

# **Diaspora, Citizenship and Identity: Migration from Kathor (Gujarat, India) to Durban (Natal, South Africa)**

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## **Abstract**

*In the second half of the nineteenth-century, large numbers of migrants from Kathor, a relatively rural backwater of Gujarat, followed the British flag to distant colonies such as Mauritius, Natal and Burma. This article examines some of the reasons for this movement, the impact of migration on Kathor and those who remained behind and ongoing links between Kathor and its Diaspora, especially how fourth and fifth generation migrants remember and relate to their village of origin. It also reflects on auto-ethnography, a research methodology employed for this research, as well as contemporary notions of Diaspora, citizenship and identity in a context of globalisation and the upsurge of nationalistic, religious, racist and xenophobic tendencies.*

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Kathor, Durban, Sunni Bohras, Migration

## **Introduction**

Many of the passengers who came to Africa were down with malaria and this (Africa) was a jungle to them, but they continued to go back and come back. Can you imagine the adventurous spirit?... I was in Kathor recently at our family house. My children asked me, "Who is going to go there?" I said, "you are all going there." if you don't take your children and expose them to our small beginnings, they will forget. I said to them, "look, the families that remained there, reflect on their sacrifice. They were told to remain there, to hold the fort." Other family members were told, "you go to South Africa and if you are successful, call us." We started calling them until 1948, when the law was passed that we could no longer call them. So these people were stuck in Kathor. They are the children of those old people who looked after our fathers and mothers. Are we going to say to them, "you are not my relatives, I don't know you"?

Hassim Randeree (2016)

Hassim Randeree is a well-known business leader and philanthropist in Durban whose grandfather came to Natal in the late nineteenth-century as part of the chain of passenger migrants who followed indentured migrants to the then

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British colony. These two migratory chains had different origins and patterns, but shared some similarities. Economic necessity most likely influenced both streams; indentured and passenger migrants left behind family to whom they remitted money. Indians who came outside of the indenture system were termed “passengers” because they paid their own passage. While there is a growing body of work on indentured (Desai and Vahed 2010) and passenger (Vahed and Bhana 2015) migrants, little is known about those who were left behind or the impact of migration on home villages, and the links between migrants and their descendants, and home villages.

Hassim Randeree’s testimony is an excellent reflection of the consequences of migration for those who remained in India. His perspective differs from that of others who have little or no contact with villages of origin in India or even a desire to visit. This despite the fact that most passengers can trace their villages of origin and many visited periodically until the 1950s and maintained epistolary correspondence until the 1970s. A key development in reducing contact with India was the 1953 announcement by Minister of the Interior T.E. Donges that wives from India would no longer be permitted entry into South Africa. This concession had been granted to Indians in terms of the Smuts-Gandhi Agreement of 1913, in part because of the massive gender disparity amongst Indian South Africans (Vahed 2015:76). As more South Africans acquired secular education, adopted English as their home language, and married local spouses, Indian South Africans lost contact with villages of origin (Vahed 2015: 74-78).

This article focuses on the links between migrants and their village of origin, with particular reference to Kathor from whence my ancestors originated. Staggered migration remains a modern day phenomenon among large numbers of people. The UN estimated that 232 million people were living and working outside their country of birth in 2013 (Demurger 2015:2). Migration can have positive or negative consequences for those who remain behind. According to Demurger, financial transfers can provide economic benefits for family in the home country and thus ‘improve households’ long-term welfare through investments in health care and education.’ But migration imposes social costs that affect the remaining members’ education, health, and even social status (Demurger 2015:2).

While there is recognition that those who remained in Kathor, mostly women in the formative period, were integral to the migratory process, it is very difficult to assess the actual impact of migration because of the absence of documentation. This article relies on the fragments of information that exist in the archives and autoethnography, a research methodology that draws on features of both *autobiography* and *ethnography*. Autobiography involves researchers’ retroactively and selectively writing about past experiences.’

Ethnographers, on the other hand, are ‘participant observers in the culture.’ Participation may include ‘cultural happenings’, interviews, investigating the uses of space and place, and examining artefacts such as clothing, and texts such as photographs (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011).

