The Norwegian Missionary Society's Early Endeavours among Indians in the Greater Durban Area

FREDERICK HALE

The ground-breaking work by Professor Joy Brain during the 1980s illuminated various previously dark corners in our knowledge of missionary endeavours amongst the Indian population which was brought to the British colony of Natal chiefly as indentured agricultural labourers beginning in 1860. Her seminal volume of 1983, *Christian Indians in Natal, 1860-1911: An Historical and Statistical Study*, whose real chronological scope extended well beyond that stated *terminus ad quem*, cast light on the penetration of several denominations and missionary agencies into this segment of the multiethnic population of both Durban and the surrounding area.[1] Undoubtedly owing to language barriers, however, Brain was unable to take a compre-hensive approach to her broad subject, and consequently there are prominent *lacunae* in her findings. With regard to Norwegian Lutheran endeavours, which actually began too late to fall into her chronological framework, she was compelled to rely on a popular sketch by twentiethcentury missionary Einar Ims.

To date extremely little of a scholarly character has been written about the Norwegian Missionary Society's endeavours amongst Indians in Natal during the period under consideration. In 1965 one of its subsequent missionaries, Einar Ims, who

revived this venture after a hiatus of approximately two decades, contributed a historical sketch of various denominations' outreach to Indians in South Africa, but it entirely lacks academic value and sheds practically no light on Norwegian or other Lutheran efforts in Natal.[2] Brain nevertheless admitted that she had been unable to find appropriate primary historical records and thus relied principally on Ims' brief synopsis and a popular booklet about the Lutheran congregations in the greater Durban area[3] for her information about Lutheran outreach to the Indians in that colony. What one learns from Brain's derivative and superficial but nevertheless generally reliable presentation is thus limited to a few basic facts about the earlier efforts of other denominations to evangelise Indians in Natal beginning during the 1860s and that of German Lutherans from about 1896. She then describes in broad strokes efforts of the NMS and the Hermannsburg Mission early in the twentieth century, the disintegration of the small congregation that they supported at Sea View, and Ims' renewal of the Lutheran venture in 1962. Brain mentions the consequent formation of congregations at Chatsworth, Asherville, Reservoir Hills, and Phoenix and the fact that the census of 1980 numbered 1 140 Indian Lutherans in Natal.[4] From the viewpoint of professional scholarship, the history of Norwegian missionary involvement amongst Indians in South Africa thus remains almost entirely untold.

It is my purpose in the present article to take steps towards filling that gap in the literature of mission history by describing the relatively short-lived efforts of the NMS to minister to Indians in and near Durban, chiefly during the years between the two world wars. In order to place these endeavours into a more meaningful historiographical framework, I shall first limn earlier missionary work to this ethnic group which other agencies, chiefly those of British Protestant origin, launched not long after the arrival of the first Indians in Natal. The extension of the NMS field from rural tracts of northern Natal and Zululand to Durban beginning in 1890 will then be briefly sketched before the heart of the matter, i.e. the belated Norwegian Lutheran response to pleas from Indian denominational fellows to minister to them, takes centre stage. Our primary focus in this regard will be on the belated efforts of the NMS to establish this branch of its multiethnic urban programme, certain difficulties which were encountered for several years

thereafter, not least regarding the funding of the endeavour, and, finally, the succumbing of this dimension of the NMS urban field to the vicissitudes of the Second World War. In a final section which is included for contextual purposes, we shall briefly consider the subsequent attempts of the Church of Sweden Mission to establish a Lutheran ministry to Indians near Durban.

