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Book Author(s): Brij V Lal

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Giritiyas at work, carrying bunches of banana in Wainunu, Bua. Most, however, were employed on cane plantations. Overseers and Fijians watch the procession. Overseers were called 'Kulambar' by the giritiyas, after the 'call your number' order barked by them at the crack of every dawn.



The Odyssey of Indenture

No one who understands the historian's craft would plead seriously that all groups should receive equal time. We know more about some groups than others not only because of the predilection of historians on the nature of their sources but frequently because we should know more about some groups of individuals in terms of their importance and their effects upon others. The problem is that historians have tended to spend too much of their time in the company of the 'movers and shakers' and too little in the universe of the mass of mankind.'

Lawrence W. Levine

'Indians are ubiquitous', wrote the Calcutta newspaper *The Statesman* on 5 August 1980. According to it, there were then only five countries in the world where Indians 'have not yet chosen to stay': Cape Verde Islands, Guinea Bissau, North Korea, Mauritania and Romania. Today, according to one recent estimate, 8.6 million people of South Asian origin live outside the subcontinent, in the United Kingdom and Europe (1.48 million), Africa

(1.39 million), Southeast Asia (1.86 million), the Middle East (1.32 million), Caribbean and Latin America (958,000), North America (729,000), and the Pacific (954,000).²

The creation of this diaspora is a remarkable phenomenon. The resurgence of interest in overseas Indian communities, especially since the 1970s,³ has perhaps been inspired by the intensification of the great debate over the nature of slavery in the United States, the precarious political position of Indians in a number of former British colonies, and the increasing visibility of overseas Indians in the international labour and capital markets. Descendants of Indian indentured migrants constitute an important part of the mosaic of overseas Indian communities. This paper reviews some of the major aspects of their experience. Its principal focus is Fiji, but much of what is said about the Indo-Fijians experience is generally applicable to Indian communities in other parts of the world, especially in the Caribbean.

Indian indentured emigration was started in the 19th century to meet the shortage of labour supply caused by the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833. Colonial governments in the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, Africa, and the Pacific turned to India after other sources of cheap labour supply had failed or were insufficient. Mauritius in 1834 was the first colony to import Indian indentured labour, followed by British Guiana in 1838, Trinidad and Jamaica in 1845, small West Indian colonies such as St. Kitts, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Grenada in the 1850s, Natal in 1860, Surinam in 1873 and Fiji in 1879. During the eighty two years of indentured emigration, over one million Indians were introduced into these colonies. Larger numbers of contract labourers were also imported into Malaya, Sri Lanka and Burma but under a slightly different contract.⁴

The indentured migrants left home on a contract whose precise terms varied between the colonies and over time. But all stipulated the nature and conditions of employment on the plantations, remuneration for work, and an optional free return passage to India after a specified period, usually ten years, of 'industrial residence' in the colonies. Most of the migrants had probably intended their excursion out of India as a brief sojourn, a temporary expedient to cope with some personal misfortune or economic hardship; it seems unlikely that many consciously opted for a permanent break with their homeland. Quite a few did return: by 1870, 21 per cent of the indentured migrants had returned, and in the decade after 1910, one returned for every two who had migrated to the colonies⁵. However, the majority, enticed by the prospect of better opportunities in the colonies, official discouragement of repatriation, inertia and the dread of

undertaking a long sea voyage again, settled permanently in the colonies. The life and struggle of these labourers and their descendants have bequeathed a legacy whose resolution still remains elusive.

The odyssey of these 'floating caravans of barbarian tourists',⁶ as someone once remarked uncharitably, has spawned a rich corpus of scholarly literature on all major overseas Indian communities, accompanied by a refreshing shift in perspective from seeing the overseas Indian communities as a problem in Indian and Imperial politics to a detailed examination of the actual nature of the experience of the indentured labourers in the colonies, including questions of resistance, accommodation and adaptation, and formation of new identities. Many themes have been emphasised, and a range of ideological and moral postures adopted, which is not surprising given that indenture was itself a complex institution riddled with contradictions.

