

KS3

Lesson 1

Ugandan Asian Migration



What can we learn about identity and belonging in Britain in the 1970s from Ugandan Asian experiences of migration?



Context

Lesson 1

Why did the Asian community settle in Uganda, and then leave in the 1970s?

Experiences and Impact

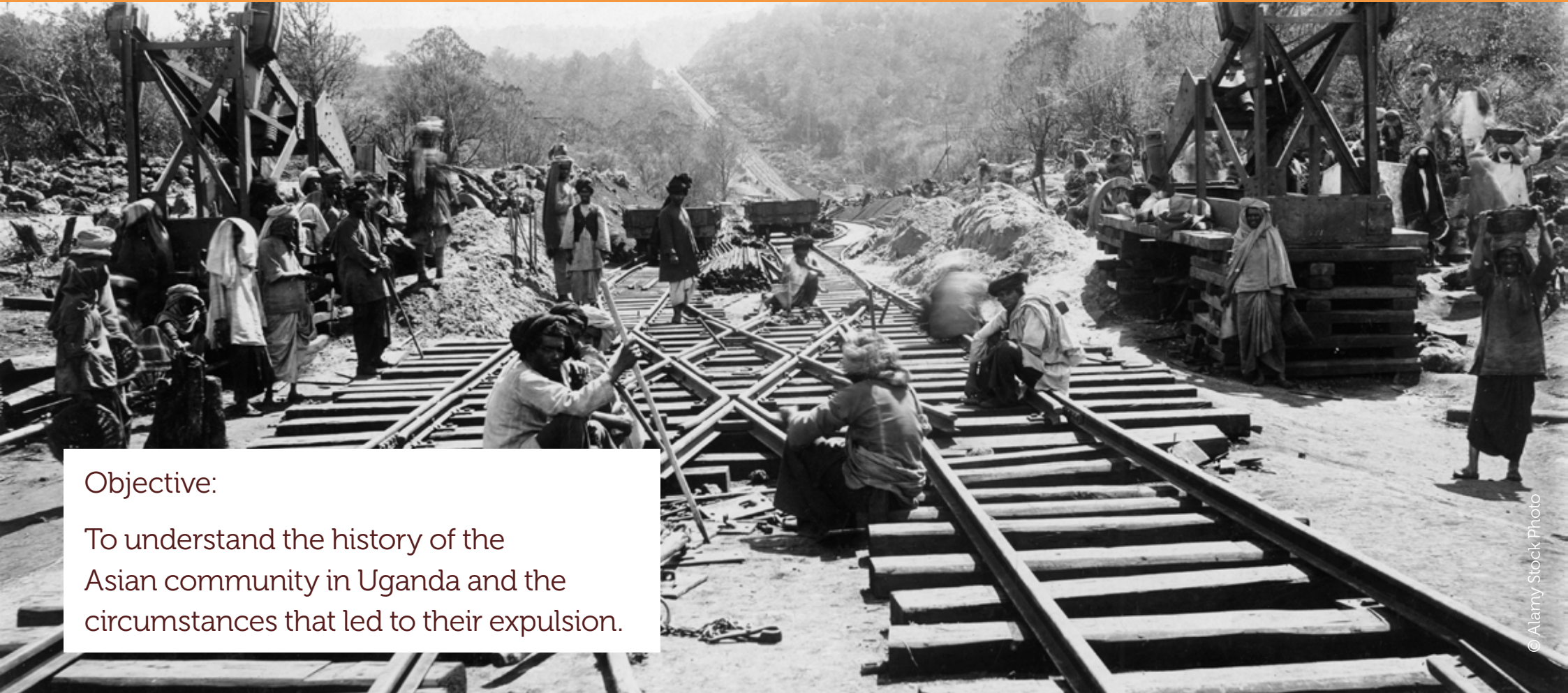
Lesson 2

What was life like for Ugandan Asians arriving in 1970s Britain?

Lesson 3

How did the Ugandan Asians find 'home' in Britain?

Why did an Asian community settle in Uganda, and then leave in the 1970s?



Objective:

To understand the history of the Asian community in Uganda and the circumstances that led to their expulsion.

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On your own copy, complete the quiz using what you can recall from your previous learning about the British Empire:



Statement

True or False?

By 1900, Britain's Empire dominated the Indian Ocean world

The British moved people from different parts of the world to build its powerbase in different parts of the Empire

People from the British mainland were very keen to move to East Africa in the 1800s

Slavery had been abolished in the British Empire in 1800

In the space under each statement, you can write any corrections as we go through the next slides

What was the link between Uganda and Britain in 1901?



