we stayed seven days. Then we went off again and reached Mkamba. By this time the porters had eaten the maize and were carrying their loads on an empty stomach, so when we arrived at Mkamba we bought plenty of rice to give them adequate rations....

In the morning we sounded the departure drum. There was no response. We sent out men to go and hurry them up but they encountered no one. All had deserted.... I lost my temper and brought the news to my brother and told him to bring me my guns, travelling clothes and a bed-roll and servants. Then I went back to the porters' villages, but they had not yet arrived. I seized their elders and kinsmen, about 200 of them, and bound them up... I went into every part of Zaramu country and in the space of five days had seized 800 men... From there I went on to Zerere in the country behind Kwale, where a Banyan was living... I asked him for strips of metal, and he gave me as much as I wanted. These I took back to Mkamba and the craftsmen who were with me made chains. I put the whole lot of the porters in these chains and sent my brother to go ahead of them...

On arrival at Urori I left men with beads and merchandise to the value of about 6,000 dollars, leaving in charge a young man. The rate of exchange in Urori was then 1 frasila of beads for the same weight of ivory; 12-15 pieces of cloth for a frasila of ivory; spice, measure for measure, and one box of soap per frasila of ivory; 15 lbs. of powder was worth a frasila of ivory. Here I left a great deal of merchandise... (Whitley 1959: 19-33).

In order to acquire ivory and slaves, Tippu Tip sometimes had to fight the African chieftains, even while losing porters to illness and starvation. Along the way, the products put into the care of servants were sometimes damaged, in which case the product was totally wasted. It was rare for porters who were hired along the coastal regions to remain with the caravan throughout the trip. On the return

trip, the ivory was usually carried from one village to another and handed over to the next group of porters. Tippu Tip's narration continues as follows.

We got into Dar es Salaam on the twenty-second of the month of Ramadhan... At the time Dar es Salaam was full of people, including both Arabs, Banyans (Hindu Indians) and Indians (Muslim Indians) from Zanzibar. There were Europeans, people of Lamu and Mombasa; Arabs from Pemba and... even Seyyid Majid himself. We decided to go to Zanzibar, but Seyyid would not let me, but told me to give the merchants their tusks and let them go off while I should wait for him and, after the feast, travel with him...

We stayed in Zanzibar six months. Seyyid Majid summoned me and asked me. "Are you contemplating a trip?" I told him that I was. "Then get your goods from the Banyan Custom Master!" "Very good" I replied. Now at this time the Banyan Customs men enjoyed great esteem with Seyyed, who did everything they wanted. They acted like chiefs. I dealt with many merchants but chiefly with Muslim Indians... but they had not enough goods. I had decided to go to the Customs Master and he agreed to give me goods to the value of 50,000 dollars (Whitley 1959: 19-33).

The ivory which was thus transported to Zanzibar was sold to foreign traders through Indian brokers, and the slaves were auctioned off at the market. During this time preparations for the next caravan would already be under way.

The memoirs of Tippu Tip provide a first hand account of the caravans. Organizing a caravan was an enormous and extremely dangerous undertaking, requiring large capital outlays and manpower. Mainly by providing the investment, Indian traders supported the organization and operation of these caravans. In particular, the narrative illustrates how closely the Hindu customhouse manager collaborated with the Sultan and enjoyed a level of wealth and power that surpassed even that of the Muslim merchants. One can readily imagine from these accounts that these customhouse managers stood at the apex of the Indian community in Zanzibar. In the next chapter, we will look more deeply into the formation and development of the Indian community on Zanzibar Island.

## **THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIAN COMMUNITY IN ZANZIBAR**

### **Indians as customs duty collectors**

The right of customs farming was determined by tender. Who was the first customs duty collector? Some say that it was Wat Bimani, an Indian merchant, while others say that it was Shivj Topan. In any event, it has been confirmed that in the 1830s Shivj Topan had established himself as a customs farmer<sup>3</sup>). The Shivj family belonged to the Bhatia merchant caste and hailed from Kutch in the northwestern region of India.

What was Kutch like? The following is an excerpt from the observations of an

Englishman who visited the region in the 1830s.