Two distinct lines of interpretation can be discerned. On the one hand are those who have stressed the deception, drudgery and dehumanisation that the indenture system entailed and have labelled it a new system of slavery. For Hugh Tinker, there was one factor, and one only, in which the indentured migrants enjoyed an advantage over the slaves: indenture was temporary institution while slavery was lifelong bondage. For Tinker what mattered most 'in the balance of benefit and affliction was the Indians had exchanged a society and a living community (though unequal and degrading to many, tiresome and tedious to most) for a lifeless system, in which human values always mattered less than the drive for production, for exploitation'.⁷ At the other end of the spectrum are those who take a more sanguine view of the indenture experience, emphasising the freedom that emigration and settlement in the colonies provided to the migrants from the social and economic hardships of their own society. Thus for I.M. Cumpston, indenture 'meant care in sickness, free medical attendance, free hospital accommodation, rations in some cases, sanitary dwellings, a guaranteed minimum daily wage, and general supervision by government officials'.⁸

Whether indenture was slavery or not is ultimately an unresolvable question, a matter of perspective. The tension between agency and structure will remain. Nonetheless, even those who reject Tinker's 'new system of slavery thesis' agree that indenture was a degrading, dehumanising experience that scarred those who endured its hardships.⁹ Instead of re-visiting that tired debate, I explore here the way in which the indentured labourers themselves experienced the system, or, to use Kusha Haraksingh's words, 'to discover in an overall sense what made the

community tick'.¹⁰ Several scholars have examined how the workers resisted oppression, or, if the circumstances dictated, accommodated themselves to the realities of plantation life.¹¹ Others have examined the experience of women and how they coped with the sexism and racism in the colonies.¹²

This essay builds upon these efforts and seeks to understand the ways in which the indenture experience led to the creation of a new kind of society in overseas Indian communities. The importance of indenture as a crucible which forged a new, distinctive identity is widely acknowledged.¹³ At the risk of gross generalisation, it can be said that the progenies of the indentured Indians differed significantly from their forbearers in terms of thought patterns, world view and values. They were more individualistic and pragmatic, more self-oriented, more egalitarian, more alone, sometimes extravagantly proud of their ancestral culture and heritage but not enslaved by its rituals and cultural protocols. Whether in the Caribbean or Fiji, the post-indenture Indians, at least of the first generation, were curious, incongruous figures in the new environment, torn between two worlds, one which they had left but to which they could not return; the other which they adopted but which they could not, or were not allowed to, integrate themselves into. The tension between the two, the sense of transience, alienation and uprootedness and general ambivalence animated their existence. They were a people caught in-between.

I explore here the sources of that tension to understand aspects of the overseas Indian identity and the transformation of the cultural baggage of the immigrants in the new environment. Fragmentation and reconstitution lay at the heart of the matter. The ways in which the old culture fragmented and then was reconstituted from the various bits and pieces which survived the ordeal of indenture varied from place to place, depending on the policies and structures of the host societies, the chronology of migration, the size and social composition of the migrant population, the geography and the patterns of settlement, the physical and cultural distance of those places from India, and the frequency of the contact with it. Nonetheless, for all the differences of detail, fragmentation and reconstitution occurred everywhere. The Fiji story will, therefore, echo in other overseas Indian communities. The patterns varied but the process remained the same.

Origins and Background

The bulk of the Indian indentured migrants to Fiji and the Caribbean, and to a lesser extent Natal and Mauritius, came from the Indo-Gangetic plains of North India, initially from the districts of Bihar and then from the

depressed eastern regions of Uttar Pradesh (UP). From the 1880s to the end of indentured emigration in 1916, Uttar Pradesh provided eighty per cent of the migrants and Bihar and Bengal thirteen per cent, the rest coming from Madhya Pradesh, the Punjab and elsewhere.¹⁴ The migrants came from a world caught in ferment. The effects of British revenue settlements took their toll on the rural population, as did the destruction of the indigenous handicraft industries, subdivision of land holdings caused by growth of population and family dissension, hardships caused by droughts, floods and famines and the consequent poverty and increasing indebtedness among the peasants.¹⁵ The old order was changing.