Antecedent Missions of Various Denominations to Indians in and near Durban

It must be emphasised that despite the anchoring of most Indians in Natal in Hinduism, Christianity was from the outset by no means unknown amongst them, owing in part to earlier nineteenthcentury missionary activity in India. When the first ship carrying indentured servants from India, the Truro, arrived in Durban on 16 November 1860, several dozen of its 340 passsengers were reportedly Christians. The exact number has been disputed. According to one contemporary journalistic account, the 340 included "87 Christians, 94 Malabars, 27 Mohammedans and 132 Gentoos [i.e. Hindus]".[5] Brain counted eighty-nine Christians on the damaged passenger roster and believes that there may have actually been slightly more.[6] In any case, the cultural and religious diversity of these new arrivals was apparent to observers and served as a harbinger of things to come. "They were a queer, comical, foreign looking very Oriental like crowd", reported one journalist in Durban. He noted that "the boats seemed to disgorge an endless stream of living cargo. Pariahs, Christians (Roman Catholics), Malabars, and Mahometans, successively found their way ashore".[7] During the next few decades continuing immigration increased the ethnic diversity of the Indian population of Natal. The largest number were Tamilspeaking Hindus from the Madras presidency, although many others came from the Bihar and Orissa region and spoke Hindi, and Teluguspeaking Indians from Andhra Pradesh arrived in greater numbers late in the nineteenth century. Eventually the Indians of Natal included many Muslims, chiefly Urdu-speaking, from North India. The ranks of those from various regions of southern India included a significant if nevertheless proportionately small number of people who had become Christians in their native land.

Both Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries in Natal began to evangelise and otherwise minister to Indians there at a

relatively early stage. Apparently the first was a Francophone Oblate of Mary Immaculate, Father Jean-Baptiste Sabon, who had arrived in Natal in 1852 under the leadership of Bishop Allard. For several years Sabon's vocation was essentially to minister to Roman Catholics, chiefly from Ireland and the French-speaking countries of Europe, in and near Durban. Shortly after the arrival of the *Truro*, however, this priest began to meet other ships from India and enquire about Catholic indentured servants on them. He also travelled around parts of Natal, from Umzinto south of Durban to Verulam in the north, contacting Indian labourers on the sugar estates. By April 1861 he had compiled a list of most of the Christian Indians in the colony, and the following month they supposedly included 150 Roman Catholics. Undoubtedly owing in large measure to the indefatigable efforts of Sabon, who *inter alia* acquired fluency in Tamil to facilitate his ministry, this number crept up to slightly over 1000 by the early years of the twentieth century.[8]

The first Protestant missionary represented the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. In 1863 Ralph Stott, the initial chargé of this "Coolie Mission" within the Natal district reported that he had already visited thirty-two estates and nowhere been denied access to Indian employees. Stott, who could speak Tamil and was acquiring Hindi, was pleased that "the Coolies are everywhere willing to hear, and read the Scriptures and tracts which I distribute amongst them".[9] His evangelistic efforts and those of a colleague who joined him in Natal soon bore modest fruit. During the twelve-month period ending in April 1868 they baptised nine converts. Their branch of the Methodist mission also sponsored a day school, at which a Christian teacher from Benares taught in English, and two night schools.[10] Early growth was not sustained, however. In 1880 the ageing Stott was the only Methodist missionary engaged in this work. Eight Indians, four of whom had recently been baptised, belonged to the sole congregation, while seven others were being prepared for membership. Three teachers then taught eighty Indian pupils at the mission's schools.[11]

Despite the prominence of Anglican churches and missionary endeavours in the British colony of Natal, their work amongst Indians there did not begin until late in the 1870s, more than a decade after Methodist outreach to them had begun. A diocesan committee which oversaw this dimension of the Angli-

can programme, with very limited resources at its disposal, turned the matter of its development over to one of the parishes, St. Cyprian's, in the city. That church accordingly established a school for Indian children in 1879. Securing the services of a suitable catechist and schoolmaster proved difficult because, in the opinion of one local Anglican, H.F. Whittington, "of the few Christian Indians who come to Natal there are not many who bear a good character or possess any education". The parish overcame this obstacle by hiring a man named Charles David who, in the words of the same clergyman, "is not so well educated for a schoolmaster, perhaps as I could wish, and his religious training has not been of a very catholic character, but he is most ready and anxious to learn and understand true Church doctrines and principles; his moral character is excellent, and I feel every confidence in him". At the end of 1879 the average attendance was thirty-two. Charles David also taught an average of ten adults in the evening. The school, which met in what Whittington called "the Indian quarter", began within months to receive an annual government grant of £40. Whittington also organised a weekly service of worship for Indians on Sunday afternoons which between twenty and thirty generally attended. He estimated that "not quite half" of these Christians had been baptised in either India or Mauritius. The liturgy which he or one of his curates led was essentially "a shortened form of evening prayer, with an address or sermon". Less than a year after St. Cyprian's embarked on this addition to its programme of ministry, Whittington baptised an Indian and had begun to distribute a small amount of Christian literature in Tamil. In a quarterly report published in 1880, however, he stressed the urgent need to employ a priest who could speak that language and would devote all his professional time to Indian missionary work in and near Durban.[12]

