invisible.

Jacqueline Leckie

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New Zealand's history of excluding Kiwi-Indians

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Forewords

It's really important to publish *Invisible: New Zealand's history of excluding Kiwi-Indians* at a time when Aotearoa is grappling with its history. Our schools have been mandated to teach the spectrum of New Zealand history from 2020, and the publication of this book will add to a rich tapestry, filling the gap in our collective knowledge of the experiences of Indian people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Indian history in this land is complex and has been captured in great detail by Dr Leckie, from the time of Cook in 1769 to the present. Interactions between Indian individuals, families and communities with broader society have paralleled colonial history. There are the familiar patterns of exclusion and exploitation we see in so many spheres of our society, whether at the picture theatre in Pukekohe — which has earned a place in New Zealand history for racial exclusion, and for segregating the races — to immigration policies that officially welcomed all 'members of the empire', while quietly emulating the White Australia policy behind the scenes.

I'm impressed with the way that Dr Leckie has uncovered hundreds of case studies of the lives of Indian people in New Zealand. The way they have adapted, prospered, pushed back and gone about building their lives and communities in a strange land is inspiring.

I thank the New Zealand Indian Central Association for the invitation to introduce and to mihi to *Invisible.* After the Covid-19 lockdown, the Human Rights Commission launched the Voice of Racism campaign, which has, in a small way, captured the experiences of Indian New Zealanders. Being asked 'but where are

you are *really* from?' is an example of repetitive questioning in the book that we captured in the campaign. It is my sincere hope that *Invisible* takes pride of place on the nation's bookshelves and in schools. I appreciate the role it will have in educating our people about racism and the real impacts it has on the lives of Indian New Zealanders. It should motivate us all to stand up to racism, the one aspect of New Zealand history we must banish to the past. In Aotearoa, diversity is our strength.

Meng Foon
Race Relations Commissioner
May 2021

Invisible: New Zealand's history of excluding Kiwi-Indians is an exciting and galvanising book by Dr Jacqueline Leckie. It introduces readers to the hardships faced by Indians upon their arrival in Aotearoa New Zealand because of the colour of their skin and the way they spoke.

This book was instigated by the presentation of a Grievance Report by Naginbhai G. Patel of Wellington to the 79th NZICA Annual General Meeting, sixteen years ago, on 9 April 2005. It is from the revelations presented in that report that *Invisible* has been developed and published.

Dr Leckie has brought to life the experiences of early Indian settlers and the challenges they faced as people of a different ethnic background to the majority of new migrants. Although the first signs of racism were directed to new ethnic groups very early in New Zealand's history, racism against Indians and Chinese carried on for a number of years. It took the will of some determined early settlers to recognise this and make a stand by raising issues of discrimination with government authorities. However, positive outcomes from this would take many years.

Racism is unfortunately still amongst us, and *Invisible* also describes the experiences of Indian communities through to today. This racism is not only directed against the first ethnic settlers of non-European descent, such as Indians and Chinese, but now it is also directed towards other ethnic groups.

I would like to thank the various NZICA members, including a special mention to NZICA General Secretary Manisha Morar, for assisting Dr Leckie by providing information and photographs.

This invaluable work informs readers about an aspect of our history that is often hidden, provides a glimpse of the difficult experiences of early settlers and explores what ethnic racism is like in Aotearoa New Zealand today.

Paul Patel QSM
President New Zealand Indian Central Association Inc
May 2021

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The Indian Diaspora and Exclusion

On 15 March 2019 a white terrorist stormed into the Al Noor mosque in Christchurch and opened fire with a deadly arsenal of weapons, just as around 350 Muslims were about to begin Friday prayers. He then attacked worshippers at the city's Linwood Islamic Centre. A total of 51 people were killed and 49 injured. Before committing these atrocities, the attacker had posted his intentions online, along with a venomous manifesto. He then live-streamed the first massacre.