One manifestation of the rural upheaval in the Indo-Gangetic plains was the increased rate of internal migration there, now accentuated by availability of accessible transportation and the possibility of jobs in the labour intensive enterprises in eastern India, such as the tea plantations in Assam, jute mills in Calcutta, and collieries in Bihar.¹⁶ By the turn of the century, according to census commissioner E.A. H. Blunt, 'there is not a single family in the Benares Division which has not at least one member in the Provinces of Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Orissa'.¹⁷ In Sultanpur, where migration had been adopted as a strategy for 'restoring fallen fortunes or of easing off a redundant population', the migrants remitted RS 1,627,700 between October 1894 and September 1897.¹⁸ In Azamgarh, the annual remittance in the 1890s was around Rs 13 lakh,¹⁹ and in Ghazipur, an official commented on the 'remarkable amounts remitted to the district through the agency of the post-office. The importance of all this can hardly be exaggerated'.²⁰ By the twentieth century, 'it is these remittances from emigrants which make it possible for the rural population...to make both ends meet in spite of the large size of their families and their uneconomic holdings'.²¹

Indian indentured recruits came from this uprooted, fragmented mass of humanity on the move. In the case of Fiji (1879-1916), most of the migrants had already left their villages before being recruited. Most were registered not in large cities such as Benares, Agra, Lucknow or Delhi—these accounted for about a quarter of Fiji's registration—but in towns and urban centres neighbouring their villages. The Emigration Act (1882) forbade registration outside the districts of origin unless the officials were satisfied that the recruits had left their homes voluntarily. This was done partly to check abuses. No doubt there was some evasion of the regulations, with 'recruiters running about from district to district picking up a few men here and a few men there and eventually taking them to be registered in some other districts'.²² The role of deception and fraudulence has been

emphasised by many observers²³, but its importance in the recruitment process should be kept in its proper perspective.

Much has been assumed about the recruits themselves, much of it unflattering. 'Flotsam and jetsam of humanity', 'riff raff picked up from the streets of Calcutta', 'dregs of Indian society' are only some of the epithets used to describe them. G.A. Grierson wrote in 1882: 'I have been assured by every native from whom I have enquired, and by most Europeans, that only the lowest castes emigrate, and that nothing will ever induce men of higher class of life to leave India'.²⁴ This provided the colonial state the 'proof' it needed to remind the Indians in Fiji and elsewhere of their proper place in the colonial social hierarchy, a 'part of the ideological underpinning of European dominance'.²⁵ Equally importantly, it also blunted sensitivity to the abuses in the system.

The truth, however, is more complicated. The migrants came from all strata of rural North Indian society. Of the indentured emigrating population between the 1880s and the end of emigration in 1916, Brahmans and allied high castes comprised 12 per cent, agriculturalists 37 per cent, artisans 6 per cent, lower castes 33 per cent, and Muslims 12 per cent.²⁶ The contribution of the various groups roughly approximated their numerical strength in rural UP society. It was thus a slice of rural North India that was transported to the colonies. The bulk of the migrants were agriculturalists and labourers. About 80 per cent of all the emigrants were Hindus, 15 per cent Muslims and the rest Tribal, Christians, Sikhs and others. For the most part, the migrants belonged to what Milton Singer has called the 'little tradition', 'unlettered without benefit of specialised teachers and institutions'.²⁷ Nonetheless, there were sufficient members of the 'great tradition' in the emigrating population who had the appropriate cultural training and tools to preserve and transmit their cultural values and heritage to others.