This educational wing of this endeavour continued to grow, and public schools for Indians in Natal also proliferated. Anglican efforts in this regard suffered from a perennial shortage of qualified teachers. In 1886, for instance, diocesan authorities had to find five Christian Indian teachers who could not only provide instruction in their faith but also serve as catechists and lay preachers. The presence of several languages amongst the Indians in Durban complicated the search for appropriate personnel. Nevertheless, increasing numbers of the-

se indentured labourers became Anglicans; in 1886 twenty-three were baptised, the majority of them in Durban. Twenty additional adults had requested baptism as that year drew to a close. Two Hindi and Tamil-speaking lay workers had been licensed by the bishop in Durban to serve as evangelists there.

In Pietermaritzburg, which had a smaller but nevertheless significant and growing Indian population by the 1880s, Anglicans instituted a Tamil service on Sundays, although in 1887 the congregation there included only three communicants.[13]

The Genesis of NMS Interest in an Indian Mission

After more than a half-century of activity in rural areas of Natal and Zululand beginning with Schreuder's foundational endeavours in the 1840s, the NMS expanded its field to Durban in 1890 when seasoned missionary Ole Stavem undertook a two-fold ministry to both urbanised Zulu labourers, nearly all of whom were then young men who, the Norwegian missionaries believed, would remain only briefly in the city before returning to their congregations at the rural stations, and Scandinavian Lutheran immigrants in that rapidly growing port. During the 1920s the Norwegian Seaman's Mission assumed responsibility for the latter part of this work. In the meantime, it had become apparent to Stavem's successors in Durban that a permanent Zulu Lutheran community there was not a transitory, virtually all male phenomenon but one which had become a permanent fixture on the urban religious terrain and which was changing to include a growing number of families.

Efforts to minister to Indians near Durban constituted a new dimension in the NMS programme, one whose early history illustrates problems of comity with which missionary organisations had to wrestle in both urban and rural areas. British colonial missionary outreach to indentured servants from India in Natal began in the early 1860s, shortly after those subjects of Queen Victoria stepped ashore. There was very little Norwegian Lutheran missionary concern about these people and their descendants until after the First World War. Some of the reasons for this seeming indifference are not difficult to infer. The NMS was deeply involved in Zulu missions in the interior of Natal and, apart from Durban and two of its stations near the Natal North Coast, namely Otimati and Empangeni, was not represented in areas with appreciable numbers of Indians.

Moreover, its financial and personnel resources were stretched to cover the commitments which its presence upcountry implied. To the extent that NMS missionaries were aware of other missions' work amongst Indians, they may have regarded it as essentially a British matter and found it more natural for British missionary societies to work amongst these peoples from elsewhere in the Empire. Besides, despite the presence of Lutherans in India since the seventeenth century, the image of the Indians in Natal was not at all Lutheran and in fact Lutherans comprised only a tiny fraction of the estimated ca. 5 per cent who were Christians. Hence, in the NMS there was long no apparent feeling of denominational obligation to them.