The principal seaport of Kutch is Mandavee, which stands... close on the Gulf. It has no fewer than 250 vessels belonging to it, and boasts a population of 50,000 souls, which is about one-eighth of that of the whole province of Kutch. It is an open roadstead with a creek. From Mandavee a maritime communication is kept up with Zanzibar and the whole east coast of Africa, with the Red Sea and Arabia, with the Persian Gulf...

The vessels used in this extensive commerce vary in size from 100 to 800 candies, or from 25 to 200 tons... The most valuable branch of traffic carried on from Kutch is with the eastern coast of Africa... Twelve vessels have returned from thence, a distance of nearly 3,000 miles, within these few days, laden with ivory, rhinoceros hides, and other valuable articles (Burns 1836: 23-29).

The major export item was, above all, cotton products. Over 20 types of cotton cloth produced in various regions were being traded. Among the imported items, along with ivory, slaves had been transported from East Africa.

What the author is describing is the busy activity of the port. Shivj Topan grew up in this bustling port town and probably dreamed of going overseas. He apparently did not grow up in a wealthy family. Generally speaking, immigrants from Kutch left home with just enough money to pay their travel expenses<sup>4</sup>). Most probably Shivj Topan was no exception. The hustle and bustle of port towns became a breeding ground for the countless immigrants who ventured out onto the seas dreaming of riches.

The trade route in the western part of the Indian Ocean stretched from Kutch to the Persian Gulf via the coast of the Indian subcontinent and the Sea of Arabia. From there the ships would sail into the Red Sea and, after a stop at the port of Aden, would return to the Indian Ocean and continue southward along the coast of Somalia to the coastal regions of East Africa. After the Portuguese had been driven out of the Persian Gulf, Muscat, of the Omani Sultanate, prospered. It was only natural, therefore, that the merchants from Kutch first settled in Muscat. The Indian merchants followed Sayyid Sa'id and migrated to Zanzibar. Shivj Topan was one of them<sup>5</sup>).

Another prominent customs duty collector was Jairam Shivj, who succeeded his father, Shivj Topan, in the 1840s. Exploiting his position, he dispatched family and kin to work as customhouse officers in all of the major ports along the Mrima coast (Burton 1872: 328-329). Thus the Hindu Bhatia came to effectively monopolize the arteries of the East African economy. Jairam was the apex of that monopoly. According to a newspaper published in Zanzibar at the time, the citizens of Stonetown called the estate of Jairam the "Nyumba Serikali" (Prime Minister's Residence). On New Years day, Sayyid Sa'id used to visit Jairam's office with an entourage of followers, and an opulent celebration was held there with all the prominent merchants in Zanzibar (Burton 1872: 328).

Thus the Indian community on Zanzibar Island came into existence with the

customs duty collector at the apex. I will now describe the formation of this community with reference to the British consular report.

### **The formation of the Indian community**

The Indian immigrant population in Zanzibar, which numbered a meager 200 in 1863, had increased to 2,500 by 1870 and to 8,000 by the end of the nineteenth century (Bennett 1978: 180; Sheriff 1987: 148). By the early part of the twentieth century more than 10,000 Indian immigrants had arrived in Zanzibar, and the number peaked at 18,000 in 1960<sup>6</sup>. Among them were Hindu merchants such as the Bhatias, and Shī'a Muslim Indians such as the Khojas and Bohras. From Bombay came the Pārsī, who were Zoroastrians in religion, and from the Portuguese colony of Goa came many Indian Christians. To support the daily lives of these Indian merchants, many barbers, shoemakers, washermen and carpenters followed them to Zanzibar. The Indian community in Zanzibar was a replica of Indian society, albeit on a much smaller scale. Some of the Indian merchants who successfully gained a foothold in Zanzibar not only established branch offices in the ports that dotted the East African coastline but even opened branches in Bombay. Eventually a vast network of Indian merchants was formed, centering on Zanzibar and extending throughout the western part of the Indian Ocean.

In 1870, the British Consul General in Zanzibar conducted a demographic survey of Indians, categorizing them as either Hindu or Muslim. The area that the survey encompassed was the coastal regions under the reign of the Sultan of Zanzibar. The results of that survey are shown in Table 1<sup>7</sup>.