1888

William McKinnon set up the British East Africa Company (BEAC)

1897

British government agreed to take control of the region from BEAC to secure more funds for building a railway from Mombasa to Lake Victoria

1896–1901

Britain used nearly 32,000 migrant workers brought from India to build the Uganda Railways



What was the link between Uganda and Britain?



By the late 19th century, Britain had established colonies within the Indian Ocean world. Britain planned a railway in Kenya and Uganda to make it easier to **exploit** the countries for trade. They needed labour but slavery had been abolished in the Empire since 1833.

In 1896, the first **indentured** labourers were 'imported' to Africa from India, by the British. They built the railway between by 1901, but 2,493 indentured labourers, (10% of those employed), died in the dangerous work and living conditions.

The British were disappointed that most surviving indentured labourers returned to India. Only 6,724 of the original labourers remained in Africa. They settled in towns along the railway route to work in trade & business – but not farming, as the best farmland was reserved for Europeans.

Britain's attempts to use indentured labourers to colonise East Africa failed. However, those who remained had an impact on the future of Ugandan Asians. Although indentured labourers became a minority of the Asians settled in East Africa, their history was used to create a **myth** of Ugandan Asians as "uncivilized" due to their supposed lack of education and poor background.

What was the link between Uganda and Britain?







By the 1930s, Ugandan Asians were a permanent feature of colonial Ugandan society. South Asians owned more farmland as European immigration had declined. Ugandan Asians also made advancements in politics. But amidst growing inequality, the success and visibility of the Ugandan Asian community created increased resentment from the indigenous population.

By 1945, colonised people around the world had a renewed consciousness and sought representation and greater autonomy. Indian independence in 1947 attracted the attention of the South Asian population and also Africans. **Decolonization** seemed a possibility for other colonies and helped to advance the cause of Ugandan independence. This triggered a crisis, for the British but also the South Asians who had benefitted substantially from the colonial system.

Racial tensions in Uganda increased, as did the anti-colonial movement. Uganda won independence in 1962, and its leader Milton Obote presided over a difficult time, where Indian traders were openly blamed for economic issues. Idi Amin took over in a military coup in 1971.

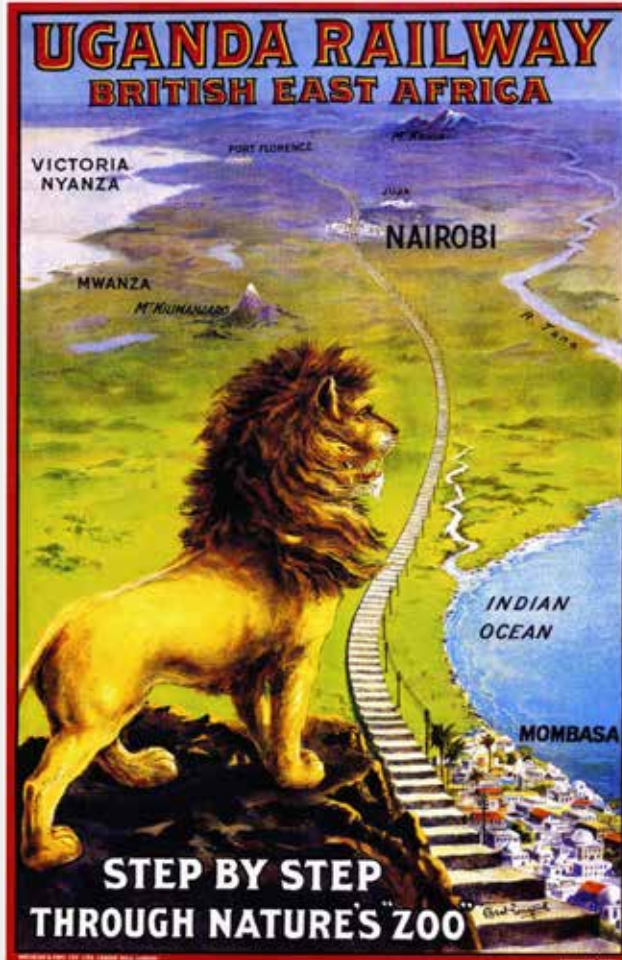
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In the space under each statement, you can write any corrections as we go through the next slides

What issues with the railways are shown in the poster?



1905 Poster

Why was there increased migration to Uganda after 1901?



.....
The railway was completed in 1901. The opportunity for indentured labourers to set up in trade triggered the first wave of major “voluntary” South Asian migration to Uganda in the 20th century.
.....

The British Raj had damaged the agricultural economy and so it was difficult for peasants to earn a living in the Indian subcontinent. This caused widespread famines which were a push factor for South Asians to emigrate to East Africa.
.....