Indian emigration rules required a fixed ratio of women to men among the emigrants. Although shaky in the beginning, after the 1870s, the ratio was fixed at 40 women to 100 men. Reaction in the colonies varied. Some preferred single men for economic reasons, while others welcomed the women as potential reproducers of local labour. Recruiters often complained of the difficulty in recruiting single young women, but in the end, the ratio was met. Of the 13,696 Indian indentured women who departed for Fiji from Calcutta, 3,659 (26.7 per cent of all females) came as members of families, the majority (68.6 per cent) accompanying their husbands and the rest with their children or with their husbands and children.²⁸ In Mauritius, too, large numbers of women came as members of

families.²⁹ The significance of this and the contribution women made to the reconstitution of overseas Indian identity will be discussed later.

The process of disintegration that had pushed the recruits out of their villages continued in the depots where the migrants were housed, questioned by officials about their motives for migrating, and inspected for their aptitude and fitness for physical work in the colonies. Between 15-20 per cent of the migrants were rejected between the time of recruitment up country and the time of embarkation.³⁰ Fragmentation accelerated on the ship voyage across the *kala pani*, the dark dreaded seas, which could take up to three months, a traumatic experience indeed for a land-locked people who had never seen the sea before. The quarters were crowded, and the provisions for the separation of the sexes not always observed. Not surprisingly, customary, culturally sanctioned space between different castes and food taboos broke down. Enforced interaction rather than separation became the norm. And everyone, irrespective of social status, took turns cleaning decks, pumping water and cooking. The voyage provided the first inkling of what lay ahead. As K.L. Gillion has written, 'Most of their caste scruples gone, without their traditional leaders and elders and generally without kin, they were resigned to the future and very vulnerable'.³¹

But there was another development amidst all the deracination. The shared ordeal of the long ship voyage forged a new identity and fostered a new kind of relationship among the emigrants. The men travelling on the same ship, coolies all, became *jahajibhais*, ship mates, a fraternal relationship that provided an important basis of social interaction, economic cooperation and emotional support among the migrants in the immediate post-indenture period.³² The bonds of caste and kinship shaken in the depots and on the voyage were being replaced by other wider social bonds based on social and personal needs and a shared sense of servitude.

The Plantation Experience

The agreement which the indentured migrants entered into in India outlined the terms and conditions of their employment in the colonies. The terms offered to Fiji's indentured migrants were typical.³³ Indenture would begin on the day the migrants arrived in the colony and would involve work relating to cultivation and manufacture of produce on plantations. A working week would consist of nine hours a day every day except Sundays and designated holidays. Adult males would be paid 'not less' than one shilling per day and women nine pennies, an adult being someone over the age of fifteen. The workers could be employed on either time work, (an

option not favoured by the employers) or task work, a task being defined as the amount of work 'an ordinary able-bodied' adult male could accomplish in six hours of steady work; a woman's task was three quarters of a male's task. Among other provisions, the workers were to receive rations at a government-prescribed scale from their employers for the first six months, with children receiving half rations free, suitable rent-free dwellings 'kept in good repair by their employers', and free hospital accommodation, medical attendance, and medicines during their period of service. An Agent General of Immigration was appointed and granted wide ranging powers to enquire into complaints the employers and the workers laid against each other, inspect plantations and ensure the observance of the regulations. Medical inspectors in the districts were empowered to 'enter upon any plantation and inspect the state of health of the immigrants thereon and the conditions of the dwellings and hospital and rations and the general sanitation of such plantations'.³⁴ Plantation managers were required to keep full employment records of those in their charge.

On paper, the terms appeared not only adequate but attractive: medical care, regular wages, proper diet, adequate housing, government supervision. In practice, though, things turned out to be different. To start with, the indenture legislation was important as much for what it omitted as for what it said, and the burden of indenture historiography has been to point out some of the disparities between the promises and the practices of indenture. The migrants did not know, for example, that they had no voice in the choice of their employers. Nor could they change their employers or voluntarily buy out their contracted period of service. Nor, again, could they move about freely without the consent of their employers, while the latter could transfer them from plantation to plantation at their will. They knew how much they could earn but nothing about the cost of living in the colonies nor the conditions of work. They did not know that the legislation which looked impressive on paper was ineffectual in practice or compromised by vested planter interests. In short, they did not know that indenture was 'in essence a model of interlocking incarceration'.³⁵