In 1870, as table 1 illustrates, the Indian population totalled 474 and 3,396 of whom were Hindu and Muslim, respectively. There were about seven times as many Muslim as Hindu Indians at that time. As to location of residence, more than 60% of the Indians were concentrated in Zanzibar. When we look at the figures broken down according to community, about 43% of both Hindu and Muslim community members lived on Zanzibar Island. The interesting feature here is the fact that the Indian communities on the coast tended to be segregated between Hindus and Muslims. For example, many Hindu Indians lived in such coastal cities as Bagamoyo and Dar es Salaam, which were located relatively close to Zanzibar Island, while among the Muslims, many Khojas lived in the southern port town of Kilwa, and the Bohra tended to live in the northern island of Mombasa.

The British Consul made a number of important observations regarding these Indian immigrants. First he noted that most of the Hindu immigrants belonged to either the Bhatia or Vania merchant caste and that they had migrated from Kutch, leaving their families behind in deference to local customs forbidding families to move to distant ports. This observation reveals that, at least during this period, the Hindu merchants were transient immigrants who would eventually return to their homelands.

Secondly, the British consul noted in his report that there were three major groups among the Muslim immigrants, i.e. the Khoja, the Bohora and the Memon.

**Table 1.** The Indian population in Zanzibar and East Africa in 1870

(Hindu)

Location of residence	Population	Number of households
Zanzibar	200	80
Bagamoyo	54	40
Dar es Salaam	52	38
Lamu	42	25
Tanga	36	21
Kilwa/Mungao	33	25
Mombasa	30	17
Kwale	16	15
Mafia	6	3
Pemba	5	3
Total	474	267

(Muslim Khoja)

Location of residence	Population	Number of households
Zanzibar	2,100	535
Kilwa/Mungao	194	86
Bagamoyo	137	36
Pemba	59	28
Dar es Salaam	43	13
Mrima Village	25	10
Total	2,558	703

(Muslim Bohora)

Location of residence	Population	Number of households
Zanzibar	250	40
Mombasa	142	25
Pemba	51	16
Tanga	44	16
Lamu	42	11
Malindi	37	21
Dar es Salaam	10	4
Others	11	6
Total	588	139

The Khoja and Bohra are Shī'a Muslims, while the Memon are Sunna. Among these groups of Muslims, the Khoja and Bohra comprised the vast majority of the population, and 60% originated from Kutch while 14% originated from Jamnagar.

**Table 2.** Caste or occupation of Indians in Zanzibar

Name of caste or occupation	Population
Bhatia	157
Vania	80
Goldsmith	34
Barber	19
Tailor	11
Carpenter	8
Blacksmith	5
Total	314

The consul wrote about the Khoja as follows.

There are 700 married females in the Zanzibar population of 2,100 Khojas. Thirty years ago, there were here only 165 families and 26 married women, showing that the members of this sect have multiplied sixfold in the last 30 years and the married or settled part have increased at a still greater ratio. This increase has been of late entirely owing to the arrival of emigrants from Kutch... The amount raised by the Khojas for religious purposes and remitted to the Aga Khan in Bombay was Rs 45,000 this year. Every year the number of Khoja pilgrims to Karbala increases. This season about 150 set out at the beginning of the south-west monsoon...<sup>8)</sup>

From these comments we can conclude that the Muslim Indians were accompanied by their wives and children from Kutch and were more likely to settle in this region than the Hindu immigrants, even at this early stage of immigration.

Next let us look at another Muslim immigrant group, the Bohra. According to the British consul, the Bohra had migrated chiefly from Surat until fifty years before, after which time the majority had originated from Kutch. Furthermore, the consul notes that the Bohra of Zanzibar Island were controlled by elderly leaders called Mullas, and that they were not rigidly organized in the way the Khojas were. It is also noted that the Bohras owned their own mosques and graveyards.

It was the opinion of the British consul that the Memom and other Sunni Muslim immigrants were not as influential as the Shi'a Muslims, as the total population was not more than 250.

Next I will introduce a more detailed document that discusses the castes of the Hindu immigrants in Zanzibar and their population. This report was written by the British acting consul in Zanzibar in the year 1874 (Table 2)<sup>9)</sup>.

According to this report, the largest Hindu group was the Bhatia. Richard Burton, an explorer who visited Zanzibar in the 1850s, refers to the Bhatia in his journal and discusses their lifestyle in detail. The following is an excerpt.