Between 10,000-20,000 voluntary migrants left for East Africa between 1880 and 1900. Most settled in Kenya, but many men ventured further into the interior of Uganda to explore economic opportunities generated by the railway. These early migrants were often individual adult men, as the passage to Uganda required enough money to start a business upon arrival.

What was the link between Uganda and Britain?



Mayur: [my family came to Uganda] with the railways. Kenya wanted railways between the two countries, people from India were invited, my great grandparents went there [around 1908] and they stayed there. They had a business and ... just didn't go back to India and opened a business and I was born there [in Uganda].



Shenaz: My father was in India, in Bombay, and my mother was in India too, but the economic situation in India wasn't [great] so a lot of people migrated to Africa. My dad's mum passed away in India, so he went to a boarding school. So then after that when he was about 18, he migrated to Africa ... set up a business ... in a tiny village called Nabusanke, he was completely on his own. So, then mum and dad got married ... about 1950 ... It was a nice little village and ... my dad ... was a school headmaster ... I was born in 1960



Jyotika: My dad was born in Uganda, [my grandad] came to Africa I don't know when. But they were invited by the British to work as tailors because they needed a lot of uniforms to be sewn for railway [workers], for police. [The British] were inviting people from India who were skilled in those areas. So that's why he came by ship to Mombasa from India, from Gujarat ... the men always went first and then they worked, got a house, had a bit of money and then they would kind of call upon their families.



Jaswant: My father was born in India, he went to Uganda because one of his brothers had been fighting in the Second World War for the British Army and then he went and bought land [in Uganda] and started growing sugar [cane] and then invited all three of his brothers to [come and he] opened up a factory for making sugar. So my father was born in India, my grandparents were born in India.

Why was there increased migration to Uganda after 1901?



By 1910, colonial policy had established a hierarchy in Uganda with Europeans occupying positions of administration and agricultural development, Asians involved almost exclusively in trade or craftsmanship and Africans forced to work for either Europeans or South Asians as cheap labour.

Uganda became unique because the end of European migration in the 20th century meant that the colonial system became dependent upon the South Asian population in order to increase economic production.

As more South Asians in the Indian subcontinent began to see opportunities and protection provided by Britain in Uganda, migration increased.

Unlike former South Asian traders within the Indian Ocean World, these migrants began to settle permanently in Uganda. This time they brought their families, and establish a permanent community.

Why was there increasing tension amongst different Ugandan communities in the twentieth century?



.....
Britain was dependent on the South Asian class in Uganda due to lack of willing European immigration.
.....

.....
Britain decided in 1920 to allow South Asians to obtain farmland in Uganda, (although the European elite would keep the best land). This led to the establishment of a small South Asian planter class in Uganda who seemed to 'get rich quick'.
.....

.....
It is therefore no surprise that Africans came to resent the status of the Ugandan Asian minority within the country, who appeared to be preventing their social mobility by the fact they controlled around 80 to 90% of trade.
.....

.....
The real culprit of preventing Africans from social mobility was the British, but the South Asians in Uganda were a more visible minority. Europeans were often isolated from everyday interactions with Africans so seemed less influential.
.....

Why was there increasing tension amongst different Ugandan communities in the twentieth century?



.....
By the 1930s the Ugandan Asian population was a permanent feature of colonial Ugandan society.
.....

By 1935 South Asians owned almost as much cultivated land as the Europeans due to the lack of European immigration. Ugandan Asians also made advancements in politics, fighting for representation in councils and legislative bodies in areas such as Kampala and Jinja. But the success of the Ugandan Asian community came with increased resentment from the indigenous population.
.....

At the end of the Second World War, colonised people around the world had a renewed consciousness. After their service to Britain and other empires, they too sought representation and greater autonomy.
.....

The independence movement in India attracted the attention of the South Asian population and also Africans. The partition of British India in 1947 signalled decolonization as a growing reality for other colonies and helped to advance the cause of Ugandan independence. This triggered a crisis, for the British but also the South Asians who had benefitted substantially from the colonial system.
.....

Britain tried making policies in Uganda to appease the indigenous population. This failed to stop the racial tensions it had created. The anti-colonial movement, which included an anti-Asian element, increased: in 1952, the first African political party, the Ugandan National Congress was founded.

Can you predict how these factors might affect the future for Ugandan Asians in 1971?