In the 1890s an Indian named C. Mathew, who had come into contact with representatives of the Hermannsburg Mission in India and become a Lutheran there, arrived in Natal and, not finding an Indian Lutheran church, worshipped in congregations of other denominations before undertaking private evangelisation in 1906 and founding a house congregation at Sea View, one of the "Old Main Line" suburbs on the railway between Durban and Pinetown, approximately eight kilometres from the central business district of the former, and perched atop a long, steep hill known as "Jacob's Ladder". This group of Telugu-speaking Christians, most of whom reportedly came from the Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh, was the nucleus of what developed into the Hermannsburg missionaries' outreach to Indians in that vicinity. At some point Mathew and some of his fellow believers learnt of the presence of the NMS in the city. How and when this occurred is unknown. The first reference to it in NMS sources appears to be in the protocol of the NMS missionaries' annual conference at Mahlabatini in Zululand in 1919. At that time Sven Eriksen, who had been the principal NMS representative in Durban for many years but was then semi-retired, reported to his colleagues that a group of Indian Lutherans who were connected to the Hermannsburg Mission had asked him to minister to them in some unspecified way. Possibly remembering a verbal skirmish he had recently had with the South African General Mission concerning the acquisition of a property in Moore Road, Eriksen had judiciously first consulted the superintendent of that organisation and reportedly ascertained that there was no objection to his extension of such support to the fledgling congregation, although

precisely what this meant subsequently became a matter of contention. Eriksen cautiously suggested to his colleagues that the NMS not overextend itself by offering more than periodic ministerial services. Instead, he advocated assisting Mathew's son, Jacob, who had expressed interest in becoming a pastor, to study for the ministry at the interdenominational Lutheran theological seminary at the Oscarsberg station near the Buffalo River in north-western Natal. The younger Mathew could then serve as the first Indian Lutheran clergyman in the province. To Eriksen the situation seemed providential. He emphasised that the representatives of the Indian congregation had taken the initiative in contacting him, that they had a site on which a chapel could be built, that they did not expect financial support from the NMS, and that Mathew was ready to undertake theological studies. Eriksen also generalised that Indian Christians could be expected to attain financial self-sufficiency more readily than the "lethargic" Zulus. He sought to present this prospective branch of the NMS programme in a balanced way by pointing out that it could involve certain difficulties, among them the fact that neither he nor any of his colleagues in the NMS South African field was competent in an Indian language and that given their preoccupation with work amongst the Zulus it was unlikely that any of them ever would. This was only a minor hurdle, however, because most of the Indians could at least understand English. Eriksen also admitted that some of the Indians seemed more interested in acquiring educational than spiritual assistance. Thirdly, he believed that the NMS should proceed with trepidation to avoid antagonising the Hermannsburg Mission but did not believe that there would be any violation of comity because the Hermannsburg missionaries had done so little to develop Indian work and was not represented in Durban. The assembled missionaries voted unanimously to extend unspecified assistance to the Indian Lutheran congregation, "as it no longer receives any support from the Hermannsburgers here", and both to aid Jacob Mathew in his quest for theological education and subsequently support him in his ministry.[14] To understand this willingness to take on a new dimension in the field, it should be remembered that the NMS had recently acquired its first out-station in Durban and was considering purchasing a site for a second. The confidential mood in its South African field thus favoured such expansion.

The steering committee in Stavanger did not share this enthusiasm about diversifying the NMS programme in Natal. Upon considering the action taken at the annual conference, it declared that the missionaries should proceed with "great caution" and *inter alia* obtain a written declaration from the Hermannsburg Mission that it was transferring its work at Sea View to the NMS. Until such clarification was forthcoming, the Norwegians should withdraw completely and allow the Hermannsburgers to minister to the Indians in question. The committee also seemed to have had a general anti-Indian attitude and wrote to its missionaries that "the information we have about the Indians does not indicate that work amongst them is particularly appealing. They appear to be a restless element". The language barrier also seemed to be prohibitive for the time being, as not a single NMS missionary in the Union of South Africa was believed to have a command of a relevant Asiatic language.[15]

This dash of cold water did not end contacts between the Indian congregation and the NMS. Neither the Norwegian missionaries' correspondence nor the minutes of their annual conferences and the steering committee's responses reveal what form these took during the next two years. Eriksen continued to preach and administer the sacraments to the Indians frequently, however, and reported to his colleagues in 1923 that the congregation had grown to encompass approximately 100 people, onehalf of whom were adults. The superintendent of the NMS field, Lars Martin Titlestad, visited the congregation at that time and, in his words, "got a good impression of their seriousness and interest in Christianity". The Indians worshipped in a large room at Mathew's house but wished to construct a chapel. Probably reluctant to undertake such a costly venture without external support, and by its own admission "in a very poor financial position", the congregation held a special meeting at Sea View on 22 December 1922, at which an *ad hoc* committee declared unanimously that the church was under the guardianship of the NMS. The younger Mathew still expressed interest in studying theology at the Lutheran seminary at Oscarsberg, but Titlestad had been unsuccessful in his efforts to secure his admission to that institution, owing to the fact that most of the instruction there was in Zulu, which the prospective Indian student could not speak. This state of affairs posed a