The Bhattia at Zanzibar is a visitor, not a colonist; he begins life before his teens, and after an expatriation of 9 to 12 years, he goes home to become a householder... Not a Hindu woman is found upon the Island; all the Banyans (Hindu Indians) leave their wives at home, and the consequences are certain peccadilloes, for which they must pay liberally. Arab women prefer them because they have light complexions; they are generous in giving jewels, and they do not indulge in four wives. Most of them, however, especially those settled on the Coast, keep handsome slave-girls, and as might be expected where illegitimates cannot be acknowledged, they labour under the imputation of habitual infanticide...

Bhattias are forbidden by their Dharma (caste-duty) to sell animals, yet, with the usual contradiction of their creed, all are inveterate slave-dealers... These Hindus lead a simple life, active only in pursuit of gain... These Banyans will buy up the entire cargoes of American and Hamburg ships... Banyan corpses are burnt at a place about two miles behind the town... When a Bhattia dies without relatives on the Island, a committee of his fellow caste-men meets by the order of H. B. Majesty's Consul; takes cognizance of his capital, active and passive; and, after settling his liabilities, remits by bill the surplus to his relatives in India... The following is a list of the other Hindu castes to be found at Zanzibar: Brahman, Khattri, Wani, Lohar. A few Parsees (Zoroastrians) from Bombay visited Zanzibar, two were carpenters, and the third was a watchmaker, ... (Burton 1872: 329-335).

Burton's journal paints a picture of the unstable life of Hindu merchants separated from their families. This problem continued until the first Hindu woman set foot on Zanzibar Island in the beginning of the 1880s<sup>10</sup>. Though the population was small, Burton notes the existence of Brahmins, the Hindu priest caste, the Katri, dye makers, and the Lohar, blacksmiths, which were not listed in Table 2.

Finally, we should pay enough attention to the Bhatia, whose numbers were far fewer than those of the Muslims but who were successful in securing the most advantageous position in the Zanzibar economy. It has already been mentioned that the privileged position of the Bhatia had been well established in Omani Muscat. This position was carried over from the days of the Portuguese, when Hindu merchants were accorded preferential treatment. The Bhatia were beneficial to the Omani Sultan as well, because Indian merchants never contested the monarchy in any way. In Zanzibar as well, the Sultan of Oman continued to maintain and expand the relationship with the Bhatia. The memoirs of the slave merchant Tippu Tip quoted earlier are proof of this relationship. There are numerous other records, such as consulate reports and travelogues, that attest to this relationship. The fact that the Bhatia, the commercial capitalists of Zanzibar, were major investors in the caravans that travelled into the interior has been repeatedly stressed in this paper. But what role did they play in the slave trade? How were the other Indian communities involved? I will proceed to discuss these issues in the next section.

## INDIAN MERCHANTS AND THE SLAVE TRADE IN EAST AFRICA

### Indians and the slave trade

In 1836, the Rao (ruler) of Kutch prohibited the importation of African slaves in response to pressures from the British Government. From that year, captains who imported slaves illegally were indicted immediately in a summary court<sup>11</sup>). As shown by the above-mentioned travelogue of a British explorer, African slaves were traded at the port of Mandvi until that time. According to existing records, 200 African slaves were imported annually<sup>12</sup>). Although the Rao's decree banned the import of slaves to Kutch territory, no special reference was made to the slave trade undertaken by the Indian immigrants in East Africa who originated from Kutch. How did the Indians in East Africa come to be prohibited from engaging in the slave trade? The process involved complications due to the unique legal status of the Indian immigrants in East Africa, who were considered "protectorates but not subjects of Britain." In other words, when the British prohibited slavery in colonial India in 1843, the measure was applicable to "British subjects" but did not legally bind British protectorates living in Kutch. The British took steps to urge the Sultan of Zanzibar to prohibit the slave trade between his subjects and Indians. The Indian immigrants resisted these efforts by acquiring Zanzibar citizenship under the "Naturalization Law" established in 1847 (Hollingsworth 1960: 32), and this was effective because the slave trade remained legal within the Sultan's territories. Ultimately, the Indians were totally prohibited from engaging in slave trade or possessing slaves by the British Government in 1859, irrespective of their legal status<sup>13</sup>). The problem was how to enforce this law. The difficulties experienced by the British Consulate are vividly reflected in the following consular report dated February 11, 1860<sup>14</sup>).