Let me illustrate the above criticisms by focusing on a few issues common to most colonies. Take the task system, for instance. William Seed, Fiji's first Agent General of Immigration, suggested that the task system suited 'the master and the servant much better'.³⁶ In theory yes, in practice no. One difficulty was defining a task. On paper, as mentioned, it was that amount of work which an average, able-bodied worker could accomplish in six hours of steady work. But the definition and allotment of tasks in the field were left to the overseer who was 'to all intents and purposes the sole

judge of the fair limits of task work'.³⁷ Frequently, tasks were set on the basis of what a few handpicked men could do. Tasks could be increased if the worker accomplished it before time; it could even be changed while the work was still in progress. Then there were cases of overseers using the amount of work done on other plantations as the measure for their own allotment without allowing for variations in terrain, soil type, ground conditions or the number of times the ground had been worked over. On the larger plantations, when the production target fell, overseers competed to see 'who can get the maximum amount of work done for minimum amount of pay'.³⁸

In Fiji in the 1880s and 1890s, workers could complete only two thirds of the tasks set, but got little or no credit for the amount of work accomplished. When informed of the illegal pay-cutting, J.B. Thurston, the governor, expressed surprise but added that 'there is certainly some force in the argument advanced for following this course'.³⁹ What the arguments were, he did not elaborate. The Attorney General observed that: 'It may be stated as a general legal proposition that if a person engages to perform a given task or a piece of work for a given wage and fails to perform such a task, he forfeits all claim to the wage: for the performance of the task is the condition precedent to the payment of the wage'.⁴⁰ That view seems reasonable enough on paper, except that it did not address the larger question: why was it that the overwhelming majority of the labourers were unable to complete their allotted task? The labourers could, of course, take their masters to court but as Immigration sub-agent John Foster remarked, 'the weight of opinion is found on the side of the skilled evidence the employer can bring forward in his favour as against the evidence of an ignorant coolie. The court has to decide on evidence, not on the private opinion of the presiding judge'.⁴¹

The labourers suffered similar difficulties over the minimum statutory wage. The indenture agreement entitled men to one shilling per day and women nine pennies. The Colonial Sugar Refining Company, the major employer of Indian labour in Fiji, argued that the reason why labourers were not able to receive the promised wage was that they were lazy and ineffective. To this charge, Henry Anson, the Agent General of Immigration in 1887, replied: 'Granted that the Indians are bad, lazy and inferior as a class to those in other colonies, one would even then expect that more than eight per cent would manage during a year to attain over the minimum statutory wage at field work'.⁴² The grim picture continued. In 1891, A.C. Stewart, Fiji's Emigration Agent in Calcutta, complained that 'the wages seem to me to be altogether too low, so low that I do not see how the

majority of the people can thrive'.⁴³ The situation continued to deteriorate. In 1897, for example, 79 per cent of the male immigrants earned only eight pennies per working day and 63 per cent of women five pennies. The pattern was repeated in other colonies as well. Low wages caused other problems such as poor or inadequate diet which caused sickness which caused absenteeism which led to further loss of wages, fines and extension of indenture. The vicious cycle was thus complete.⁴⁴

The indenture legislation entitled the labourers to institute proceedings against their employers. Between 1890 and 1897, the indentured labourers in Fiji laid 251 complaints against their employers for breaches of the labour ordinance, the principal charges being for assault and battery and non-payment of wages—and only one!—for overtasking; but they managed to get only 86 convictions.⁴⁵ The principal reason for the paucity of charges was not indifference or lethargy, but the 'uncertainty of relief', coupled with fear, threats of retribution, ignorance of the law and inexperience in conducting their cases, and after all the risks that had been taken, the poor rate of conviction of the employers. Between 1897 and 1912, 402 charges were laid against the European overseers: only 29 per cent were convicted.