Kiwis and people worldwide reacted to the news with a range of emotions from shock and anger to empathy and love for the victims. Yet the outpouring of grief was overlaid by a collective denial that such evil lurked within the nation. True, the murderer was an Australian immigrant, but how could he commit such terrorism in peaceful and tolerant Aotearoa? Indeed, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern declared that the person who committed the racist violence 'is not us'. When she said that Muslims 'have chosen to make New Zealand their home, and it is their home. They are us,' she could have been referring to any immigrants, including Indians. Ardern's condemnation of the unprecedented actions of 15 March may have been true in spirit, but that horror pointed to the presence of white extremism and tacit or unintentional support within Aotearoa. Within six months of the killings, the vice-chancellor of the University of Auckland allowed

the distribution of white supremacist literature on campus on the grounds of freedom of speech.

The Christchurch massacre raised questions about what it means to belong to an ethnic and/or religious minority in a country that has experienced a very long history of underlying prejudice and racism. After all, New Zealand is founded upon colonialism, predicated by white racial domination. The concept of the nation and nationalism — which assumes a 'singular shared identity within it and denies difference outside its borders'[1] — has remained problematic in New Zealand. The Treaty of Waitangi Te Tiriti o Waitangi, signed in 1840, ostensibly represented a partnership between indigenous Māori and the British Crown, but it did not eliminate racism towards Māori or material and cultural loss, deprivation and marginalisation. The passing of the 1975 Treaty of Waitangi Act instigated a process of reparations and ushered in recognition of New Zealand as a bicultural nation — but, again, this did not see an end to racism.[2]

In the aftermath of the Christchurch massacre, clinical psychologist Waikaremoana Waitoki asked, 'Why did our country have to hit rock bottom and lose 50[3] lives before we asked ourselves to look inwards at the institutions that enabled racism to thrive? Alongside that introspection, did we look at our own actions, or inactions, that foster racism, not only towards Māori, but to anyone who was not Christian and Caucasian?'[4] Or as lawyer and Te Tiriti specialist Moana Jackson stressed, '[T]he massacres in Christchurch and the ideologies of racism and white supremacy which underpinned them did not come about in some non-contextual vacuum. They are instead a manifestation of the particular history of colonisation and its founding presumption that the so-called white people in Europe were inherently superior to everyone else.'[5]

But what of the experiences of non-European migrants, specifically Indians and their descendants, in Aotearoa? Both within the negative history of colonisation and racism and, more positively, within the scope of the Treaty and biculturalism?[6]

This book adds to the story of migration and belonging from the perspective of Indians in Aotearoa New Zealand. It seeks to uncover

what Sir Anand Satyanand, a son of Indo-Fijian migrants and a former governor-general, termed the 'dark side of history'[7] and historian Sekhar Bandyopadhyay described as a 'story of exclusion' that renders Indians' existence 'invisible' in our narratives.[8] This disturbing history highlights negative and offensive white voices, but where possible it also reflects upon the pride of Kiwi-Indian migrants in their new homeland.[9] Unlike existing publications on Indians in New Zealand, this is not a history of celebration or integration, but speaks instead of stories of resilience, while also outlining the discrimination Kiwi-Indians have faced, so that all New Zealanders can recognise and address the nation's uncomfortable past. It can be tempting to dismiss past anti-Asian rhetoric as crackpot and belonging to a different time, but it is too easy to sweep this history under the carpet,[10] and to do the same with contemporary racism directed at Indians.

This book is not offered as a solution to persistent racism and discrimination. It does not address exclusion within Kiwi-Indian communities that may be based on caste, religion, status and gender, as well as economic exploitation.[11] The book does not explain 15 March 2019. Rather, it hopes to shed some light on how that tragedy could happen in a nation where the extreme outcome of racism 'is not us'. Aotearoa New Zealand's record of the exclusion of Kiwi-Indians is a legacy that challenges the nation's view of itself as inclusive and open.