As an insider, I was able to link what I was learning during the research process with what I knew, as well as what I learnt from my visit to Kathor. Researchers bring ‘baggage’ to a study and being an insider has both advantages and disadvantages. Familiarity may lead the researcher to overlook questions that a curious outsider would ask; insiders may omit findings that reflect negatively on their group; and their research may be viewed with mistrust by outsiders. On the other hand, insiders have access to information and a better understanding of the people, place, or issues being studied (Mawani 2016: 75-76). Academics employing *autoethnography* must critically analyse their experiences or they would be no different from ordinary people relating stories in any forum (in Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011). Research should be ‘rigorous, theoretical, and analytical’ and based on proper fieldwork to ‘produce analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better’ (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011).

This article contributes to the growing literature on Gujarat. According to Sayed (2016:24), while Gujaratis and Punjabis make up the largest diasporic Indian communities, there is little research on ‘Gujarat’s history, culture, and the migration patterns of the Gujarati community. ...[This] may partly be attributed to the drive towards mercantilism and the relatively few Gujaratis in academic and scholarly fields.’

### **Kathor and Kathorians**

Kathor lies approximately 25 kilometres north of Surat City, on the banks of the Tapi River which flows westward to the Arabian Sea. The excellent soil along the river resulted in many villages springing up along it. Directly across the Tapi River from Kathor is the village of Kholvad, home of one of South Africa’s most famous anti-apartheid activists, Dr. Yusuf Dadoo (1909-1983). According to the Indian Population Census of 2011, Kathor has a total of 2 848 families, with a population of 13 783 (6 986 males and 6 797 females). A third of the population is Muslim. Kathor has a higher literacy rate (86.78 percent) than the general population of Gujarat (78.03 percent). Male literacy was 90.45 percent while the female literacy rate was 83.06 percent.

This article focuses on Kathor’s Gujarati-speaking Muslims who are Sunni Bohras. Bhana and Brain (1991:40) explain that ‘vohuru’, which means ‘to trade’, is the etymological root of the word Bohras. Sunni Bohras were made up of mainly indigenous ‘agrarian communities which were converted to Islam

most probably during the reign of the Sultans of Gujarat' from 1391 to 1583 (Misra 1985:122). There are several regional Sunni Bohra communities. Migrants to Natal originated in the various villages in the vicinity of Surat; hence, they are known as 'Suratis'. Other regional groupings are the Patani Vohras, Kadiwal Vohras, and Charotar Vohras (Misra 1985:123).

According to Kathorians' popular understanding of their history, their ancestors were farmers and traders. In the mid-eighteenth century, drought led to many families migrating to the adjoining village of Mota Varacha or further afield to Rander. Many then moved to Surat and subsequently to Mumbai (Bombay) and Kolkatta (Calcutta). From the 1860s, Kathorians went abroad to Mauritius and Myanmar (Burma) and from the 1870s to Reunion, Madagascar and South Africa, and later still, to Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Mozambique. In the immediate post-World War Two era, Kathorians, mainly from Burma, made their way to Pakistan, and from the 1950s many emigrated to the United Kingdom as Commonwealth citizens (Kathor Muslim Society UK 2016).

With regard to Mauritius, the newspaper *La Mauricien* (6 December 2011) stated:

The Mamoojees (Kathrada) were the first family [from Kathor] to start business and they were followed by the Timols, Vawdas, Vayids, and others. They opened wholesale and retail trading points in Port Louis and were active in the opening of *dukans* in the northern part of the island at Poudre d'Or, Rivière du Rempart and Piton. As they came from a prosperous and busy textile producing town, they had capital and business competencies. Both the Souratees and Kathorians started linkages with the local British firms to gain access to manufacturing companies in Britain and other countries. They became wholesalers supplying fellow retailers.

My visit to Kathor in 2009 underscored the global dispersal of family members within India as well as the United Kingdom, Canada, South Africa, Reunion, and Mauritius, while the Middle East is a site of temporary work for some. Secondary migration, sometimes because of political conditions in places like Uganda, Fiji, and Zimbabwe, has seen Kathorians settle in recent decades in places like Australia, Canada and the United States. Mawani and Mukadam (2012:xxii) write that the Gujarati community, "is a group for whom migration has always been a way of life. The idea of adapting and adopting, as well as discarding and recreating the various aspects of their identities have been key factors in their trajectory" (Sayed 2016:24).