Even those convicted often escaped with light punishment. Sometimes the overseers defiantly reimbursed their sirdar, Indian foremen, for the fines inflicted on them by the courts. In Labasa in 1899, a sirdar whose beatings had reduced a woman to a 'mass of bruises' was retained by the manager of the plantation, despite protest by immigration officials, on the grounds that it was the sirdar's first offence and that 'the constant change of sirdar at Nagigi is not calculated to benefit the labourer'.⁴⁶ In contrast, the employers were remarkably successful in having their labourers convicted for various breaches of the labour ordinances, such as non-performance of tasks, unlawful absence, desertion, damaging property, and, quite simply, for 'want of ordinary diligence'. Between 1885 and 1906, 43,614 such charges were laid, and 82 per cent of those charged were convicted.⁴⁷ In Surinam between 1873 and 1916, only 10 per cent of the employers charged under the labour laws were convicted, whereas the conviction rate for the labourers was 71.4 per cent.⁴⁸

Resistance and Accommodation

How did the indentured labourers respond to their predicament? There is broad agreement in the literature that when the opportunity presented itself and the moment seemed right, labourers engaged in active resistance through strikes, petitions to the colonial government, and violence against overseers. But such instances were surprisingly few. When strikes did

occur, as Maureen Swan has written of Natal, they 'were short-lived, rarely transcended the accommodation units or work gangs into which plantation workforces were sub-divided, and were generally concerned with specific abuses of the contract',⁴⁹ or, as in the case of Guyana, when the prospects of success looked good.⁵⁰ Part of the reason was the authoritarian nature of the social relations of production of the plantation system itself, which, in Eric Wolf's words, is 'an instrument of force, wielded to create and maintain a class-structure of workers and owners, connected hierarchically by a staff-line of overseers and managers'.⁵¹ The planters, moreover, had a powerful ally in government. As North-Coombs has argued in the case of Mauritius, the colonial state was predisposed to favour planters because the sugar industry was the 'chief prop of public finances and its continued prosperity was the *sine qua non* of good government'.⁵²

The diverse social and cultural composition of the indentured work force did not help. In the case of Fiji, the migrants came from over three hundred different castes and districts, spoke a variety of dialects, if not languages, and varied in their motivations for migrating. These difficulties were compounded by the indenture legislation which restricted the opportunity for collaboration amongst the migrants. In Fiji, for instance, it was a criminal offence, punishable by fine and imprisonment, for more than five workers employed on the same plantation to go together to lay complaints against their employers without obtaining a formal leave from them.⁵³ Yet, the planters could freely transfer labourers from one plantation to another not only for reasons of economy but also 'because it is desirable to break up a gang of men who have caused or are likely to cause serious disturbance of the peace'.⁵⁴ Together with transfers, the rapid turnover of the labour force contributed its share to the problem of developing solidarity among workers. As S.J. Reddi has written of Mauritius, 'experience acquired by one group in wresting some concessions was lost as they dispersed to take employment elsewhere',⁵⁵ or set up on their own.

The labourers suffered from the further disadvantage of little or no formal education in English which limited their ability to articulate their grievances to the colonial officialdom and the plantation management. The new kind of Indian leadership that emerged on the plantation revolved around the 'sirdar', Indian foreman, thus compounding their problem. A sirdar, chosen for his ability to enforce the plantation's edict—or for 'their bullying capabilities' as Thurston put it⁵⁶—was spared the ordeal of hard field labour, got better pay and, above all, the ear of his master. The position also brought him the opportunity of accumulating a little wealth on the side.⁵⁷ On some plantations, the sirdar were allowed to run stores,

and it requires little imagination to see 'how pressure can be put on an immigrant by the sirdar to compel him to deal at his store'.⁵⁸ It is little wonder that sirdar (called drivers elsewhere) were such hated (and feared) men on the plantations.