dilemma for the NMS. Titlestad felt some responsibility for the congregation which had unilaterally placed itself under the Norwegian organisation, but not all of the Hermannsburg missionaries agreed with this move. Eriksen conferred with the one who had previously ministered to them and who spoke their language fluently, Johann Rohwer, admitted that his residence far from Sea View had made it very difficult for him to continue to do so. Rohwer had been interned during the First World War and thus had little opportunity to serve the congregation in recent years. He expressed satisfaction with the prospective NMS assumption of this work. The Hermannsburg superintendent, Heinrich Wiese, was not satisfied with this move but could do nothing to oppose it. Another NMS missionary, Johan Nerø, had spoken with a third Hermannsburger, Paul Schiering, who had accused the NMS of gratuitously interfering in the work of his organisation at Sea View and cooperating with the elder Mathew in bringing about a schism in the congregation. Titlestad emphasised to his colleagues, though, that the congregation had no obligations to the Hermannsburg Mission, which in any case had given it only sporadic ministerial services and no pecuniary support for many years. Clearly, he did not believe that the congregation would be burdensome to the NMS, as it had supported itself to a considerable degree and, in his estimation, consisted of "capable workers and accomplished builders and contractors" who could handle their own affairs. After debating the matter, the NMS missionaries decided to investigate further the question of the Hermannsburgers' willingness to surrender their role in this work and, if they unambiguously agreed to do so, to take the Indian congregation under their wings.[16]

The Evolution of NMS Endeavours among Indians

The Hermannsburgers did in fact agree formally to this transfer, although the NMS did not pursue the work with noteworthy vigour. Titlestad described the congregation and his organisation's ministry to it in some detail in 1928. At that time it numbered sixty-nine adult and juvenile members, of whom an average of thirty attended services regularly. He or one of his colleagues preached and administered the sacraments to them an average of once a month. It was impossible to shoehorn more frequent services into their demanding schedules. The

NMS had appropriated £60 per annum for supporting an evangelist, but none was available who would accept the call at that level of remuneration, and the Indians themselves were either unable or unwilling to supplement it. Congregational worship still took place at Mathew's house, a venue which, in Titlestad's estimation, militated against a higher rate of attendance. "Many of the Indians do not think highly of going to worship in a private home, so they stay away", he explained to supporters of the NMS. "Hence, for a long time they have discussed the possibility of constructing a chapel, although they say that they do not yet have the means to do so". Titlestad added that the lack of physical comfort also reduced attendance: "It is blazing hot out in the corrugated tin house where we have our meetings, and it is cramped when many people attend". He urged Norwegian readers to contribute a total of at least £100 to defray the cost of building materials for a suitable chapel and assured them that members of the congregation would then furnish a site and erect the edifice themselves. Titlestad generalised that the Indians in Natal were "industrious and intelligent, and many of them are strongly attracted to Christianity". He may have diminished the confidence in them he was seeking to inculcate in his readers by also confessing that "it is often difficult to rely on the Indians, so one must proceed cautiously with them. One should always avoid paying them money in advance or without guarantees". Despite this caveat, it seemed obvious to Titlestad that the NMS had to reinforce its involvement amongst these Lutherans, whom he curiously referred to as "our Semitic brothers and sisters", or risk losing the congregation at Sea View.[17]

The NMS did not have to sacrifice its work there, at least not until the Second World War. In 1931 Titlestad still travelled monthly by rail to Sea View, then tramped twenty minutes from the station to the service, the venue of which is not clear from the few pertinent documents from this period. It changed at least three times during his first ten years of ministry to this congregation. The elder Mathew, then over eighty years old, still assisted in the service, while Titlestad both played the organ and preached in English. Most of the singing was of songs which the late nineteenth-century American evangelist Dwight L. Moody's vocalist, Ira D. Sankey, had made popular in many countries during the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century.