While Gujaratis have been trading with Africa for many centuries, nineteenth-century migration must be seen in the context of British colonial expansion, with British settlers establishing colonies in East and Southern Africa, and large

numbers of indentured workers imported to Mauritius, Natal and Uganda. Gujarati traders followed and ‘carved out sectors or pockets of local dominance.’ They provided capital and expanded retail trade, mostly importing merchandise from Britain and India (Bose 2006:27-28).

### **Kathorians in Natal**

Well-known Kathorian family names in Natal include Vawda, Paruk, Jadwat, Asmal, Bobat, Coovadia, Vahed, Patel, Haffejee, Omarjee, Kathrada, Moola, Timol, and Vaid. D.M. Timol (1847-1922) is generally regarded as the first Kathorian to settle in Natal. He initially made his way to Mauritius and moved to Natal in 1874. He returned to Kathor to marry Hawa and when his three sons joined him in the business, it operated as D.M. Timol & Sons (Vahed and Bhana 2015:232). The Paruk brothers, Cassim, Amod, Esmail, and Mamoojee, also arrived via Mauritius. Their descendants established some of the largest businesses in Natal, including a sugar mill, clothing factory, oil mill, and textile mill, and they were involved in property development (Vahed and Bhana 2015:205-207).

The wealthiest of the formative Kathorians were the Asmal and Bobat families who formed B. Ebrahim Ismail & Co., one of the largest companies in Durban in the early decades of the twentieth-century. Its headquarters in Commercial Road, Kathorian Building, in the heart of Durban’s Indian CBD was an iconic building for many years. The company represented the shipping line Indian African Line, and specialised in the wholesaling of rice (Vahed and Bhana 2015:95-97). Family member, Dawud Mahomed, was one of the best known Indian politicians in Natal from around 1880 to 1920. He was born in Kathor, migrated to Mauritius, and eventually settled in Natal where he opened a business, Bombay House, which dealt in general drapery and merchandise imported from England. He was also involved in real estate. Dawud Mahomed achieved prominence for his involvement in political affairs through the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), founded by Mohandas K. Gandhi in 1894. Mahomed was president from 1906 to 1912 and spent about 12 months in prison during the passive resistance campaigns of 1906-08 in the Transvaal. Gandhi described him as the ‘most intelligent, resourceful, and independent – or insensitive – trader in Natal. His jokes and songs were composed of steel.’ Mahomed was active in Durban’s Anjuman Islam and West Street Mosque, and was a prominent leader amongst Surati Muslims (*Indian Opinion* 13 February 1909).

The story of another family, the Coovadias, underscores the staggered nature of migration and the burden borne by those who remained in India. Hoosen Cassim & Co. was formed in 1883 by H.C. Coovadia and his brother M.C. Coovadia. A third brother, E.C. Coovadia, joined in 1894. Partnerships allowed traders to move between Natal and India as they saw migration as temporary

and maintained their family and business links with India. While the Coovadias arrived in Natal in the 1880s they were only joined by their respective families after the First World War. Until then, the brothers took turns living in India (Vahed 2005:461).

Migration for both indentured and passenger Indians was a predominantly male affair. In the case of passenger migrants, as Vahed and Bhana point out, 'most men came to Natal alone, either because they left their wives behind or were not married, and returned to India to fetch their wives and children or to get married once they had established themselves' (Vahed and Bhana 2015:51). Male-centred Indian migration reflected a global pattern between the 1840s and 1920s. According to Donato and Gabaccia (2016), 'while the earlier movement of settler colonizers was relatively gender balanced, between 1840 and 1924 global labor migrations became heavily male and circulatory as empires grew and increasing levels of international trade demanded temporary male workers to build infrastructure and work on plantations and in heavy industry.' The burden of those who remained in the homeland was carried mainly by women. As Hughes (2012) points out, women's 'social reproductive labour enables men's migration.' Conversely, Hughes wonders, 'might the absence of husbands result in empowerment and greater independence for [women] in patriarchal contexts?'

