

## **Incidents (of Travel) Moses Serubiri and Mohsen Taha Jinja, Uganda June 2016**

*Itinerary by Moses Serubiri*

We didn't know exactly what the trip would consist of when we got into the car in Kampala at around eight in the morning. We filled up the tank and headed for Jinja.

Jinja's beginnings were rooted in the early industrialization of Uganda at the beginning of the 20th century. Jinja was built at the source of the River Nile on Lake Victoria. The question of the origin of the Nile caused great excitement in England during the 1860s when John Hannington Speke, the English explorer, declared its discovery through his letters to the London press, and later in his *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (1863). It was reported that the scene of the river's birth was so grand it was unparalleled in anything Speke had ever seen. Its beauty was unmatched in any landscape throughout all his travels in Africa. Speke also reported that there was an excess of plantains—although he referred to the fruit as bananas—all the way from Jinja to Kampala.

Today that route cuts through the Mabira Forest Reserve, home to many endangered species. Jinja was seen to have both a natural beauty, a geographical significance as the source of the Nile, as well as vast agri-industrial potential.

We would spend our day in Jinja looking at the legacy of the Indian people of the town and the architectural legacy they left. Idi Amin's eviction of Indians from Uganda in 1972 was not the first expression of prejudice against Indians in Uganda, nor was it the first exodus of Indians from East Africa. Waves of Indians had already left the country during the 1920s, immediately after the East African Railway was finished and following the completion of the Uganda Railway Station in Kampala. Thousands of Goan Indians had migrated to Uganda in order to work.

### **Between Naranbhai Road and Rippon Road – an old re-inhabited apartment building from the 1960s.**

Initially, Adam, who helped us find locations in Jinja, took us to a building he called the "Dirty Flat". Its walls were falling apart, and the gas and water pipes looked like they had been made in the 1960s or 1970s. The building had no doors, and we entered through a long corridor, having been told that the roof had excellent views over the town.

### **Three buildings on Gabula Road and the Madhvani building.**

Only fifty meters away, off Jinja's main street and towards the Idi Amin clock tower, were three further buildings that we went to see: the home of an Indian woman, an old re-inhabited building in a very Indian style with a wooden ornamented facade, and what looked like an office building. More wooden facades, as well as elaborate wooden verandas with columns, appeared on another building on the main street in Jinja that still belongs to an Indian industrialist family. There was a sign on the building that read, "Madhvani. Built 1923." These signs were present on several buildings throughout the main streets. We were told that there was a neighborhood called Madhvani town, which demonstrated the extent of this family's influence in Jinja.

### **Four houses on Nile Crescent, next to the Jinja Sailing Club and the Jinja Golf course, along the River Nile.**

These locations were all outside the centre of Jinja—away from the industrial area, away from the bridge, and away from the main street. They were mostly residential houses in which Indian families would have last lived in around forty years ago. In fact, were trying to identify "Indian architecture" and buildings that seemed to have been built between the 1920s and the 1950s with characteristic facades with wooden ornamentations, elaborate thresholds, extravagant verandas, and large staircases. We also noted aspects that reminded us of bungalows that would have been used as administrative buildings in the 1920s.

### **Kutch Road, next to Kakindi stadium.**

After walking near the Jinja Sailing Club, we visited a site on Kutch Road. Walking along the walls of the Kakindi stadium, we saw the decay that characterized several houses in the area. Being right in the middle of town, the dilapidation felt even more ghostly here. In contrast to the music of the yearly Bayimba festival that takes place in Jinja, and the noise from the football matches that regularly take place inside the stadium, the boarded-up houses along Kutch Road are abandoned and silent.