

PATEL FAMILY

An Avichal Heritage Initiative
10-12th January 2020

Tracing Ro(u)tes
in partnership with The Kala Chaupal Trust

Women
in Migration

**AN ARCHIVE
AT RHODESIA
HOUSE**

INDIAN WOMEN IN SOUTHERN AFRICA DURING 1910-1940s

The socio-political-economic times when Chanchalben first moved to Rhodesia, the now Zimbabwe were changing rapidly influenced by multiple external factors. She was at the time among only 150-200 women of Indian origin in British Central Africa/Rhodesia.

While she persevered in the conservative role of wife and mother it is important to lay cognisance to her strength of spirit in the changing landscapes and situations of both India and Africa.

'The migration of Indians to the various countries of Southern Africa took place at different times, for different reasons along different routes.

Gradually, countries in the region experienced the settlement of Indians who contributed extensively in diverse areas of activity in their adopted homes.

Indian women, along with their menfolk, actively participated in various local sectors that helped them establish a firm footing in the new countries.

Even during the early period in South Africa, Indian women took active part in politics aside from their involvement in the economic sector.'

WOMEN OF INDIAN DESCENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

discouraged by male members of their community, who saw it as derogatory to their manhood if they sacrificed their women in resisting a law that was directed only against men (Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, Ahmedabad: Navjeevan Press, 1961, p11).

During the Second Satyagraha Campaign of 1913, Indian women from various religions, sects and linguistic groups played a pivotal role in supporting their men against the Searle Judgment, which invalidated all non-Christian marriages, that is, all Hindu, Muslim and Zoroastrian marriages were declared null and void (Rajab, 2010, *ibid*). This meant that most married Indian women in South Africa were reduced to the status of concubines whilst their progeny were classified as illegitimate and deprived of all rights of inheritance, property, assets and legal claims. On 23 September 1913, sixteen women were arrested, tried and sentenced to three months imprisonment with hard labour in Pietermaritzburg Jail. According to Wells (*ibid*), as women were acting in defence of their religion and domestic role, their participation was condoned and even encouraged. Overall, the campaign of passive resistance was a qualified success, as it eased the most irksome restrictions on Indian mobility and succeeded in having the offending ruling overturned.

Until the late 1930s, Indian women were still largely tradition bound. However, by the beginning of the 1940s, confronted by changing socioeconomic conditions, the first signs of political activity amongst a small group of educated and politically conscious individuals appeared. In this period, a large number of working-class households depended on female breadwinners due to high male unemployment. This provided a stimulus and platform for Indian women to become politically motivated and challenged the myth of them being just "docile" and "passive". Between June 1946 and May 1947, over 1700 individuals, 20-25 years of age, of whom 297 were women, served jail sentences some as many as four times (Surendra Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy: The Natal Indian Congress 1894-*

Even though Indian women played an important role in communal and social life, much of their work in the household and family was not recognised. Mahatma Gandhi brought about a dramatic change in the role and status of Indian women in both South Africa and India, when at his bidding they came out in large numbers to play a part in the freedom struggle of their respective countries.



In memory of
Chanchalben Kishorbhai Patel (1907 – 1992)

THE MATRIARCH OF THE
SOMABHAI MOOLJIBHAI PATEL FAMILY

EARLY LIFE
(1907-1923)

Born in Karamsad, Gujarat to Kishorbhai Vallavbhai Patel and to Arkhaben in a family with four brothers and two sisters, Chanchalben was married at an early age of only 16 yrs.

She was the second wife to Somabhai Mooljibhai Patel, who had recently returned to Dharmaj, Gujarat from Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in February 1923. It is at a time between the day of his arrival and late June that he married Chanchalben.



Chanchalben Patel

સોના જેઉં સાસરું પણ પિયર જેઉં નહીં
Grooms house may be of gold, but her
parent's home was priceless.



Somabhai Mooljibhai Patel

ડાળ બગડે તો દિવસ બગડે, અથાણું
બગડે તો વરસ બગડે, અને બાઈમાણ
બગડે તો ભવ બગડે

If curry is spoilt, the day is
spoilt, if pickle is spoilt the
entire year is spoilt, and if the
wife is spoilt, the entire life is
spoilt.