Separation must have had a terrible impact on the fabric of family life. Wives in India would have been anxious that long separation could lead to family disintegration, or that husbands might create new families in Natal, which did happen in some cases. Wives did not meekly accept their plight. The fragmentary archival evidence suggests that some staked claim to their rights. Khatija Jadwat, who returned to Kathor after the death of her husband A.M. Jadwat, wrote to the Master of the Supreme Court in 1940 that 'for want of money' she had been forced to remain in Kathor where she was experiencing difficulties. She complained that she was not receiving 'her income proportionate to her share' and called for 'prompt and sympathetic attention and consideration of the Master' (Vahed and Bhana 2015:151). M. Patel, who was working in Natal at the time, divorced his wife Ayesha in 1948 because she had a child out of wedlock (Natal Archives D.I. 80, 4140).

There is insufficient documentary material to conclude with certainty what the impact of predominantly male migration was on women. New roles and responsibilities were likely added to women's already heavy burdens, including taking on men's work or seeing to family finances and making purchases over and above caring for their children and perhaps their husband's parents. Women's greater decision-making powers likely changed gender relations. Increased control by in-laws may have reduced some wives' influence over their household (Hughes 2012).

### A Kathorian ‘Mindset’?

One of the most interesting interviewees was Ebrahim Jadwat, whose family came to South Africa in the 1890s and is in the retail clothing trade. He reflected on the so-called “mentality” of Kathorians. Growing up, Jadwat noted that differences amongst Muslims included origins (indentured / passenger), language (Gujarati / Memonese / Urdu), ethnicity (Surati / Memon / Koknee / Miabhai /Hyderabadee), and class. Among Suratis, there was a distinct hierarchy based on village of origin. One example is the West Street Mosque whose 1899 Constitution stated that the seven trustees had to be from Surat, with at least two from Rander and two from Kathor (Vahed 2001:315).

Kathorians, Jadwat said, ‘had an air’ about them and he visited the village with great anticipation:

*I came to know about this Kathor business at the age of sixteen. It was not introduced into our homes but I learned it was about feeling big, “Motam”, pride. At the age of twenty-two, twenty-three I went to India for the first time, 1971, and I was shocked out of my socks when I saw this place called Kathor –ramshackle buildings, no paved streets, no waterborne sewerage, and I wondered, “what is it to be so proud of this place?” My wife Rashida is from Kholvad, so we crossed the little stream to Kholvad and I see an amazingly different place, a place where everything had “home comforts”, so to speak, fridge, stove, all the things that we are kind of used to. So I said “these people are far better off than us”, but the mentality of the Kathorians was one of great pride.*

Jadwat believes that it was as a result of this mindset that Kathorians ‘went out and did some big things in earlier centuries.’ Some of his family members settled in the Andaman Islands, which form an archipelago in the Bay of Bengal between Myanmar to the north and east, and India to the west. They established businesses and coconut plantations, and own ships and helicopters. The story of this branch of the family has been recorded (Jadwat 2004). When Ebrahim’s father Mohamed visited his family in the Andaman Islands he found that amongst other things they sent ‘two, three hundred people for Hajj every year.’ Ebrahim also noted that Kathorians were ‘the big trading people’ in Burma, and that ‘in Reunion the biggest trading company is Jadwat Trading Company, in Mauritius it is the Kathradas, all Kathorians.’ ‘My point’, Jadwat continued, is that all of these people who came out of Kathor had a mission: to go out and conquer the world and they did. When you look at all the big businesses that were established at the turn of the century in Natal, Kathorians were among the bigger merchants. There is something in the mentality that says that you are bigger than the rest. It was a mindset that said that where you were, you led everybody.