Having heard that Kanoo Munjee had been much engaged in slave dealing, and that he had been imprisoned by the late Lieutenant-Colonel Hamerton for slave transactions, I have frequently warned him of the heavy penalties he would incur if he ever again engaged in the purchase or sale of slaves. A few days ago I visited a plantation belonging to Kanoo Munjee, situated about six miles from the town of Zanzibar, and having now acquired the African language spoken by the slaves here, I entered into conversation with several Africans I met, and discovered that they were slaves of Kanoo Munjee, two of them having been purchased by him only two months ago from an Arab, who had just brought them to Zanzibar, and seven slaves, viz., three females, three males, and one young boy, having been brought to Zanzibar from the coast of Africa by Kanoo Munjee about eight months ago; and others had been purchased in their own country in the interior of Africa by an agent for the purpose by Kanoo Munjee. On my return home, I caused Kanoo Munjee to be arrested, and the slaves found in his possession to be brought to the British Consulate. I discovered 69 slaves...

Thus, in addition to the loss of the price of the 69 slaves, Kanoo Munjee has had

to pay a considerable sum for their support... besides, confined him in the fort, and informed him that he will be sent out of the Zanzibar dominions by the first buggalow leaving for India...

I find that in the year 1843 His Highness the late Imaum, at the request of the Right Hon. the Governor General of India, issued a proclamation, warning all his subjects against selling slaves to any native of India, and also forbidding them to buy slaves from any native of India...

Thus confronted with the continuing slave trade by the Indian British subjects, the consul decided to issue a notice as follows:

### Notice

#### To all British subjects residing in the Zanzibar Dominions.

Whereas by a proclamation issued seventeen years ago, His Highness the late Sultan Sayid Said bin Sultan expressly forbids all his subjects to sell any slaves to any natives of India... Nevertheless, Banians and other natives of India residing in the Zanzibar dominions have continued to buy and sell slaves up to the present time.

I do hereby give notice, that if any slaves are found in the possession of any native of India, after the expiration of one month from the present date, he will be dealt with as the law directs.

All natives of India who shall bring a slave to Zanzibar from the coast of Africa, or from any other country... will be fined one hundred dollars for each offense, and sent as a prisoner to Bombay.

The report states that Indians in Zanzibar had been prohibited from possessing or trading slaves since 1843. However, the situation remained the same seventeen years later. The exasperated consul decided to resort to punitive action against Kanoo Munjee and issued the notice.

Indians were given one month to liberate slaves in their possession. The British Consul waited patiently, but not a single Indian obeyed the decree. As a result, the infuriated consul indicted the customhouse manager, who owned over 400 slaves, and incarcerated him according to the stipulations of the notice.

This forceful measure seems to have had immediate effect. The Consul reports that 3,287 men and women slaves were liberated immediately, of which 2,087 had been working in clove plantations. The remaining 1,200 were domestic slaves working in Stone Town.

It seemed as though the liberalization of slaves owned by Indians in Zanzibar would proceed smoothly. However, no sooner had the Consul left Zanzibar because of illness, than the situation reverted right back to the previous state because of lax surveillance. Moreover, the Indians living in ports along the coastal regions of East Africa remained a problem for the British authorities.

The coastal Indian traders were more deeply involved than anyone else in the slave trade, even though they never directly organized or dispatched slave caravans

into the interior. Surveys were conducted by the Consulate, and it is from these reports that the reality of the slave trade conducted by the Indian traders comes to light. In the next section I will present details about the castes mainly involved in the slave trade and about the mechanism of their involvement.

### **The reality of the Indian slave trade**

Towards the end of 1872, the British Government dispatched a special envoy to conduct a survey of the coastal regions over a period of several months. The report of that investigation confirmed the following facts<sup>15</sup>).

1. The major accomplice of the slave trade is the customhouse manager and his representatives, who are able to grasp how many slaves are exported from each port. They support the slave traders by withholding information and concealing facts about slave trading.
2. It is not at all rare for Indian immigrants, who are British subjects, to be directly involved in the slave trade.
3. Because the investment activities of Indian merchants are broad and diverse, it is difficult to differentiate the financing of the slave trade from other types of investment.
4. Hindu merchants such as the Bhatia and Vania are less likely to be involved in slave trade than their Muslim counterparts, but they do not have a clean slate.