FACT FINDING- PASSPORTS

CHANGING FACES OF THE TWO COUNTRIES- INDIA & ZIMBABWE



A PAPER TRAIL TO ESTABLISH CHANCHALBEN'S DATE OF MARRIAGE

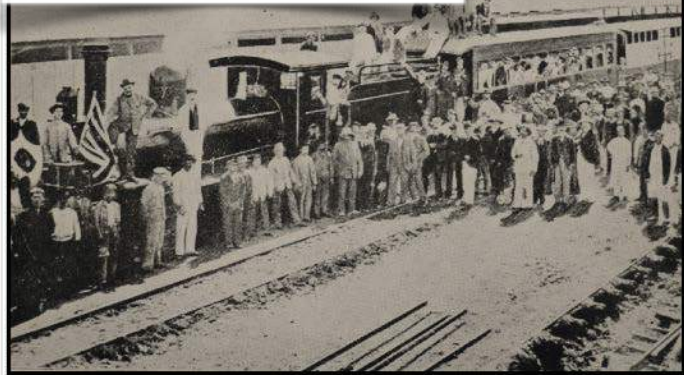
Chanchalben's first passport was issued on 16 July 1923 at Bombay, India under the authority of Government of Bombay. On the bearers page she is identified as "Chanchalben wife of Somabhai Muljibhai Patel", a British Subject by birth, wife of a British Subject. Entry in Somabhai's passport dated 24 July 1923 by Government of Bombay states "Travelling to Southern Rhodesia, via Beira".

While the specific matrimonial date has been lost, it can be confidently deduced that the wedding occurred between the months of March and June 1923.

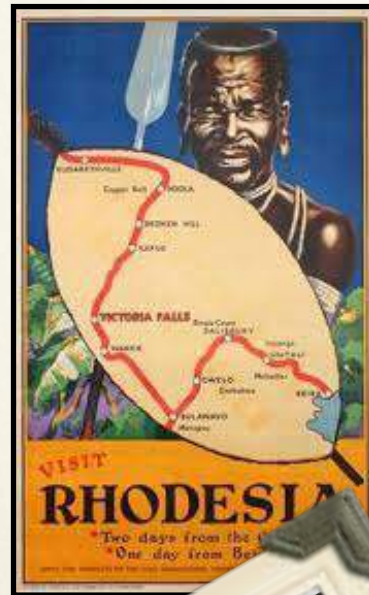
INDIA TO SOUTHERN AFRICA

A JOURNEY BEGINS TO FIND A NEW HOME

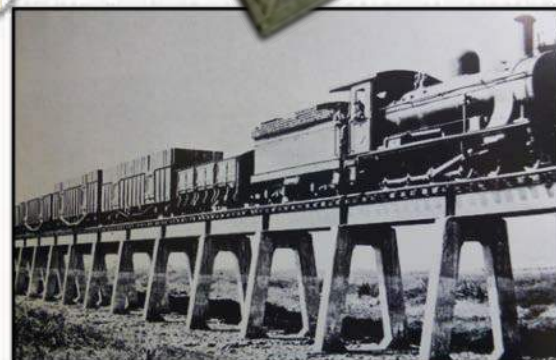
1923



Courtesy of the National Archives of Zimbabwe - the first train at Beira at the opening of the standard gauge on the Beira and Mashonaland Railway - 1 August 1900.



JOURNAL ARTICLE
Beira, Mozambique
Gateway to Central Africa
URL = {<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2561399>},
author = {William A. Hance and Irene S. Van Dongen},
journal = {Annals of the Association of American Geographers},
publisher = {[Association of American Geographers, Taylor & Francis, Ltd.]},
title = {Beira, Mozambique Gateway to Central Africa},
volume = {47},
year = {1957}



Courtesy of Railways of Zimbabwe - raised viaduct on the Pungwe River flats, circa 1930

‘Soon after their marriage, Somabhai Patel and his newly wedded wife Chanchalben departed together for Southern Rhodesia in late July by ship from Bombay to Beira followed by train, reaching Salisbury (now Harare) at end of August 1923. Bhimjee Naik as usual would have an agent waiting to meet the ship to assist people of Indian origin with local accommodation and onward travel.

While for Somabhai this was his third return voyage, for Chanchalben, this journey must have been both awe inspiring as well as heart wrenching. Not knowing when she would next meet her kins, her first crossing of the Indian Ocean - of what was to turn out to be many over the course of the next several decades- meant arriving in a world far removed from her growing years.’