During our interview Jadwat produced a framed 1911 photograph of his

grandfather and his relatives and friends dressed in western clothing standing outside the Mehfile-Anjuman Islam in Kathor, over a crocodile they had shot. He reflected:

*Now, here is a photograph that shows me there was a highly organised community at the time that had institutions that prepared people. It looks like everybody in the photo was educated, had some kind of training. Mehfile Anjuman Islam is an institution, it represents an organised society. So when they came to Natal, they came with a mind that had an institution that you needed to replicate here. You did not come with a "village" mentality. They built institutions wherever they went. As soon as they established their businesses the first thing they did was to build a masjid and they had the foresight that the institution needed to be self-funded. So around the Masjid they built shops, and they built the Madrassa, then the school, and then accommodation and so forth.*

*So what does it tell you? That the people said, "we will structure ourselves so that our society will grow and develop"....In the early days, when you came off the ship, you went to Verulam, there was accommodation for you, the Kathradas and others, they accommodated people who stayed until they went into the hinterlands. And they established Musafir Khanas, M.S. Randeree family established one, the Haffejee's another, for upcountry visitors and travellers.... All this tells me there must be something in that place Kathor but the decay that I saw in 1971 disappointed me.*

### **Kathor, December 2009**

I visited India for the first time in November 2009 for a conference in Goa and went to Kathor afterwards. Having been warned about conditions in the "gaam" (village), I stayed in Surat where the hotel manager arranged a taxi for me to visit the villages. The land between Surat and these villages was surprisingly green and fertile, with crops like sugarcane, pulses, and rice. While the roads in Kathor were not tarred, the houses were made of brick and those that I visited were neat and airy. I visited Kathor on 26 and 27 November. The Muslim festival of 'Bakri Eid' (Eid-ul-Adha) was to be celebrated on 28 November and goats were roaming the streets. This reminded me of my childhood when Durban's Muslims experienced a similar festive atmosphere before consumerism took over; many now conduct the *qurbani* at commercial farms. While the *qurbani*, the sacrificial slaughter of an animal, is banned in some parts of India, the villagers were keen to tell me that Hindus and Muslims in Kathor enjoyed a healthy relationship.

I had arranged to meet two senior family members in Kathor – Abdul Rahman Patel on my maternal side and Ayub Vahed on the paternal side. The latter was my father's second cousin who was living in the house where my father had lived between 1932 and 1947. The story of my paternal family helps to deconstruct the notion that all migrants from Kathor were successful traders. While there was a small group of wealthy migrants, most arrived in Natal as

employees who worked long hours for meagre wages and lived in unhygienic conditions, usually at the back of shops. The reports of the sanitary inspectors provide evidence of this (Vahed 2005:462-463).

Goolam Hoosen, my namesake and grandfather, was born in Kathor in 1900 and was sent to Natal at the age of five to live with his sister Khatija who had married a pioneer trader Ismail Haffejee. Goolam Hoosen married Mariam in Kathor in 1926 and two children were born in Natal, my father Mohamed and Ebrahim. Goolam Hoosen was struggling financially in Durban and returned to Kathor in 1934. He joined Mercantile Marine in October 1934 and worked as a cook on voyages between Bombay and London. Mariam died in 1937. Goolam Hoosen spent the war years in Kathor, where he remarried, and returned to Durban in 1947 in the hope of better prospects. This did not materialise as he worked as a janitor at the *Musafir Khana*, a lodge for travellers, in Alice Street, Durban, until his death.

Mohamed, my father, was born in Durban in 1928 and lived in Kathor between the ages of four and nineteen. When he returned to Natal, Mohamed was sent to work in rural Inanda, north of Durban. He moved to Durban in 1952 and worked as a retail sales assistant until he passed away in 1985. The pay was poor and my mother Ayesha supplemented the family income doing dressmaking, keeping table boarders, supplying *rotis* to local restaurants, and preparing lunch for local businesses (Vahed 2010: 615-516). Ayub Vahed, who was blind and ill, was pleased to meet me and asked whether I knew his two sons who had migrated to South Africa in the early 1990s. Sadly, I had to tell him that I had no idea that they were in the country.

The story of Abdul Rahman pointed to the fortuitousness of migration. Abdul Rahman was my mother's paternal cousin. While my mother's father Ebrahim brought his family to Natal, his brother Mohamed left his wife, Ayesha Bhamla and two children Abdul Rahman (b. 1937) and Fatima (b. 1939) in Kathor as he did not have a stable job. In 1949 Mohamed went to Kathor to collect his family, but he died there and his children remained in India with their mother. I recall my father keeping contact with Abdul Rahman through regular letters. By all accounts, the family in Kathor had a difficult time. Abdul Rahman was in an advanced stage of cancer when we met, while Fatima had passed away two years earlier.

