22. Uncovered Treasures

The Birth Certificates

We received an email from Mr Govinden Vishwanaden letting us know that he had finally located birth certificates for Grampa and a girl named Jahangeerbee Peersahib. Having those in our hands along with the birth and death certificates for the boy Samson Peersahib meant that we could finally cross check the information to see how they all relate.

Grampa’s Birth Certificate

Grampa’s birth certificate noted that his birth name was Thomas Shadrach Peersahib. He was given his mother’s maiden name as his Christian name from birth. His parents were James and Esther Peersahib (with no mention of Samson or Miriam). He was born at Moka on 1 September 1859 as we had always known.

All this time we had been searching for Shadrach James Thomas Peersahib, using multiple spellings of his surname, and we were on the wrong path. He must have dropped his Muslim name Peersahib and taken his father’s Christian name for his surname when he came to Australia. A lovely gesture from a young man who, according to family in both Mauritius and Australia, was very disillusioned following his father’s sudden remarriage to a woman who was only seven years older than he was. Aunty Priscilla Thomas hinted at the difficulty a Muslim man would have experienced settling in Australia in that era. This probably explains why he dropped his Muslim name and took his father’s more Anglo-Saxon sounding name as his surname.

We finally had proof that James and Esther were Grampa’s parents. Great! What a relief.

Samson’s Birth Certificate

James and Esther Peersahib had a second son named Samson who was born two years after Grampa on 11 June 1861. His death certificate shows that he died of fever at the age of 13 in January 1875.

It is clear that James Peersahib was never called Samson. Rather, it was his second son who had that name and who lies in the grave at St Thomas Church which was always thought to be that of the father of Grampa Thomas Shadrach James.
I have no doubt that Grandfather James Peersahib and his son Samson are buried in the same grave. Our Mauritian family have always visited that grave having grown up with the knowledge that their grandfather (and ours) was buried there. They would have continually noted the headstone stating his name was Samson Peersahib. It is completely understandable that, over time, they would come to believe that Grandfather’s name was Samson Peersahib.

**Jahangeerbee’s Birth Certificate**

The third birth certificate shows that James and his second wife Lokheea had a daughter called Jahangeerbee, born on 31 July 1880. Sydney and Arlette’s great-grandmother (Grampa’s half-sister) was named Ruth, and since she was the daughter of James Peersahib’s second marriage, we assume that Ruth’s birth name was Jahangeerbee, and that she was christened Ruth, although we have no evidence to support this theory.
**Certified Extract of a Birth Entry**

(Pursuant to the Civil Status Act (PB1)

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**Child - Enfant**

**Father - Per**

**Mother - Mère**

**Annotation(s) - Mention(s)**

Thomas Shadrach Peersahib birth certificate.

Source: Civil Status Office, Mauritius.
**Samson Peersahib birth certificate.**

Source: Civil Status Office, Mauritius.
### Jahangeerbee Peersahib Birth Certificate

Source: Civil Status Office, Mauritius.
Esther and Family

The Arrival

The marriage certificate issued to Grandmother Esther’s parents when they left Madras in India to travel to Mauritius with their children, on 14 July 1857, by the ship Beernah, showed that her mother, Elizabeth, was 35 years old. Her father’s name was simply noted as Thomas, however no christian name was mentioned -- his age was given as forty years. They had travelled with their five children: Marian (Miriam) aged 21, Yoster (Esther) aged 14, Yogabeth (Josapet) aged ten, Eyrvale (Israel) aged six, and Marravalee (Manuel) aged three. Esther’s father passed away two years later on the 24 June 1859, just ten weeks before Grampa was born. The family were listed as Christians on their arrival record.

Marriage certificate issued to Grandmother Esther’s parents to enable the family to travel from India to Mauritius in 1857.

Source: Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Mauritius.

Robynne: This takes me back to the Cyclone of 1868 mentioned in Chapter 21 when Miriam, a bible woman, was noted as being seriously injured. I now suggest that this could be Grandmother Esther’s poor older sister.
Hence why the family confusion over Grandmother’s name being Miriam Esther. In reality, the two oldest children of Elizabeth and Thomas were Miram AND Esther.

We also found further information about Uncle Manuel Thomas, his wife Estelle and their family by locating all their children’s birth certificates at the Civil Status Office in Mauritius. Their children, listed oldest to youngest, were: Mercy, Gamaliel ‘Gami’, Abishegam ‘Abi’, Cyrus, Ebenezer, William Paranesam ‘Nesam’ and Quisana, some of whom we have written about earlier.