Increased inequality between indigenous Ugandans and Asians

January 1971: Britain, USA and Israel triggered a coup where Idi Amin became leader in Uganda

Ugandan Asians become wealthier

Asians were increasingly visible as an elite as European migration to Uganda tailed off

Ugandan National Congress founded

Decolonisation

Growth of independence movements

Turning point: Idi Amin 4th August 1972



Addressing a military regiment, Ugandan President Idi Amin declared that Uganda had no place for the 80,000 Asians who were 'sabotaging Uganda's economy and encouraging corruption'.

By the 9th of August, Amin declared that all non-citizen Asians must leave Uganda within three months and that those who dared remain would be 'sitting on fire'.

These first two declarations had only concerned the expulsion of Ugandan Asians who held British passports or were non-citizens, yet Amin's number of 80,000 implied the entire Ugandan Asian community was no longer welcome

Extract 1:

As soon as he'd won the election [Idi Amin] there was a change you could feel in the atmosphere that something was not quite right, things were changing ... there was always a fear that started to creep into people's lives, that this person is not the right person, that we may not start having the freedom that we had, persecutions may come in. But no one I don't think anyone ever dreamt that he would make this announcement, people thought that we're here, we're here for life, and that was it.

Bharat, who grew up in Uganda and was a child in the 1970s

Extract 2:

Oh my god we were scared after, when we knew that we had to leave, and it was just like we were counting days to get out because all these armed officers with rifles were roaming around on motorbikes frightening people to get out as soon as possible "don't wait for 30 days".

Tarla, who grew up in Uganda and was 13 in 1972

.....

Extract 3:

People didn't eat fish from the River Nile, because we lived at the source of River Nile, because they found [body parts], watches in the fish. When they finished dumping bodies on the street then they started dumping them in the river, so all that fear! And you knew that your life didn't mean anything.

Jaswant, was born in Uganda and was 18 in 1972

Turning point:

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The first two declarations had only concerned the expulsion of Ugandan Asians who held British passports or were non-citizens. Amin's '80,000', however, implied all Ugandan Asians were no longer welcome

Extract 4:

There was all of a sudden a sort of ... hushness [sic], ... almost like people were scared to talk aloud it was like the whole volume of the country or the family/the household just went down and then things like curfew. ... my dad was stuck coming from Masindi to Jinja because it was evening and he'd been stopped by the police ... then I remember my grandma had a sudden attack, she wasn't well, and the doctors wouldn't come out because it was curfew and there was this horrible feeling of danger, something not nice happening, and we felt a bit helpless ... in the end ... my middle brother and our house-help went to find help...

So there was this sense of danger ... then there was a bullet that came right through the house and missed my cousin, missed her nose I'd say, and there was a hole in the wall and that was a bit scary, I felt scared but I didn't quite understand what or why this was happening.

Sutinder, was born in Uganda in 1962

Turning point: Idi Amin 4th August 1972



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Extract 5:

We left after 60 days ... the reason was that my dad was a Ugandan national and we had Ugandan passports ... We thought this expulsion order doesn't apply to us ... because we are Ugandan, it just applies to people [with] British passports [like my mum] ... But ... after days of queuing up ... they said 'No you are not Ugandan' and took the Ugandan passports away from us: the officer said 'you are Asian, so you have to leave'.... Our first port of call was the British High Commission, ... and the British High Commission said ... 'the head of the household has to be British for the family to come and [mum's] not the head of the household, you [my dad] are the head of the household. So that was a no-go. Then we thought that because my mom was born in India, [we could try India] ... the Indian High Commission ... was exactly the same reply as the British ... So we ... went to the Australian [embassy] or Canadian [embassy], quite a few embassies ... [they all said] no... But then somebody said that 'Pakistan are taking people, if you are Muslims' so we went to Pakistan.

Najma was born in Uganda in 1957. In 1972 they moved to Pakistan, moving again in summer 1974 to come to the UK after a change in the law accepted they could all come to the UK if her mother had a British passport.

Listen to/ read the extracts and then answer the questions below



1. List some of the emotions which Bharat, Tarla, Jaswant and Sutinder describe going through as Idi Amin came to power.

2. Bharat says, 'you could feel in the atmosphere that something was not quite right'. What evidence can you find to support or contradict that statement?

3. Do you think there are any differences which make the recording/written source better?

4. What might be some of the challenges for a historian working with oral histories such as these?

15:23 – 15:43

[Interview with Jaswant Jutley-Plested - YouTube](#)

Source: Oral History interviews with Bharat Joshi, Sutinder Nagi, Jaswant Jutley-Plested and Tarla Modha, 2022- 2023.



British Raj

Commonwealth

Decolonisation

Empire

Exploit

Immigration

Indentured

Infrastructure

Migration

Populous

Racism

Refugee

Settlement