Abdul Rahman had five children. His daughters (Hajra and Ayesha) were married and living in Canada, two of his sons (Essop and Idris) emigrated to South Africa in the early 1990s, and the other (Amin) remained in Kathor to take care of his parents. Abdul Rahman said that none of his South African relatives was prepared to assist his sons when they moved to South Africa, and that they were working in menial positions for a tiling company. I called Abdul

Rahman the day following my visit and learnt that one of his son-in-laws in Canada (Lockhat) had died suddenly. Abdul Rahman himself died around 2013.

The movement of family members to South Africa in the 1990s points to the re-opening of migration under new conditions as apartheid gave way to non-racial democracy. South Africa became the destination of migrants from various parts of Africa and Asia even as its own professional and business classes were emigrating to countries like Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand. While marriage restrictions have been lifted, there are few marriages between Indian South Africans and villagers in India.

Cultures transform as a result of influences from host societies and the absorption of new ideas and practices, and fourth and fifth generation South Africans differ in their dress, culinary preferences, and language from their Kathorian counterparts. While there are many narratives of assistance from migrants to fellow villagers a century ago, in the post-apartheid period these bonds have loosened and new migrants have to find their own way. Indeed, it is not uncommon for local Indians to harbour negative stereotypes about this new stream of migrants from their ancestors' villages of origin.

I met several families in Kathor with relatives in Durban, including the Asmals, Omarjees, Coovadias, and Lockhats. I was fairly conversant in Gujarati while my mother was alive but am now barely able to communicate. The taxi driver, a Gujarati Hindu, negotiated my way around the village. It became evident that all family members make sacrifices in the migratory process. There may be material benefits in moving out of the village and the elderly within families understood this, but there was also a yearning for sons, daughters and grandchildren abroad. Regular remittances from children can be crucial for survival, but their absence means a lack of emotional support for the elderly. While there is a major difference between earlier and present-day migration as today's migrants have access to new technologies to maintain regular contact, absences are emotionally painful, as seen in the illness of Abdul Rahman or his daughter becoming a widow.

I visited the graveyard, mosques, eating places, trading areas, and educational institutions in Kathor. My visit to the graveyard was especially interesting in showing the ways in which migrant communities impact on home village. In one section was a water tank, with the notice 'Water tank. Waqf of Randeree Family (South Africa)'. On the new wall around the graveyard compound was a notice, 'Fifty percent of repair work having been completed by the co-operation of Natal Trust, Janab Ismail Kathrada (J.P.) Saheb, Haji Yusuf Hussain Randeri (Prof. Saheb), and Haji Ahmed Gora G.M. Randeri Saheb (UK), and the brothers of South Africa.'

Two of the names on the gravesites caught my attention. One was Mawlana Omarjee, a well-known figure in Durban who initiated the establishment of a *Darul uloomin* Kathor. He suffered from diabetes and passed away during a visit to Kathor in the early 2000s. Another read 'Hawabai E.S. Patel', died 17 October 1938. This was my maternal grandmother who had taken ill in Natal and returned to Kathor as she wanted to be laid to rest in her place of birth.

Natal's Kathorians remain heavily involved in education in the village. The Madressa-E-Anjumane-Islam Trust (MAI) was formed in 1889 by pioneer migrants to Natal. It currently has an educational campus that houses several schools. The Physical Science Laboratory at the Ayesha bibi D.M. Lockhat Girls High School was built in memory of Haji Suleman I. Vawda and was sponsored by Dr. Moosaji and Mrs. Zubaidabibi Lockhat. The Higher Secondary Section and the English Medium School at the A.M. Moolla High School were established in 1989. A.M. Moolla was a well-known clothing industrialist in Natal, who was involved in numerous social welfare and educational activities (Vahed and Waetjen 2015:150-187). These examples underscore the crucial role that Kathorians in the diaspora continue to play in their village of origin.

