

16. As an Indian what can I do to make a change in the country?

South Africans of Indian origin must become active and involved in politics. Let us pause for a moment and look at our history of where we have come from, where we are now and why it is important to continue to build and grow this country.

Monday, the 16 November 2008 marks a historic day for the Indian community in South Africa. For it was on 16 November 1860, that our forefathers landed at Addington Beach, Durban, as indentured labourers, 148 years ago.

Our turban, dhoti and sari-clad ancestors, sowed the first powerful seeds for economic growth and enlightened thinking in a country stifled by the destructive forces of an entrenched, restrictive colonial order. Their arrival ushered in our rich cultural heritage, germinating in strong branches of impeccable sets of values, cultural norms and work ethics. Their unstinting resilience to survive the adversities and oppressive practices of that order resulted in the hallmarks of success, and, to an extent, leadership, as currently witnessed in almost all segments of Indian life.

As they tilled the soil with their blood, sweat and tears to enrich the capitalist sugar barons, they used their pittance income to build schools and educate their children.

The lessons of the liberation struggles of our forefathers serve as powerful sources of inspiration to self-sacrifice and peaceful co-existence in a country that should be rightfully united in its diversity and strength.

The historical significance of their arduous and painful liberation struggle is often least understood by some in other sectors in SA, and even Indian youth, who tend to lose their way in the maze of distorted western ideologies and norms.

As our forefathers ploughed the sugarcane fields and planted the seeds of the trees of economic and personal wealth, they favourably positioned Indians as pioneers in the fields of education, law, medicine and other specialist disciplines and sciences. And antagonism and negativity were unknown entities in their thoughts and actions.

The Indian identity remains indestructible as the seeds sown in the foundation years ago by our forefathers will always grow and blossom.