Exclusion of Kiwi-Indians throughout New Zealand's history was sometimes overt, but more often less sensational and more insidious. The white New Zealand immigration policy was the first hurdle Indians faced when coming to New Zealand. Most Indians also encountered other forms of discrimination, often institutional,

or racism embedded in social interactions that was more subtle and nebulous. In many instances the prejudice was colour- and race-based; a whites-only discourse where Indians were discriminated against along with all 'non-whites', including Māori. There was also widespread expression of an anti-Asian sentiment, and in New Zealand this mostly affected Indians and Chinese.[12]

Most liberal Kiwis condemn racism directed towards Asians, but the dominant perception associates this racism with the history of the Chinese in Aotearoa. Chinese faced widespread prejudice during the second half of the nineteenth century. The Chinese Immigrants Act 1881 levied an entry (or 'poll') tax of £10 on each Chinese immigrant, while ships arriving in New Zealand were restricted to one Chinese passenger per 10 tons of cargo. In 1896 this 'tonnage' ratio was reduced to one passenger for 200 tons of cargo, but the poll tax was increased to £100 (estimated to be $20,000 today). The First Labour Government abolished these provisions in 1944.[13] This discrimination was publicly acknowledged on 2 February 2002, when Prime Minister Helen Clark formally apologised to Chinese New Zealanders for the tonnage restriction and poll tax imposed on Chinese arrivals to Aotearoa.

Meanwhile, the history of discriminatory practices explicitly directed at Indians in Aotearoa New Zealand — and moreover the complex history of Indian settlement here — has tended either to have been invisible or just not discussed. Such neglect may not be intentional but speaks to national histories written either through a white lens or with a bicultural framework of Māori and Pākehā applied; perhaps with Indians hidden in the footnotes or subsumed within the generalised past and contemporary discourse about 'Asiatics' or Asians in Aotearoa.

A key reason for this discomfort and ambivalence concerning the rights of Indians in Aotearoa is that, although considered a different race and colour, the majority were, unlike the Chinese, subjects of the British Empire.[14] The pathways of Indian migration to Aotearoa were a consequence of British imperialism, formalised after 1857, on the exploitative foundations of the East India Company, which

profoundly restructured economy, society and politics on the Indian subcontinent. Landlessness, indebtedness and other economic pressures induced outwards migration that invariably followed the sea routes by which Britain operated its empire. By the late nineteenth century Indian migrants also met common exclusionary policies and practices within British settler colonies where the Indian diaspora had begun to take root. This was despite Queen Victoria proclaiming to the 'Princes, Chiefs and People of India' that she would grant 'the Natives of Our Indian Territories' the same rights as 'all Our other Subjects' and, among other things, to support religious toleration, to recognise the 'Customs of India', to end racial discrimination and to ensure that 'all shall alike enjoy the equal impartial protection of the Law'.[15] By the 1920s Indians in New Zealand would regard Queen Victoria's promise of equality as null and void.

Still little known to most Kiwis is that Indians arrived in Aotearoa about the same time as Europeans and Māori first made contact on land. Todd Nachowitz has argued that it is crucial to unpack this erased history and participation of ethnic minorities within Aotearoa's history to 'help relevant minorities reclaim association in a newly formed shared national identity that has the potential to strengthen social cohesion'.[16] He suggests that embedding Indian history within that of Aotearoa, and its bicultural foundation, should highlight an Indian perspective. Although the details of very early Indian encounters in Aotearoa have been lost in time, it is important to put on record evidence of an early Indian presence on these shores. Indians may have been invisible within dominant historical narratives, but they are 'equally entitled to claim their place in the history of first encounter and the exploration and settlement of New Zealand'.[17]

The earliest Indian visitors to Aotearoa were Indian lascars (seamen) working on European ships. In 1769, 14-year-old 'Mamouth Cassem' (probably Mahmud Qāsim), born in Pondicherry, and a Bengali named 'Nasrin' (Nasreen), aged about 16 or 17, most probably came ashore when the *Saint Jean-Baptiste* berthed in the Hokianga during 12–31 December of that year. The ship was under the command of Captain Jean François Marie de Surville, who was conducting a Pacific trading voyage on behalf of the French East India Company.

From 1794 to 1801 trading ships of the British East India Company sailed between England, South Africa, India, Australia and China, and Aotearoa New Zealand was part of some of these routes. Indian lascars crewed these ships, and sepoys (Indian soldiers under British or other imperial orders) were also on board. Stops ashore in Aotearoa were made to collect supplies and seal skins and to cut timber. Some lascars were at Tamatea (Dusky Sound in Fiordland) between 1795 and 1797.