INSTRUCTIONS FOR MAKING TEA

Go and fetch wood
Hamba tata lo-nkuni.

Put coal in the stove
Faga malahle lapa lo stofu.

Kindle the fire at 6.30 a.m.
Basa lo-mlilo skati ka sikis teti ekuseni.

Boil the water
Bilisa lo manzi.

The water is boiling now
Lo manzi ena bila manje.

Very well then, make tea—
Lungile, enza lo ti.

Put the teapot on the tray
Bega lo tipoti lapa lo treyi.

Avocado
evokadapeya

Tomato
Tamatisi

Potatoes
Mazam

FANAGALO

(A NEW LANGUAGE & A NEW LIFE)

Although in unfamiliar surroundings with few people who could speak her own language, she had to quickly learn “Chi-Lapa-Lapa”, a language officially known as “Fanagalo”. This locally used pidgin language, considered the lingua-franca of Southern Africa combining words from English and local Bantu languages such as Shona is necessary to enable her to communicate with the indigenous population and fully function in her new surroundings. She infact became fluent in this language to the extent that she taught her many children and grandchildren to speak it over the course of the next decades.

FACTSHEET

In the Republic of South Africa there are nine written languages which are widely used.

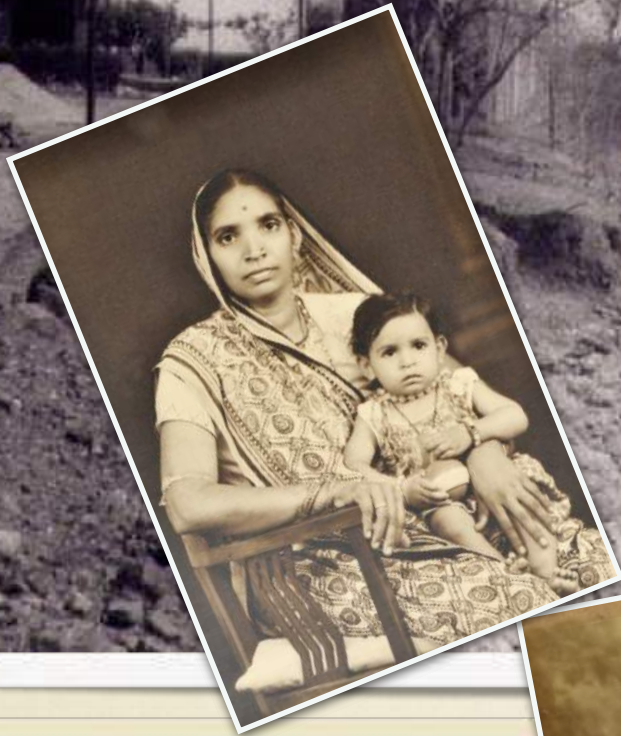
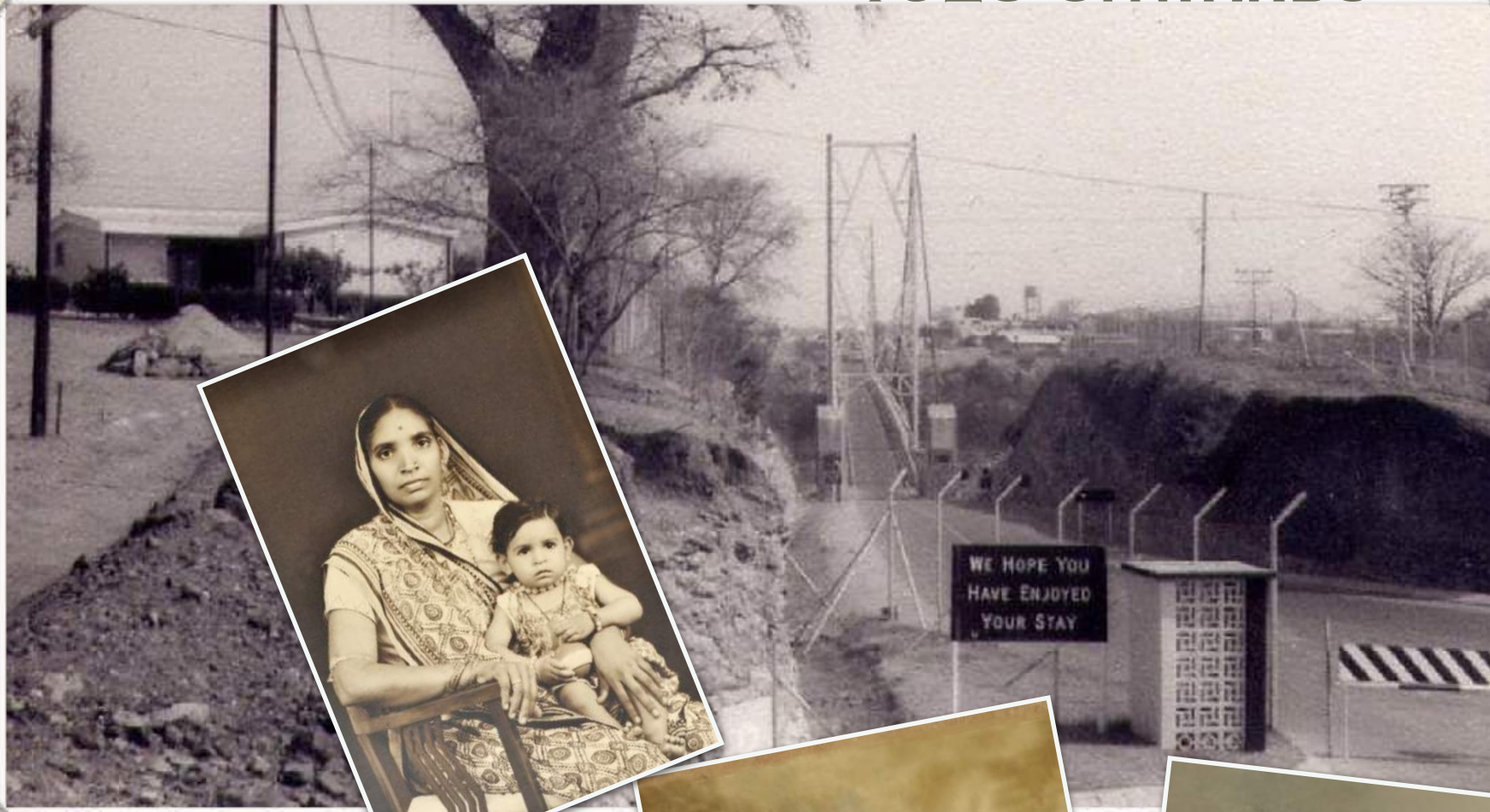
Fanagalo is, for all practical purposes, the only "communication" bridge between these numerous and diverse languages.