Titlestad still seemed generally positive about this sector of his ministry.[18] By 1933, however, the size of the congregation was shrinking, a development Titlestad attributed to the fact that many members of it were moving away from the area. He nevertheless continued to preach there regularly.[19]

The mid-1930s brought changes to this congregation and the ministry to it which foreshadowed the transition it would undergo in the early 1940s. In 1934 both the elder Mathew and his wife died. Titlestad again expressed to his colleagues the need to place either an evangelist or an ordained pastor at Sea View, but budgetary constraints in the NMS precluded this. He thought it unrealistic to expect the congregation to support its own clergyman at that time, as "there is little willingness to contribute amongst the Indians". Yet the church continued to worship in services at least once a month and sponsored a Sunday school for the children. By 1935 a total of forty-one people had been baptised at the church. How many of these were adults is not known.[20]

In 1935 the NMS sought to raise funds for this congregation through subscriptions to a fund. Rødseth, then superintendent of the field in Natal, informed the leaders of the church that it might be able to get annual financial support if they applied for it. In November of that year the parish council therefore replied in an effort to bring about a stronger permanent arrangement between the church and the NMS. The five congregational leaders declared that they would be able to contribute at least £72 *per annum* towards the salary of an evangelist, provided one could be found to minister on a full-time basis or, less preferably, one-half that amount for a half-time evangelist. They did not specify how much they expected the NMS to donate in this regard. Beyond a minister, the members of the council emphasised their need for a "better church" to replace the wood and iron private home then used for services and Sunday school.[21]

These requests, coming at a time when the NMS was in a severe financial crisis, prompted a spirited debate amongst its missionaries in Natal. During their annual conference at Ekombe in May 1936, they discussed the condition of the Indian congregation, past and present efforts to serve it, and proposals for continuing a ministry to it without a significant outlay of sorely needed cash. Titlestad in effect served as the spokesman for the Lutherans at Sea View but emphasised that on several

occasions he had urged them to dissolve their congregation and join an Indian Methodist church in the vicinity. They had reportedly always replied that their parents had been Lutherans from the time of their arrival in Natal and that they would therefore remain in the Lutheran church. Interpreting this determination as a positive sign, Titlestad pointed out that during the past year an Indian Lutheran named Abraham John, who had been a teacher and evangelist for the Church of England, had officiated at services in Sea View on those Sundays when he had not been able to do so himself. This evangelist and teacher's only compensation had been the weekly collection, which rarely exceeded ten shillings. Titlestad proposed an annual appropriation of £24 to assist the congre-gation in providing a regular salary for John, in return for which he would not only lead worship but also teach confirmands and catechumens, do visitation in the parish, and seek to further its growth. Titlestad was cautious, however, and expressed his belief that this subsidy should be made contingent on satisfaction with John's work as a lay minister. At the same time, he stated that the NMS should not at that time contribute financially to the construction of a chapel. Several of Titlestad's colleagues questioned the wisdom of making this particular appropriation. Leisegang made the strongest rhetorical case against it. He contended that the NMS had erred grievously in contributing too much financially to Zulu churches and not placed enough timely emphasis on their self-sufficiency. Making a substantial contribution towards the maintenance of an Indian evangelist, Leisegang believed, would be a step backwards. He thought it especially ironic that money should go to people who he did not believe were indigent, in that they were employed and owned real property. What the congregation really needed, Leisegang averred, was spiritual and not pecuniary assistance. He proposed that Titlestad and the pastor of the Norwegian congregation in Durban seek to visit Sea View more often. Leisegang concluded his case by pointing out that the NMS simply did not have the money which the Indian congregation had requested. As a compromise between these two positions, a third missionary suggested that the NMS agree to granting funds only if the congregation raised a matching amount. Such an approach, he believed, would give the Indians sorely needed cash but also stimulate them towards self-

sufficiency. Superintendent Rødseth came down squarely on Leisegang's side in the debate and declared that the Indian Lutherans could have joined the Methodist church but had declined to do so. He therefore opposed making any appropriation. In the end this position prevailed.[22] The Indian congregation thus had to struggle through the rest of the economically depressed 1930s, suffering from a lack of consistent ministry and a declining membership. It reportedly fell victim to the Second World War. The German military occupation of Norway from April 1940 until May 1945 effectively severed most of the transfer of funds from the NMS headquarters to its missionaries overseas, including those in Natal. They therefore had to reduce some of their activities while continuing to pursue others vigorously. Work amongst Indian Lutherans received low priority and was therefore eliminated. According to an unsubstantiated tradition, the relatively few people who belonged to the congregation at Sea View in 1940 left it during the war and became Pentecostals.[23]