But while fear, coercion and poor communication impeded collective action, some immigrants may have actually favoured a system that had given them a measure of security and certainty, among them the untouchables, the tenants-at-will, the landless labourers, for all of whom strenuous labour was not a novelty but had been a permanent condition of life in India. At least in Fiji, their individuality was recognised and effort rewarded for achievement rather than birth. One indentured labourer told anthropologist Adrian Mayer in the 1950s that the time of indenture was better than the present. Now, 'I have cane land, bullocks and a home. Yet, every night I am awake, listening to see if someone is not trying to burn my cane, or steal my animals. In indenture lines we slept well, we did not worry'.⁵⁹ The comforting certainty of servitude. For others, indenture provided the opportunity to subvert the Brahminical socio-religious order. Untouchable Bhagvana, a sirdar, told Totaram Sanadhya in the early 1900s how he had endured beatings and abuses of his landlords in India, but now things were different. 'Now, for the next five years, these people under me can't even squeak. Every dog has its day. What happened to me I still remember vividly, and won't forget for the rest of my life'.⁶⁰

The absence or relative paucity of active forms of resistance did not mean that the labourers were docile. They simply chose other means of resistance. Eugene Genovese's observation is apt: 'If a people, over a protracted period, finds the odds against insurrection not merely long but virtually uncertain, then it will choose not to try. To some extent this reaction represents decreasing self-confidence and increasing fear, but it also represents a conscious effort to develop an alternative strategy for survival'.⁶¹ The alternative strategies adopted by the labourers were many, including 'malingering, 'wilful' indolence, outright refusal to work, constant requests for leave of absence, desertion, and 'unlawful' (short term) absence from work'.⁶² One common strategy employed by labourers in most colonies was desertion. Immigration officials themselves saw desertion as a deliberate act of defiance. Desertion was a breach of labour ordinance, so it was a route of last resort. Often it was premeditated. Wrote the Immigration Inspector at Ba (Fiji) in 1900: 'The intention of desertion has usually been avowed beforehand, at the time of making the complaint in the most stubborn and determined manner...it was planned and systematised protest against assault [by overseers and sirdar]'.⁶³ Desertion

was not simply a protest against the material aspects of the plantation system. In Mauritius, argues S.J. Reddi, it was also 'a rejection of the inhuman aspects of estate life which were not amenable for reform through the existing legal system'.⁶⁴ For some, suicide provided a way out,⁶⁵ but most others bode their time and waited for freedom at the end of indenture.

Clearly, indenture was a grim experience, made all the more so by the prevailing official attitude that the experience was beneficial to the workers who were used to toiling from 'sunrise to sunset and ask as their rations only a few ounces of rice'.⁶⁶ The officials were 'confident that the advantage to the ordinary labourer of a term of indenture in the colonies have only to be better known to be fully appreciated'.⁶⁷ The indentured labourers disagreed. The Fiji Indians called it 'narak', which means hell. For indenture violated many of the values and subverted the social and cultural practices and institutions the indentured emigrants had brought with them, among its most notable victims being the caste system.⁶⁸ Social taboos regarding food, diet, social space, rituals of purity and impurity, prayer and worship could not be maintained on the voyage and on the plantations. And paucity of women necessitated marriages across caste lines. The process of disintegration was gradual, and a certain consciousness of caste status survived indenture. But everywhere it lost the importance it had in India as a determinant of social behaviour and as the principle of social organisation. The planters and the colonial officialdom emphasised the material benefits of indenture while in their criticism Indians focused on the moral degradation that it fostered. It was the latter which won the day in the anti-indenture crusade.

Reconstitution

Nonetheless, for all the hardships the indenture system engendered, the impression of unrelieved suffering, impotence and helplessness on the part of the labourers would be inaccurate. For just as important as the disruptions indenture created were the continuities it preserved in the migrants' cultural patterns. There was continuity, argues Leo Despres, in the case of Guyana, 'not only because the indentures had certain rights, but also because the immigration and labour laws which defined those rights served to confine the new immigrants to ethnic ghettos. As new indentures arrived in one wave after another for almost three-quarters of a century, they were mixed with those who came earlier. This served to reinforce traditional habits and customs and contributed to a continuity in cultural patterning'.⁶⁹ That process, it should be noted, occurred in altered circumstances. The bits and pieces which survived migration and indenture

were knitted into a new pattern to suit the requirements of the new environment. The new artefact reflected the values of its makers: individualism, egalitarianism, initiative, self-reliance, and impatience with archaic cultural protocols and social practices. These values formed an integral part of the Fiji Indian moral order.