Fanagalo is the lingua franca of Southern Africa. As such it is used every day by hundreds of thousands of Whites and Bantu.

It has, in fact, been spoken since the turn of the century.

LIFE IN RHODESIA- AT HOME

1923 ONWARDS



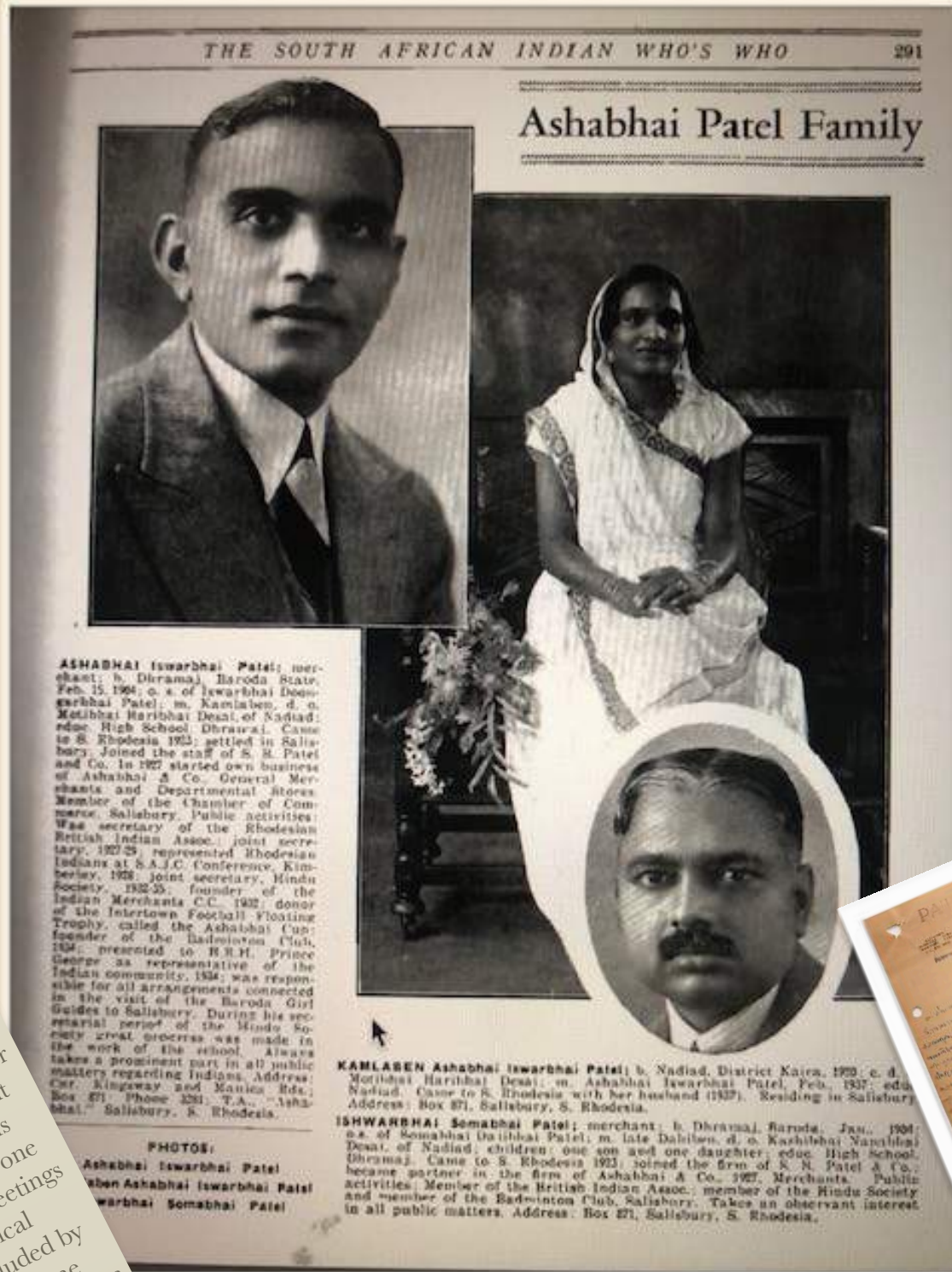
Chanchalben during her first decade in Rhodesia had also immersed herself in the activities of the growing local Indian community and the duties and tasks involved in creating and running a new household and in raising the first two of her eight children: Lalita and Vimala. She experienced her first tragedy when she lost her first son (3rd child) to disease around 1929 or early 1930. Her