

Sikh and Indian Australians

TEACHER RESOURCE 3 - PERSPECTIVES ON “ASIATIC AND AFRICAN ALIENS”

Perspectives on a “rather difficult question”.

Source 1. A lifeline to rural towns

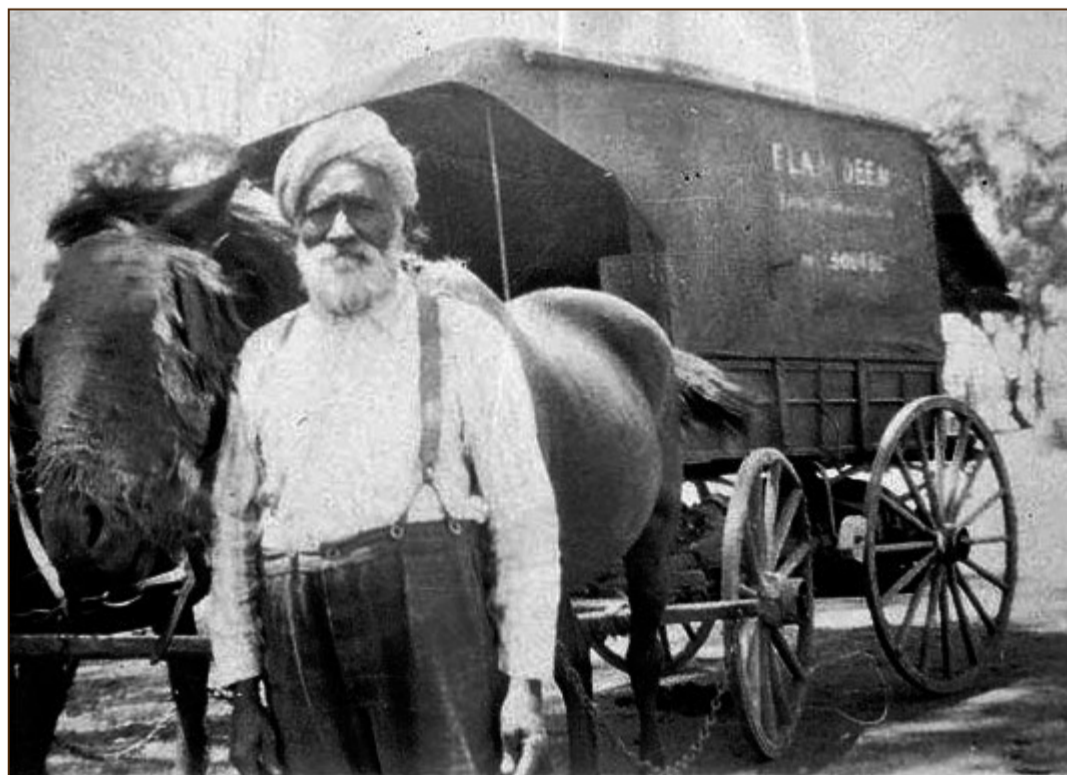
Many sources indicate that these hawkers provided a lifeline to the rural towns and more isolated farms by providing a large range of products, as well as a diversion from the everyday. There must have been a great sense of excitement when the hawker came to town bearing new merchandise, both everyday and exotic, which might otherwise not be seen outside the big cities.

<https://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/discoverycentre/your-questions/indian-hawkers/>

Source 2. He was very welcome indeed - memories of Mary Staley

And we were very pleased to see these hawkers, they carried such a variety of tiny things that the housewife really depended on, tiny things that were so unimportant for other people, like needles and cotton and darning wool and little bits of material to make children’s clothes, soaps, toilet soap. Some of us made our own soap but you couldn’t wash your face with that, but he had beautiful soaps. And sometimes he carried cough medicines, and then of course he had curtaining and lengths for making dresses. And he was very welcome indeed.

<http://greataustralianstory.com.au/story/sikh-hawkers> - Mary Staley



An Indian hawker with his cart

(Source: Museum Victoria Collection, www.museumvictoria.com.au)

Source 3. The Acting Premier of Western Australia Edward Wittenoom 1898 letter to the Governor:

...whatever the individual views of the government may be, it is impossible for it to retain its position in this democratic country and [support] equality of rights to coloured people. The voters (in Western Australia) do not take into consideration what the obligations of the Mother country (Great Britain) may be to their Indian subjects: they only consider the competition of a race who can and will... undersell them in production and labour.

Westrip and Holroyde *Colonial Cousins* pp 163 - 164

Source 4. Competition with local businesses

"...in earlier years, [Ottam Singh] went from house to house peddling his wares: spices, curries, pepper, items of clothing, calico and other materials, shirts, frocks etc. I believe he still did this in the case of isolated settlers away from the towns in later years too, but the Roads Boards in some districts had introduced very [strict] conditions about licensing pedlars and hawkers who competed with local businessmen, so he no longer went from house to house in Nannup at the time I remember him."

<http://www.australiansikhheritage.com/ottam-singh>

Explain the point of view toward the hawkers by each of the following groups of people using examples from the four sources to support your answer.

GROUP	SUPPORT OR OPPOSE INDIAN HAWKERS	REASONS WHY THEY HELD THAT POINT OF VIEW
women on the farms		
men on the farms		
local businessmen		
voters (WA workers)		
The Western Australian Government		