Another building that caught my eye was the Kathor Education and Charitable Trust, established in 1975. I learnt that it was established by the Lokat / Locate (spelt Lockhat in South Africa) families of Mauritius, Reunion and the United Kingdom. Coincidentally, I attended a conference on indentured labour in Mauritius in December 2009, about ten days after I returned from Kathor. There I met a Suleman Locate from Reunion. I mentioned my visit to Kathor and learnt that he was the chairperson of the Trust. Ironically, though both of us were from Kathor we communicated via an interpreter, a local retired Mauritian academic Abdool Caadir Kalla, as Suleman Locate spoke French and I spoke English (Vahed and Bhana 2015:23).

The Kathor Muslim Society UK is also involved in a number of projects in Kathor, including the Kathor Medical Trust, which was established in 1994 to provide basic medical treatment at nominal cost, and the Garasiya Girls Hostel, which was established in 1991 and provides food, boarding, clothing, and secular and Islamic education for around 300 girls, many of whom are orphans or from destitute families. The emphasis on educating girls was striking. One mother told me candidly that this was to increase her daughter's prospects of marriage in the diaspora which was seen as preferable to marriage within the village. While South Africans rarely marry in the village, migratory streams to Canada and the UK are more common and these practices persist.

The establishment of institutions in Kathor by those in the diaspora may be a result of family ties or emotional attachment to the village. Whatever the

motivation, they play a crucial role in the social and economic development of the village, and suggest that at least some among the diaspora remain attached to place of origin.

### **Kathorians and Continued Migration**

Villagers stressed that there were limited economic opportunities for younger people. Hassim Randeree recalled that during his 1980 visit to Kathor, he met with a group of children and asked, 'what is your ambition? They looked at each ... and were laughing. Then one chap says to me, "Hassim Mota, we live for tomorrow."' Randeree told them that they should be 'ambitious in life and have self-commitment to a future.' He offered to send one to work for a friend in Jeddah and thereafter to the UK. A young man was identified but Randeree 'had to make two trips to India to get his passport for him ... that is how slow they were.' After a few years Randeree sent him to London:

*We are talking 1980s, so he went to London, he sent me a letter to say, Hassim Mota, "I cannot get married here, these girls in London are too modern for me", and he went back home. ...The same youngster today, if he was in London, he would have been a grandfather. When I look at our Indian community in London, how well they have done. This is third generation, the children are all professionals. ...My cousins in London, all are accountants and lawyers. But this guy's family is still doing poorly.*

While it is true that many of those who migrated have done well materially, such "success" is not uniform. And there is a larger philosophical question: how does one judge what is better? By material possessions? Emotional happiness? Randeree spoke of many young people in Kathor lacking ambition. Jadwat echoed this, stating that those who remained in Kathor 'sat waiting for the cheque to come.... When you went, they expected you to take something substantial for them.' This can be read in several ways. One is that Kathorians are devoid of drive and determination. Another is that the villagers simply get on with life; a "simple" life while those in the diaspora seek to continually accumulate wealth as they are never really secure.

Conditions in Kathor are undoubtedly difficult. Following my visit, several years of poor rains left people desperate in many parts of Gujarat. The state government noted 'barren farms, dying cattle and erratic supply of drinking water, food and fodder rations. It is also evident in the steady rise of distress migration among the youth, who leave behind hundreds of elderly men and women' (Johari 2016). Migration options for unskilled Kathorians are, however, narrowing. South Africa has tightened its immigration policies due to difficult economic conditions and heightened xenophobia, while Western Europe and North America have done likewise in a post 9/11 context where Europeans are increasingly basing social affiliation on a politics of identity

rooted in culture, faith, or ethnicity and want to reverse processes that they feel have made their societies too diverse.