The report shows that the Indian merchants, both Hindu and Muslim, were involved in the slave trade in many ways. The Indians were classified into three groups according to their method of involvement<sup>16</sup>).

1. Indian customs officers who collected customs duties derived from the slave trade.
2. Wealthy Indian merchants who financed slave caravans.
3. The less wealthy, petty merchant class who purchased and then resold slaves kidnapped by Africans from the interior regions near the coast.

The investigator concludes that, although the activities of the first two groups were being effectively curtailed, the third group of Indian slave traders required continued attention.

The above categorization of Indian merchants illustrates that amount of capital rather than caste or community determined the depth of commitment. In Zanzibar, however, economic power coincided with caste, and so we can correctly posit that the Hindu merchants, particularly the Bhatias, comprised group 1, the Muslim merchants comprised group 3, and the wealthy Indians from both communities comprised group 2.

The British launched various efforts to stop slavery among the Indian

merchants. Contemporary correspondence and records reveal the fact that Indian merchants suspected of illegalities were tried in consular courts, fined, and forced to liberate slaves. But even these measures failed to eradicate the slave trade by Indian merchants. Ultimately, the British Government concluded that in order to suppress the slave trade by the Indian merchants, a total ban would have to be enforced among the Arabs and Swahilis as well. It was the British Consul John Kirk who was delegated to enforce that decision.

### **Closure of the slave market**

John Kirk formally assumed the position of British Consul in Zanzibar in 1873. I emphasize the term "formally" because Kirk had been serving as Acting Consul since 1868.

John Kirk started his career as a surgeon and participated in the Crimean War as a military doctor. After the war, he participated in Livingstone's Zambezi expedition, experiencing Africa for the first time. A natural scientist as well as a physician, Kirk became totally enamored by Africa. He returned as a doctor for the British Consulate in Zanzibar, little aware that he would eventually be appointed to the post of British Consul and serve for fourteen years as the chief administrator of Zanzibar.

In the year 1873, when Kirk assumed the position of British Consul, Britain's anti-slavery campaign was facing a crisis, due to the sudden expansion of the slave trade. The reasons for that expansion were twofold. The first was a cholera epidemic in 1870, which reduced the slave population substantially and spurred the demand for replacement. The second reason was the hurricane that swept over Zanzibar in 1872. It was a totally unexpected event, because Zanzibar did not lie on the usual path of hurricanes. The winds devastated the clove trees, and the need for abundant labor to restore the plantations became another factor in spurring the slave trade. During the 1870s, the slave trade in East Africa faced the gravest situation in its history.

Kirk negotiated with Sultan Barghash, who had succeeded to the sultanate. Although he was on friendly terms with the British, Barghash became recalcitrant in the midst of this critical situation and refused to succumb to British pressure. In 1872, Barghash totally ignored the British mission which had been dispatched to Zanzibar to negotiate an anti-slavery treaty, and early the following year he retreated to Oman to avoid succumbing to the British demands.

The British Foreign Office commanded Kirk to proceed with the enforcement of the treaty and threatened military action if Barghash refused to comply. The resolution of this crisis was left to John Kirk. He visited the palace of the Sultan and submitted an ultimatum to Barghash. Barghash called in the American and German Consuls, asking them to put pressure on Britain, but he was refused. The Sultan next attempted to secure the cooperation of the French but again was rejected.

On June 5, 1873, totally isolated and without support, Barghash was forced to

sign a treaty abolishing the slave trade and closing the slave market (Bennett 1978: 97)<sup>17</sup>. It is this year that marks the end of the Indian immigrants' long history of involvement in the slave trade.

As I have shown, it was not the initial intention of the British to ban the slave trade in East Africa. The objective was to prohibit Indian merchants, who were subjects of the British empire, from engaging in the slave trade and possessing slaves. Only when it became clear that the policies were ineffective did the British begin to target the Arabs as well in their anti-slavery campaign. This was a blatant intervention in the internal affairs of Zanzibar. Moreover, the anti-slavery campaign was undertaken aggressively and accompanied by the threat of military action.