Attempts to Launch SKM Work amongst Indians in Natal

For purposes of historiographical contextualisation, it can be noted that during the latter half of the 1940s the Church of Sweden Mission, or *Svenska Kyrkans Mission* (here abbreviated SKM) also considered undertaking work amongst the rapidly increasing Indian population in Natal and thereby establishing a second urban sector in its South African field. Near the end of the Second World War a Swedish Lutheran missionary in the service of the SKM, Hans Voxblom, who had been in India since 1935, called in Durban on his way back to Sweden. The presence of the large Indian population there prompted him to suggest to counterparts in the SKM's field in South Africa that they expand the ethnic scope of their programme to include these Asians. This proposal found a mixed reception during the next few years. Some SKM missionaries expressed their desire to see Voxblom himself remain and start this kind of work, as he could speak at least one Indian language. Others feared that it might be a waste of time and energy to do so, however, because they believed that the Indians could be sent to India if the National Party came to power.[24]

The SKM then considered bringing an Indian pastor from India to initiate such a mission amongst the Tamils of Natal.

Seasoned missionary Knut Swensson wrote to the commissioner for immigration and Asiatic affairs in August 1947 to inquire about the eventuality of acquiring a temporary residence permit for such a man. That official informed him that it would not be possible, because the Immigrants' Regulation Act of 1913 forbade the entrance of Asians to the Union of South Africa, and no special agreement existed between the governments of that country and India to allow missionaries from the latter to enter South Africa even on a temporary basis.[25] The Swedish Lutheran hope of starting a mission to Indian South Africans, it seemed, had fallen victim to racism even before the National Party acceded to power. Swensson did not give up, however. He appealed the matter to the minister for the interior, who consented in November 1947 to allowing an Indian clergyman to enter South Africa for an initial period of four years "on the understanding that this will not lead to such a missionary getting domiciled in this country".[26]

The question remained who would lead this work. Voxblom had by then returned to India. In 1948 Swensson urged Arvid Bäfverfeldt, the director of the SKM, to come to South Africa and establish a mission in Durban as soon as possible. At a later stage an Indian pastor could join the staff.[27] Bäfverfeldt, however, thought it was the appropriate task of the Tamil church in India to supply a missionary for Durban "if there is any possibility of its sending an Indian pastor". Voxblom, he believed, was indispensable in India, and no other person seemed available at that time.[28] In the meantime the steering committee had considered the matter in detail and contacted the Tamil Lutheran church in India in this regard. The latter body expressed interest in the project but was unable to spare a pastor to be sent to Durban. The steering committee also contemplated but rejected the idea of sending a young South African Indian to the Lutheran theological seminary at Oscarsberg because much of the instruction there was in Zulu and because "racial tensions between Indians and Africans could cause great difficulties". The only viable alternative seemed to be to commission a Swedish missionary to work amongst Indians in Durban, preferably one who had experience in India and could speak an Indian language. If such a man were not available, the steering committee thought it might be satisfactory to commission someone without such a background because

most of the Indians in the Durban area spoke English.[29] But not even an appropriate Anglo phone Swede was available for this kind of ministry.