### **Concluding thoughts: Kathor in Kathorians' imagination**

While we speak of globalisation as a contemporary phenomenon, a remote village like Kathor had extensive global connections from the nineteenth-century. Some Kathorians in the diaspora maintain links with their village of origin, while others are conscious that their ancestors originated there. A small number maintain family homes in the village, some visit occasionally, and yet others contribute financially to projects in Kathor while never having visited. Hassim Randeree (2016) believes that such associations are important:

*I am going to take my grandchildren to Kathor, and introduce them to the people there and make them understand the sacrifices of the villagers.... The first time that I went to Kathor there was an old lady, Choti Foi. The tradition was that when anyone arrived they gave her a packet of money and said, "while I am here, all of us will eat together." So the first day, I was sitting there and all the children were on the floor. We ate a simple meal but it was like Eid to those children. I cried and thought to myself, "these are our children. What are we doing for them?" (Randeree 2016).*

While there are individuals, such as Randeree, who believe that it is important to maintain the link with Kathor, we cannot speak of a 'Kathorian diaspora'. Cohen (2010:6) identifies several features of diaspora, some of which apply to Kathor: dispersal from a home area in search of work or trade; commitment to the maintenance of 'home'; and intermittent visits, but other features that Cohen identifies do not apply: there is no 'collective memory and myth' about Kathor or idealisation of the village, no widespread return movement, or Kathorian consciousness that extends to other countries of settlement.

Salman Rushdie wrote that most diasporians feel an 'urge to reclaim, to look back', but that it is difficult to recover what has been lost and they are left with 'not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imagined homelands' (Rushdie 1992:10). Most Kathorians in South Africa would likely agree with Jadwat that they have minimal connections with Kathor. Jadwat stated that his father Mohamed had continuous links. My father's letter writing was almost on a weekly basis to an aunt, and she writing to us and through us the community, so the link never stopped until he passed away. He wrote in Gujarati and received all the documents from them in Gujarati. ... It was probably the closest relationship between village and us, but that relationship was not passed onto us.

I had yearned to visit the home of my ancestors and was fortunate to locate relatives, visit the house where my father grew up, and pray at the Ebrahim Saeed Mosque where he and other Vaheds of Kathor had prayed. I felt that a

circle had been completed. But it is unlikely that I will visit Kathor again unless there is a specific reason to do so. With both my elderly relatives there having passed on, I would be a marginal figure. If Kathorians were once rootless and second class citizens in South Africa, most are now very rooted in the country and their emotional attachment and sense of belonging to Kathor is weak. Even those who have an attachment see themselves as South African citizens who not only 'belong' to the country, but are 'of' it.

While the formative migrants from Kathor saw themselves as Kathorians, over time this evolved into a 'Surti' Muslim identity in Natal, which included migrants from Surat and surrounding villages and coexisted with being Indian in apartheid South Africa. Surti identity has broadened over the past few decades into an Indian Muslim identity in the South African context, while there is a strong sense of being Muslim in a global context. Being Indian remains important in South Africa because citizens continue to be legally defined by race (Vahed 2010:622-625). Identities are always in the making and will evolve in a context of rising African nationalism in South Africa and the upsurge of nationalistic, religious, racist and xenophobic movements globally.

### Glossary

Anjuman	An Assembly or Association in Persian.
Choti Foi	Youngest maternal aunt.
Darul Uloom	An Arabic term which literally means 'house of knowledge' and refers to an Islamic seminary where clerics are trained.
Eid	The two Islamic festivals, Eid al-Fitr, observed at the end of the month of fasting, and Eid al-Adha (commonly known as Bakri Eid amongst Indian Muslims), to commemorate the willingness of the Prophet Ebrahim to sacrifice his son.
Haji / Hajee	A Muslim who has been on the Hajj pilgrimage to Makkah.
Hyderabaddee	A term used pejoratively in the South African context to refer to Muslim descendants of indentured Indians.
Janab	A rank title in Persian, translated to Excellency.
Koknee	A Muslim migrant to South Africa from the Konkan.
Mawlana	Title of a Muslim man respected for his religious knowledge or scholarship.
Memon	A Muslim commercial community that traces its lineage to the Lohanas of Sindh.
Miabhai	A term used in South Africa to refer to Urdu speaking Muslims from Gujarat.
Mota	Older brother / person.
Musafir Khana	A lodge for travelers.
Qurbani	Animal sacrifice on the festival of Eid al-Adha (usually a goat in India).
Saheb	Polite form of address for a man.
Surati	People from Surat and surrounding villages.
Waqf	An endowment made by a Muslim to a religious, educational or charitable cause.

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