Indian sailors also 'jumped ship' and settled among Māori. Reasons for this would have included the attraction of a new life, and the desire to escape poor shipboard conditions and harsh treatment from Europeans.[18] In 1809, a Bengali deserted the ship *City of Edinburgh* to live with his Māori wife in the Bay of Islands.[19] In 1814, six Indian sailors stole a boat and left the *Matilda*, either on the south-west coast of the South Island or at Port Daniel (Otago Harbour) in 1814.[20] Three were killed but three survived, probably settling near Whareakeake in Otago until 1823. One survivor, probably from Surat, spoke English and Māori and was given the name Te Anu. Bishop Selwyn said the man was living with his Māori wife and son at Potirepo (Port William) on Rakiura (Stewart Island) in 1844.[21]

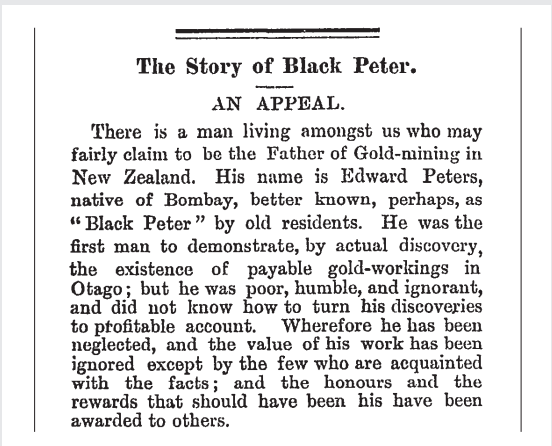
During the nineteenth century, Indians worked throughout Aotearoa — including Te Waipounamu (South Island) — more than is now recalled. Many were Muslims, such as 'Butterdean' (Badrudeen) from Kashmir, who was living in Otago in 1875.[22]

Other early Indian migrants were the Sohman (originally Somen) and Bussawan families. They were among 17 servants indentured to

John Sohman (formerly Somen), was one of the early migrants from India. He arrived in Canterbury in 1859 as an indentured servant. He later settled at Oxford and was a staunch supporter of the Salvation Army.

Edward Peters: Discovered gold, died a pauper

Until the unveiling by Governor-General Anand Satyanand of a memorial at Glenore, Otago, on Easter Saturday 2009, Edward Peters was erased from his rightful place in Aotearoa New Zealand's history as the discoverer of gold in the Tuapeka area of Otago in 1857. Peters — variously described as Eurasian, a 'half-caste', 'native of Bombay' and a Goan (he was born in Satara, Maharashtra, which is close to Goa) — left India to work on the California goldfields. He signed up as a cook on the sailing ship *Maori*, which left Gravesend in England in 1853. On 31 August 1853 Peters absconded after the ship had docked at Port Chalmers. He reported to the police and was sentenced to six weeks' hard labour, after which he was free to settle in Otago. He worked as a farm labourer and gold prospector in the Tokomairiro, Tuapeka and Molyneux districts, where he was called 'Black Peter' — indicative of how his identity was racialised. Peters was denied recognition as the discoverer of the source of the Otago gold rush, and instead the accolades went to Gabriel Read, who registered a claim in 1861. Read was awarded £1000 from the provincial government for the discovery, but Peters was denied any prize. Later, the Goldfields Committee launched an appeal which

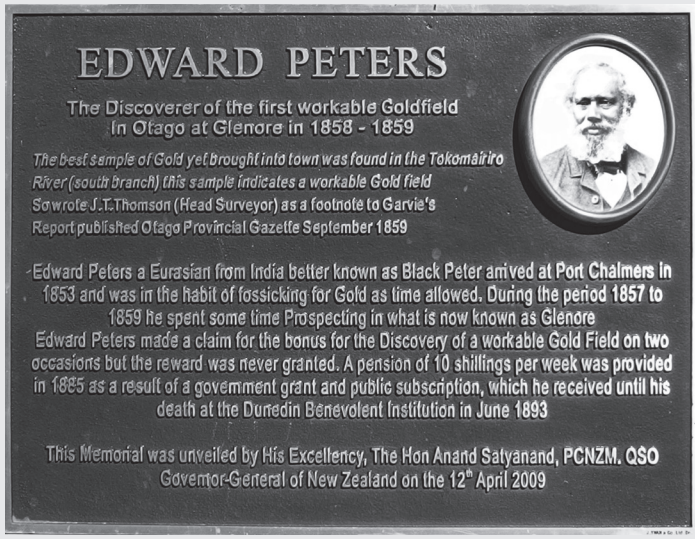


The Story of Black Peter.