Owing largely to this shortage of personnel, the SKM did virtually nothing to pursue this vision and never became significantly involved in Indian missions in Durban or elsewhere in South Africa. The matter thus lay dormant until 1960 when the Co-operating Lutheran Missions, an organisation of which both the SKM and the NMS were members, revived the question of Indian work. This was in large measure an initiative of the Norwegian Lutheran missionary Ingolf Edward Hodne, who identified the Indians of Natal as a "neglected missionary task" in a speech to his colleagues in the NMS in 1959.[30] He repeated his call for a mission to them the following year and outlined a basic geographic strategy. "It would seem natural to begin in Durban, expand via Pinetown to Maritzburg, and eventually follow the railway towards Johannesburg, where there are large groups of Indians in most of the towns", Hodne proposed.[31] The SKM was still unable to contribute personnel to the undertaking at that point, but in 1960 it donated £6[32] towards defraying the cost of the project during its first year. The actual beginning of this fascinating branch of urban missionary work, which has never been the subject of serious scholarly inquiry, thus lies outside the chronological framework of this study. As no Indian dimension was forthcoming in the 1940s and 1950s, therefore, the ethnic scope of Scandinavian urban missions in South Africa was essentially the same as it had been before the outbreak of the Second World War. If anything, it was less inclusive, because of the loss of the work amongst Indians which the Norwegian Lutherans had undertaken decades earlier.

Conclusion

Although the NMS's attempts to cultivate an enduring mission to Indians in Natal during the 1930s did not bear immediate the anticipated fruit, the endeavour is nevertheless significant in the history of Scandinavian missions in one of the world's most ethnically, religiously, and culturally pluralistic societies. The historiography of most major mission agencies has developed incrementally, and that of the NMS is certainly no exception. As the internationally noted Australian historian of mission

Professor Norman Etherington observed in a recent survey of historiographical trends pertaining to southern Africa, "studies of twentieth century missionaries are very thin on the ground". He suggested that "one possible explanation is the ebbing of the missionary impulse since its high point at about the turn of the century".[33] The latter generalisation hardly applies to the NMS or certain other Norwegian agencies, however, whose vibrancy and numerical strength throughout the twentieth century defied the secularisation which manifested itself in Scandinavian society generally. Nevertheless, Etherington's point about widespread scholarly neglect of developments is beyond dispute. For the most part, until very recently the historiography of Norwegian Lutheran missions in South Africa has riveted on rural areas of Zululand and Natal. Olav Guttorm Myklebust deserves great credit for shedding much light on the significance of the first ordained NMS missionary, Hans Paludan Smith Schreuder, but Myklebust's works, like those of Torstein Jørgensen, Jarle Simensen, and other ground-breaking Norwegian scholars whose research focused on the nineteenth century, have left developments after the watershed of the Second Anglo-Boer War almost entirely unexplored, not least with regard to the partial shift of geographical and social emphasis from conventional rural stations to various kinds of ministry to migratory Africans and other people in urban areas. The short-lived NMS work amongst Indians in the greater Durban vicinity was a noteworthy part of the latter, one which underscores the expanding scope of Norwegian Lutheran missions which would resume after the trauma of the Second World War and the imposition of apartheid as a bitter fruit of the ascendancy of the National Party to power in 1948.

Notes

1. J.B. Brain, *Christian Indians in Natal, 1860-1911: An Historical and Statistical Study* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1983).
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Frederick Hale, b. 1948, M.T.S. (Harvard University 1971), Ph.D. (Johns Hopkins University 1977). Has held positions as research fellow at Oslo University and Uppsala University, and guest professor at the University of California. Presently Senior Research Fellow, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.

Summary

After engaging in evangelism and other forms of missionary endeavour in rural areas of Natal and Zululand for more than forty years, the NMS expanded its South African field in 1890 to Durban, thereby beginning an urban dimension of its work in the region. After the First World War, the NMS also diversified the ethnic scope of its work there by ministering to Indian Lutherans near Durban. In doing so, it was following in the footsteps of Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, and other missionaries

who had undertaken ministries to Indians in the colony of Natal before 1900. This aspect of the NMS's program never attained major dimensions, however, and fell victim to the financial constraints of the Second World War, when funds from Norway were severly restricted. The Church of Sweden Mission, with which the NMS co-operated in urban areas of South Africa, then considered taking responsibility for part of the support of Indian Lutheran congregations near Durban during the 1940s but did not develop that side of its urban work, which remained concentrated in Johannesburg and elsewhere on the Witwatersrand. Only many years later did the NMS resume a ministry to Indians in Natal.