

Indian Diaspora in Madagascar

Indians in Madagascar form a community of roughly 25,000 individuals according to the statistics of India's Ministry of External Affairs; other estimates of their population range from 15,000 to 30,000. Most of them are from merchant communities of Gujarat, majority of them are following Khojas, Ismailis, Bohra sect of Shia Islam, beside them Vaishnav Hindu merchants forms the second largest section. Among them are 867 non-resident Indians, with the rest being locally born descendants of early immigrants. they play major role in nation economy. By the 1880s, a community of roughly 200 Indian traders had formed at Mahajanga, a port on the north-west coast of Madagascar, near Bombetoka Bay at the mouth of the Betsiboka River. Confusion arose over their legal status; they often declared themselves to be Malagasy subjects in order to evade the laws against slave-holding or the building of stone houses, both forbidden to British subjects, while their *dhow*s, which they used to transport goods to and from the African mainland, flew French flags. Initial arrivals were mainly Muslim Khojas, Ismailis and Daoudi Bohras, with some Hindus settling later. The 1911 census found 4,480 Indians in the country, making them 21% of the total foreign population and the second-largest foreign population after the French. The majority speak Hindi or Gujarati, although some other Indian languages are spoken. Nowadays, younger generations speak at least three languages, including French or English, Gujarati and Malagasy. following the nationalization of private businesses in the 1970s, many were compelled to leave; those who remained were largely uneducated, but stayed on and gradually built their businesses. By 2000, they were generally believed to control 50-60% of the country's economy, making them the target of demonstrators during periods of unrest.