AN APPEAL.

There is a man living amongst us who may fairly claim to be the Father of Gold-mining in New Zealand. His name is Edward Peters, native of Bombay, better known, perhaps, as "Black Peter" by old residents. He was the first man to demonstrate, by actual discovery, the existence of payable gold-workings in Otago; but he was poor, humble, and ignorant, and did not know how to turn his discoveries to profitable account. Wherefore he has been neglected, and the value of his work has been ignored except by the few who are acquainted with the facts; and the honours and the rewards that should have been his have been awarded to others.

Otago Witness, 5 December 1885



A memorial plaque dedicated to Edward Peters was unveiled in 2009. His discovery of gold began the Otago gold rush, but this was never officially recognised. Instead the reward and fame went to Gabriel Read.

granted Peters an allowance of 10 shillings a week. Peters was aged in his sixties when he died in 1893 as a pauper in Dunedin's Benevolent Institution. But he left behind friends who vowed that his contribution to Otago's history should not be erased. Mrs C. R. Mitchell of Balclutha wrote in Peters' obituary that 'Peter would have been above the average class of people one meets with in everyday life. He was always gentle and kindly to animals, and very tender over young children. How he first discovered gold in Otago is well known to the reading public; also how another won the renown and reward that should have been his. "Black Peter" another of our pioneers has passed away, and his name must ever be associated with the early history of Otago.' [23]

Stories about Peters continued to be passed down within local families, and in 2009, farmer and historian Alan Williams and the Glenore Manuka Trust finally made sure that Peters was commemorated. So, too, did Edward Ellison, a kaumātua of Te Rūnaka o Ōtākou. Williams suggests that Peters was a victim of local politics as he was not part of the powerful social networks in which Read very likely participated.[24]

work on the Cashmere Estate at Christchurch in 1859 by a former judge in India, Sir John Cracroft Wilson. These Indians and their descendants either died or married Māori and Europeans.[25] John Sohman and his family settled in Oxford, north of Christchurch, where he and his daughter were active within the Salvation Army. We will return to John's story later in the book, when the Registrar of Pensions tried to cancel his old-age pension in 1907.

By the late nineteenth century the roots of New Zealand's Indian community were laid when chain migration began from the Punjab and also separately, by the early twentieth century, from Gujarat.[26] (When some pioneers settled in Aotearoa they sent news back to their villages for relatives and friends to join them overseas. The latter in turn repeated the process — hence the term 'chain migration'.) Gujaratis and Punjabis had already emigrated to South Africa, Australia, Canada and elsewhere (including Burma, Singapore, Brazil and Argentina), but New Zealand became a sought-after destination once immigration restrictions and discrimination against Indians set in within other white settler colonies during the early twentieth century. Another reason for this southernmost Indian diaspora was because ships with passenger migrants (the name for those who were not indentured migrants) destined for Fiji stopped in Auckland, and some Indians tried to disembark there. Other non-indentured Indians who had originally decided to work in Fiji learned about better opportunities further south.

The sustained waves from the two centres of the Indian diaspora in Punjab and Gujarat to New Zealand were also part of the massive transformations within rural India that pushed global emigration, including to the South Pacific. During the colonial years the cash economy swept through much of Punjab and Gujarat, inducing rural indebtedness, higher taxation, land shortages and environmental degradation, as well as increasing the commercialisation of agriculture and customary services. Cultural pressures, such as expenditure on weddings, houses and other markers of social and religious status, exacerbated the drive for extra income. By the early twentieth century emigration was an accepted practice from

above: Dr Mutyala Satyanand addresses the Auckland Indian Association at a celebration of India's independence, 1947. On his right is Devjibhai Patel and on his left is Mrs Pickett.

below: Jasmine Patel, held by her father, Jagdish Patel, and Kamal Patel, carried by Mrs Patel, with Mr and Mrs Mahendra Thaker, New Zealand's first sponsored Asian refugees from Uganda, at Wellington Airport.