Past research has pointed out that the British promoted anti-slavery campaigns as a means to expand British rule. Thus the anti-slavery campaigns waged in East Africa were triggered by the Indian merchants who were deeply involved in the slave trade, and as such, had far reaching political implications. It was in 1890, when Zanzibar was subjugated and became a protectorate of the British Empire.

#### **EPILOGUE: THE CURRENT SITUATION OF INDIAN IMMIGRANTS IN TANZANIA**

I first visited Tanzania in 1979, shortly after the resolution of a border dispute between Tanzania and Uganda. The shops lining the main boulevard of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's largest city, were devoid of products as a result of the shortage of everything from groceries to gasoline. The ordinary citizens were surviving on meager rations of maize flour and cassava.

One day, when I was walking along the street with a friend, a brand new stationwagon passed us and then stopped. A young Indian man came out of the vehicle and started talking to me in fluent English. Although I forget what we talked about, it was my first encounter with an Indian in Tanzania, a country that I thought was populated by Africans. The sight of this wealthy Indian living in a poverty stricken country left a deep impression on me.

Currently there are about 30,000 Indians living in Tanzania. Immediately after independence there were 100,000 Indians, of whom nearly 20,000 were living in Zanzibar. There are less than 3,000 Indians remaining in Zanzibar today. What kind of community do these Indians form today, and how do they live? I will present a brief introduction on the status of the current Indian community in Tanzania in this section, based on the survey I conducted at Dar es Salaam, Tanzania between July and August 1988<sup>18</sup>.

When asked which generation of their ancestors had immigrated, 34% of the immigrants reported that their grandparents had done so, 23% said their parents, and 13% reported that the current generation had. Some of the grandparents who had immigrated to Tanzania arrived in the 1920s and 1930s.

When questioned about their religious affiliation, 66% of the respondents

reported that they were Muslims (Shī'a Muslims accounted for 50%, and Sunni 50%), 27% Hindu, 4% Christian, 2% Jain, and 1% Sikh. The Hindu population is relatively small because more Hindus left Tanzania after independence than Muslims.

When questioned about their language, 100% of the Hindus and more than 60% of the Muslims reported that they had grown up speaking Indian languages such as Gujarati, Kutch or Panjabi as a mother tongue. Most of the Indians also spoke Swahili and English, which are the national language of Tanzania and the official language, respectively. The number of Indians brought up strictly in Swahili is increasing, and most of these are Muslims of the Sunni sect. If language loss is correlated to the degree of assimilation, one can posit that the Muslims are more likely than Hindus to be assimilated into Tanzanian society, and that Sunni sect Muslims tend to be more easily assimilated than Shī'a Muslims.

The occupational breakdown of the respondents shows that 35% are engaged in some commercial occupation (trading, wholesale, retail, transportation), skilled workers and manufacturing workers account for 40% (mechanical technicians, tailors, goldsmiths, etc.), 20% are wage earners (secretaries, accountants) and 5% are engaged in special professions (doctors, lawyers, certified public accountants). The interesting point here is that the traditional relationship between caste and occupation is maintained persistently to this day. In particular, gold and silver handicraft shops, shoe shops and laundry shops are, without exception, owned by people of the Soni, Moti and Dhobi castes. The term "Dhobi" has even been borrowed into Swahili and is used as a common noun meaning laundry. Except for the few who have succeeded in entering new professions or have become diplomats, even the merchant and the skilled worker castes basically maintain their traditional occupations.

The life of an Indian revolves around the communal associations representing each community. The Hindus are organized around associations that represent individual castes, each with its own temple, while the Muslims are organized according to sects, each of which has its own mosque. The community members support each other through various activities in their daily and religious life. The Muslim groups within the Indian immigrant society are as exclusive as the Hindu castes, a tendency that is particularly strong among the Shī'a Khoja (Ismaili and Ithnasheri) and the Bohra and the Memon of the Sunni sect. The mechanisms of these communal organizations were reinforced by the policy of the Tanzanian Government, which provided land property for well defined organizations. This policy resulted in a unification of the members of previously fragmented low caste organizations. Today, this tendency has become even stronger and has resulted in what might be called a reorganization of the caste system. The organizations of untouchables, such as the laundry operators and shoe makers, have established mutual aid associations and are strengthening their bonds, but have yet to construct a community hall.