early struggles would have been somewhat ameliorated with the formation of the Hindu Society of Salisbury in 1926 in which she was an active member.

LIFE IN RHODESIA- COMMUNITY

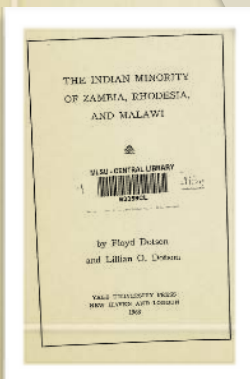
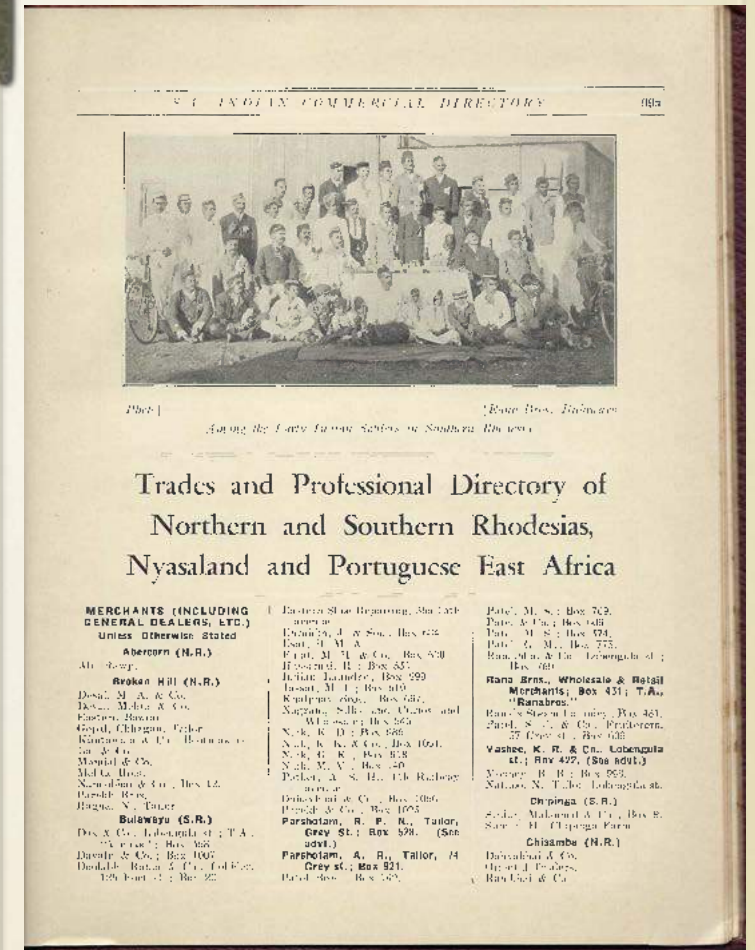
In those days, in order to create a life and culture they were familiar with, they had to grow, harvest, clean all their own Indian groceries and ensure there were fresh hot meals at each time of day. The home was always full of visitors that Somabhai would bring from the station to ensure that the Indians who arrived, had the support to settle and thrive, while establishing his own business.