Aunty Priscilla Thomas referred to the Thomas family as Tamil however we have recently confirmed that they were Tamil Christians. As you know the Thomas family was highly involved in the Anglican Church and Christian Missionary Society. So it is quite conceivable that a Muslim man such as James Peersahib, newly converted to Christianity, would meet a Tamil Christian such as Esther Thomas, through their common interest in the Christian Missionary Society and Indian Christian Association. You can certainly see how their paths would have crossed.

The Marriage

According to their marriage certificate, Grampa’s parents – Esther Thomas and James Peersahib – were married at Rose Hill in Mauritius on 23 October 1858. He was 24 and she was fifteen. As previously mentioned, he officially started working as an Interpreter in February 1859, probably because he has just married, and his wife was pregnant with their first child, just as we had surmised earlier. In September 1859 their first child Thomas Shadrach Peersahib was born.

It is touching to see that Grampa and Granny Ada named their first child Miriam Esther after Grampa’s mother and her oldest sister.
Marriage certificate for Esther Thomas and James Peersahib.

Source: Civil Status Office, Mauritius.
A Short Life

Sadly Grandmother Esther passed away on 11 February 1877 at Plaines Wilhems at the age of 34. Her surname was spelt incorrectly on her death certificate (Esther Pursahib).

Robynne: It has certainly been a challenge finding records with the Peersahib name spelt in so many different ways.

James Peersahib married his second wife Lokheea on 16 March 1878, just 13 months after Grandmother Esther’s death. Let’s take a moment to think about the impact of this on Grampa:

- he lost his little brother in 1875;
- he lost his mother in 1877;
- he ‘lost’ his father to a new wife in 1878.

It’s not hard to understand why this was so traumatic for Grampa; he had experienced the loss of his brother, mother and, in a way, his father, in such a short space of time.

Many family members had told us that Grampa felt his father’s remarriage came too soon after his mother’s death, therefore dishonouring his mother. He couldn’t stand by and watch his father starting a new life with a new woman, so he left.

The Child Protégé

At this point I would like to backtrack for a minute and remind you about Aunty Priscilla’s stories about Grampa. She stated that: ‘Shadrach was a really brilliant student; he was not only brilliant, his English was perfect and he did very good work’.

Knowing that Grampa’s father Grandfather James Peersahib was a school monitor (teaching assistant) in Madras in a Christian school; also one of the first catechists for the first Bishop of Mauritius, Bishop Ryan; and then went on to establish an Indian Christian school in Mauritius as noted by Bishop Ryan in his Journals -- it makes perfect sense then, that Grampa might go on to help his father in a teaching assistant role in the Christian school. It’s easy to see how Grampa got such a strong foundation for education and religious instruction, and possibly the principle of empowering those who were oppressed by the British colonisers.

Teaching in the Christian Missionary Society and Indian Missionary Association involved education and religious instruction: this certainly fits the approach,
personality, skills and ways of Grampa once he arrived at Maloga and started
to do the same with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children at Maloga and
Cummeragunga Missions.

It’s also interesting to see that Grampa’s own children became his teaching
assistants (school monitors) at Cummeragunga so many years later, just as he
may well have done under the guidance of his own father.

It seems that Grampa’s ‘calling’ here in Australia mirrored that of his father on
his arrival in Mauritius. Both started with nothing, and chose a life of education
and preaching the gospel to people who had been disempowered by British
colonisers.

**Property Ownership**

As previously mentioned, our family in Mauritius has advised us that Grandfather
James Peersahib and Grandmother Esther owned several properties in Mauritius.
Following a great deal of effort by Govinden Vishwanaden and other Mauritius
based researchers, we uncovered the following information about the properties
held in James Peersahib’s name between 1865 and 1903. These are as follows:

1. A land property at Plaines Wilhems with an area of 48 toises on 6 March
   1865.

2. A land property at Plaines Wilhems with an area of 100 toises on 3 March
   1875.

3. A land property at Plaines Wilhems with an area of 100 toises on 17 October
   1903.

N.B: One hundred toises are roughly three hundred and eighty metres squared.

At the time of his death, James was living at 15 Queen Victoria Street, Rose Hill,
which is also believed to be one of his properties.

Our Mauritian family have clearly stated that there were seven properties and
we have no doubt that the records shall be there once our researchers have time
to complete their search. We also believe we can eventually find evidence of who
‘acquired’ those properties following Grandfather James Peersahib’s death. This
may well confirm the family story about the Notary who tricked Grandfather’s
widow Lokheea into signing the properties over to him.
Esther Peersahib (spelt Pursahib) death certificate.

Source: Civil Status Office, Mauritius.
Dharmaalan Dana

James Peersahib death certificate.

Source: Civil Status Office, Mauritius.
Peersahib/Thomas family tree © George and Robynne Nelson