Regarding inter-caste relationships, although our observations might be rather

superfluous, it was nevertheless our impression that social discrimination between castes is slowly disappearing. This impression was reinforced when a Brahmin complained to us that recently untouchables were presiding over funerals as priests. In fact, some people belonging to the untouchable caste are serving in important positions in the Hindu Council, a central organization. It will be most interesting to see how the current restructuring of castes influences inter-caste relationships in the future.

In the process of this research, I was once again greatly surprised at the enormous wealth and economic power of the Indians. The Indians who remained in Tanzania after independence were from relatively low income groups. Despite this fact, the difference between their living standard and the Africans' is glaringly apparent. The sight of the Indian youth whom I happened to see emerging from a new stationwagon on my first visit to Tanzania lives on in my mind.

### NOTES

- 1) FO84/1344, Imports at the Zanzibar Customs House during the twelve months ending the 23 Aug., 1868, Public Record Office, London, pp. 125-26.
- 2) FO84/1344, Zanzibar Customs Tariff, 1870, p. 120.
- 3) *Samachar*, Silver Jubilee Number, 1929.
- 4) The following excerpt from the article on the Bhatias in *Zanzibar Gazette*, 30/11/1898, illustrates the general pattern of the life of an immigrant:  
 "The merchants who migrated to seek new opportunities generally embarked on Dhow sailships from Mandvi Port in Kutch and arrived at Zanzibar. They were usually in their teens. First they would work for a certain period as apprentices in long established trading houses. Later, they would own their own shops, and build the foundation from which they would later become representatives of trading houses. They would procure goods from large trading houses on credit, and launch their careers. Or they would climb up the organizational ladder by starting out as apprentices and eventually becoming managers or partners. Those who were successful would return to their homeland, marry, and develop new commercial routes."
- 5) *Samachar*, 1929.
- 6) *Administration Report for the Year 1913*, Zanzibar Government, 1913, p. 13; *Report on the Census of the Population of Zanzibar, 1958*, Zanzibar Government, 1960, p. 18.
- 7) FO84/1344, Annex: No. 1-2, 1870, pp. 129-132.
- 8) FO84/1344, Zanzibar Customs Tariff, 1870, p. 129.
- 9) *Selections from the Records of the Government of India*, V/23/25, Appendix, 1874, p.ii. (kept at the India Office Library, London). The author had an opportunity to investigate the Indian community in Tanzania in 1988. The present situation in Tanzania suggests that goldsmiths belong to the Soni caste, barbers to the Nāi caste of the Limbachia group, tailors to the Bhoiraj or Vanza castes, blacksmiths to the Luhar caste, and carpenters to the Gujar Sutar caste. Of these only the barbers, who are members of the Nāi caste, can be classified as untouchable (Koga 1991: 71-145).
- 10) *Samachar*, 1929.
- 11) FO881/2314, Slave-dealing and Slave-holding of Kutches in Zanzibar, 1860, p. 6.
- 12) *Selections*, V/23/212, 1837, p. 215.

- 13) FO84/1391, *The Banians of Zanzibar & The Slave Trade*, May 17, 1873 p. 52.
- 14) FO881/2314, *Slave-dealing and Slave-holding*, 1860, pp. 6–8.
- 15) FO84/1391, Memo; regarding Banians or Natives of India in East Africa, 31/3/1873, pp. 46–50.
- 16) FO84/1398, *On Board Dhow off Rufiji Delta*, 2/3/1874, pp. 53–4.
- 17) FO881/2270, *Correspondence respecting Sir Bartle Frere's Mission to the East Coast of Africa*, (1872–3), 1873.
- 18) The survey was a part of the research project, "Comprehensive Research into the Indian Immigrant Society in the Former British Colonies" (project leader, Professor Masanori Koga of Hitotsubashi University), which was funded by a Grant-in-Aid for the Scientific Research of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture. There were five members in the team, including myself. Questionnaire surveys were conducted in each community (the chairmen of the communities were interviewed), and individuals were interviewed as well (thirty-eight heads of households and thirty family members were interviewed) (Koga 1991: 71–145).

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- a. Public Record Office, London  
FO 84/1344, FO 84/1391, FO 84/1398, FO 881/2270, FO 881/2314.
- b. India Office Library, London  
*Selections from the Records of the Government of India*, V/23/25, V/23/212.
- c. Zanzibar National Archives, Zanzibar  
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