THE HINDOO SOCIETY

The degree of unity achieved in the Hindu community, considering the depth and pervasiveness of caste in traditional Indian society and culture. In all of the settlements large enough to support an Indian (i.e. Hindu) Association, a community hall has been built from which one is categorically excluded. For such social events as a marriage or the entertainment of important public guests from India, it is taken for granted that everyone will be invited. In public meetings called to discuss political questions, no one is excluded by caste or religion, and no one hesitates to have his say because of his caste.



1923 ONWARDS



ENTREPRENEURS OF RHODESIA & THEIR WIVES

BALUBHAI PATEL WAS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SOMABHAI UNDER THE TRADE NAME
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358 THE SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN WHO'S WHO

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family tree of the Chh... Ranjit Makkani - Wikipe... urvakunji dharmaj - Go... scnc.ukzn.ac.za/

THE SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN WHO'S WHO

BHULABHAI & CO.

BHULABHAI & CO.

HAVERBHAI PREMBHAI PATEL, merchant; b. Varad, dist. Surat, Sept. 14, 1903; s. of Prembhai Kunverji Patel; m. Ambaben, 4th d. of Karabhai Bhagabhai Patel; four s., one d.; educ. Varad a Sarvajanik High School, Surat. Came to Southern Rhodesia in 1924, settled in Salisbury. Started a business. Joined the firm of Morarji Bhikkubhai & Co. in 1930. A few years afterwards added wholes. In 1936, with partner, founded City Suit Case Manufacturing Co., which was formally opened by then Mayor of Salisbury. Trading in the firm name of Bhulabhai & Co. Public activities: Treas. of the Hindu Society member of the Rhodesian British Indian Assocn.; member of the Badminton Hindu Club. Takes a keen interest in all Indian public affairs. Took part in the National Non-European movement in Surat, 1920. Left Government School, responding to call to leave Government Schools, taught in National School for short while. Address: P.O. Box 976, Phones 2369, 3064, Tel. ad., "Bhulabhai," Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. His wife, Ambaben Patel.

BHULABHAI BHAVANBHAI PATEL, merchant; b. Orgam, dist. Surat, 1905; 3rd s. of Bhavanbhai Naranji Patel; m. Gangaben, d. of Khushabhai Mawjee Patel, of Sankri; one s.; educ. Orgam a Lokmanya Rastriya Patsala, Surat. Came to Southern Rhodesia, 1923. Joined the staff of Morarji Bhikkubhai & Co. Started own business under the name of Bhulabhai & Co., 1930. Founded the City Suitcase Co., 1936. A keen industrialist. Public activities: Member of the Hindu Society, Salisbury member of the Rhodesian Indian Assocn.; member of the Badminton Hindu Club, Salisbury. An active social worker in the welfare of the Indian community. Active non-co-operationist in the National movement in Surat, 1920-21. Left Government School in response to the National call, taught in national school, a brief period. Address: P.O. Box 976, Phones 2369, 3064, Tel. ad., "Bhulabhai," Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN WHO'S WHO 359

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INDIA-AFRICA JOURNEYS

MANY OCEAN CROSSINGS OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL DECADES



Kampala at Bombay (Mumbai) painted by artist Gordon Frickers, Marine paintings, British India Steam Navigation Company



Kampala British India Line

Built: 1947 by A Stephen & Sons, Glasgow, Scotland

Gross tons: 10304

Length: 507ft (155m)

Width: 66ft (20m)

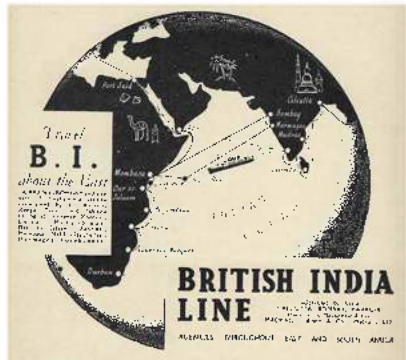
Depth: 27ft (8m)

Speed: 16kn **Power:** 9700 shp **Propulsion:** Steam turbines twin

screw **Passengers:** 60

First 180 Second 825

Third **End of service:** Scrapped 1971



Built: 1948 by A Stephen & Sons, Glasgow, Scotland **Gross tons:** 10294

Length: 507ft (155m) **Width:** 66ft (20m) **Depth:** 27ft (8m) **Speed:** 16kn

Power: 9700 shp **Propulsion:** Steam turbines twin screw **Passengers:** 60

First 180 Second 825 Third **End of service:** Sold 1976



BUILDING A LIFE AT RHODESIA HOUSE, DHARMAJ (CIRCA-1930)



Fakirbhai, the eldest of four brothers who played a seminal role in the upbringing of Somabhai's daughters at Dharmaj, Gujarat India and oversaw the building of Rhodesia House (circa 1930)

"The Kumusha Cafe is a tribute to Chanchalben and to Gujarati women overall in how they persevere in the kitchen to keep their families healthy and happy despite circumstances."- Alpita Patel- Rhodesi



Chanchalben and Somabhai returned to India in 1930 to take care of the education of their two daughters. The young girls had been left behind in India under the guardianship of Somabhai's elder brother Fakirbhai, who lived in Dharmaj.

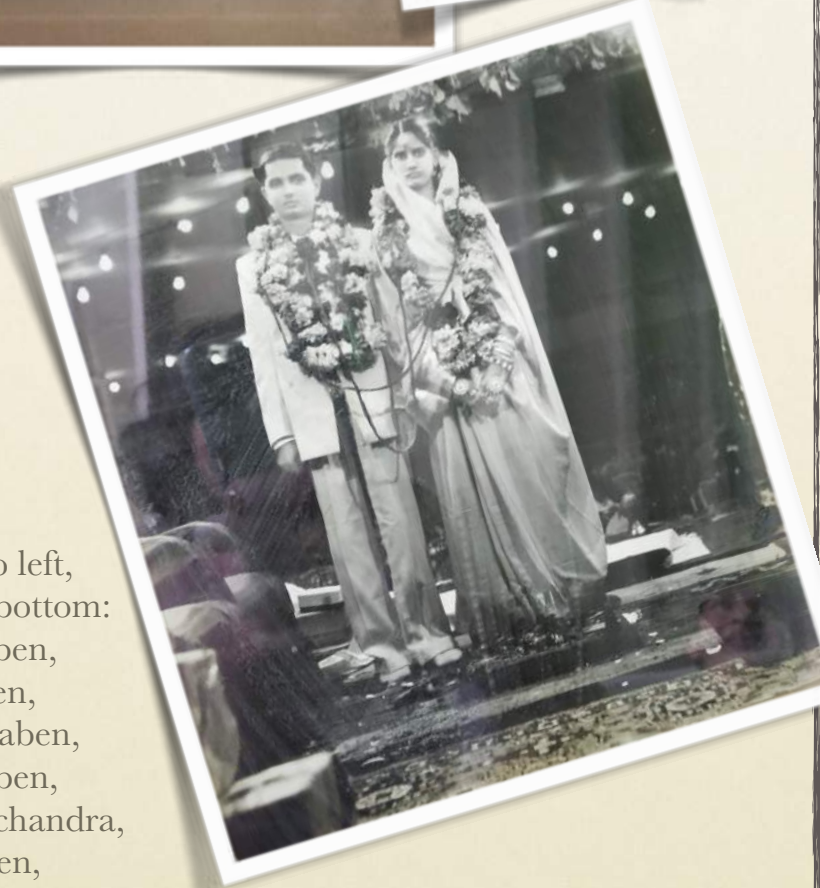
In September 1938, Lalita and Vimala were reunited with their parents, and for the first time met their younger siblings Prabha (1932), Sushila (1934) and Sarla (1938), all born in Salisbury, Rhodesia. On this occasion, perhaps due to the start of World War II and to provide the five daughters with a modicum of parental support, Somabhai is known to have remained in Dharmaj for an extended period, departing in July 1941 for Southern Rhodesia.

"Rhodesia House", the new home built in Dharmaj with the support of Fakirbhai, was built from the economic prosperity seen with the expansion of Patel Bros & Co Ltd., Somabhai's business in partnership with his brother, Narharibhai and friend/elder Baboolalbhai (also from Dharmaj and migrated to S. Rhodesia in 1907) with one of his sons, Jasbhai.

Life at Rhodesia House was generally at a gentle pace, in keeping with the era, and revolved around school schedules, farms and temple life. Chanchalben, a phlegmatic person by nature, was very fond of horticulture (a trait passed down to her children and some grandchildren) and she ensured that an extensive planting of fruit trees (which still bear fruit today) and a seasonal vegetable patch within the gardens of Rhodesia House was undertaken. All kinds of seasonal local produce was grown for the house dinner table.

AND BUILDING HER CHILDREN'S LIVES

1930s-1950s



Right to left,
Top to bottom:
Sushilaben,
Lalitaben,
Hemlataben,
Prabhaben,
Jagdishchandra,
Vimlaben,
Vishnuprasad,
Sarlaben.

For the household at Rhodesia House in Dharmaj, the period from the late 1930s to mid-1940s were happy and joyful years.

A possible reason for Somabhai and Chanchalben's return to India in 1938 must have been to find suitable grooms for their daughters Lalita and Vimala.

Although both were still in their teenage years, as was the custom among the Patidar community of Charotar at that time, they married at a young age. Suitable grooms were found from nearby Sojitra: Dhirajlal for Lalita and Manulal (Doctor) for Vimala, who were then pursuing further studies at Baroda College. Manulal (also known as the "Doctor") had continued successfully with his medical studies after his wedding following which he first practiced at Baroda.

‘MINI DHARMAJ IN THE AFRICAN BUSH’

CHANCHALBEN’S SPIRIT WILL CONTINUE TO LIVE ON IN HER CHILDREN,
GRANDCHILDREN, GREAT GRANDCHILDREN AND RHODESIA HOUSE

**SHE IS FONDLY REMEMBERED AND REFERRED AS ‘BAA’ EVEN TODAY
AND AS THE MATRIARCH OF THE SOMABHAI MOOLJIBHAI PATEL FAMILY**



Chanchalben, with the assistance of local staff, set about recreating a mini-Dharmaj in the African bush for herself and the family. An extensive fruit and vegetable garden was laid, with fruit trees both local and those imported from India of mangoes, chikoo, black berries (kala jambun), apples, peas, oranges and avocado adorning her backyard.

It is during this period, in 1949, that Hemlata, the youngest of the eight children was born at Salisbury.

Throughout this period, Meyrick Park frequently hosted visits from the grandchildren then born and living in Northern Rhodesia.

For those grandchildren who spent their childhood holidays at Meyrick Park, this remains among the more vivid experiences to this day. The household was always teeming with visitors, either passing through Salisbury or arriving for many social occasions coinciding with special Hindu festivals.

Chanchalben returned to Rhodesia House with an ailing Somabhai in 1965 who subsequently passed away in 1967. She returned to stay in Zimbabwe with her youngest son Vishnuprasad for the remaining years.

Chanchalben watched and maintained her matriarchal duties over these less tumultuous years.

Chanchalben was to visit Dharmaj one last time, in 1990, to attend the wedding of her granddaughter, Heenaxi.

She breathed her last in 1992 in Harare, Zimbabwe at the age of 85 in the country she had now adopted as her own.

If the story stirred memories then.....

A complete book on the 100 years of the Chanchalben Family generations of Rhodesia House is available for purchase.

Please contact the front desk for the same.