Women played a critical role in the reconstitution of overseas Indian society. Their portrayal in the official and even scholarly literature is a sorry one. It was—and still is—widely believed that the indentured women were recruited through fraudulent means, they were mostly women of 'loose character', generally single, broken creatures, 'sent to the recruiting stations to fill the quotas authorised by the colonial office'.⁷⁰ C.F. Andrews, writing in 1916, likened Indian women 'to a rudderless vessel with its mast broken drifting onto the rocks; or like a canoe being whirled down the rapids of a great river without any controlling hand. She passes from one man to another, and has lost even the sense of shame in doing so'.⁷¹ Not surprisingly, then, Indian women were held responsible for most of the major social and moral problems. The very high rate of suicide among Fiji's indentured migrants, for instance, was blamed on the Indian women's supposedly immoral conduct. The view was the women ruthlessly exploited their 'scarcity value' by using marriages as expedient financial transactions, marrying men, obtaining jewellery and money in the process, and then discarding them for some other lucrative financial prospect, leaving the dejected man to end his life.⁷² The women were even blamed for the abnormally high infant mortality rates in the 1890s. The colonial officials thought them devoid of maternal instincts.⁷³

The veil of dishonour foisted on indentured women has been lifted by recent research.⁷⁴ Women came from a similar social background to men and for similar reasons. Male suicides had other causes than female infidelity: the violence of indenture, the relentless, unremitting, pace of plantation work, unsuccessful attempts by men to restore the Indian patriarchal family system, cultural and social prejudices among the migrants—proportionately more South Indians committed suicide than North Indians—and the realisation among some that the intended temporary sojourn was to become permanent displacement. As for want of maternal instincts among Indian indentured women, Dr Hirsche, the Chief Medical Officer of Fiji, wrote that those who made this allegation 'allow[ed] their zeal to render their judgement obscure in these matters'. Of course, some women might have been negligent, he conceded, but the 'maternal instinct in the coolie is as well developed as it is in any other race'.⁷⁵ In truth, not maternal negligence but the appalling sanitary conditions on the

plantations, inadequate supply of clean water, the absence of nursery facilities in the lines, and the requirements of daily field labour for women with infants, lay at the root of the problem.⁷⁶

Women emerged from indenture as productive workers in their own right, enjoying or negotiating a measure of independence perhaps unimaginable back home. They were veterans of back-breaking labour in the cane fields who performed (or were required to perform) a range of services beyond the normal call of duty; their refusal to comply may have contributed to male suicides. Jo Beall has written of Natal: 'When not in the fields themselves, or during their breaks, they were required by their partners or the men to whom they were somehow indebted, to take them food in the fields or at the mill. In the evening they prepared daily meal and provided sexual services. Women in their capacity as reproducers of labour power, therefore, were subjected to extreme forms of oppression and subordination as well as being exploited'.⁷⁷ They raised families in often inhospitable circumstances, and played a critical role in facilitating 'the transmission and practice of folk religion and of tradition-based sanctions'⁷⁸ in the new communities. In Guyana, writes Jeremy Poynting, women were 'the main preservers of Indian domestic culture', which was, he argues 'initially the principal means whereby Indians maintained their identity'.⁷⁹ The presence of Indian women in the colonies was important in another way. It discouraged relationships between Indian men and non-Indian women.

Equally important in the maintenance of overseas Indian cultural identity was the role of religion. From very early on, the migrants seemed determined to preserve their religion to provide support and solidarity among themselves. In the words of Roy Glassgow, 'The Indians' emphasis upon the value and worth-whileness of his culture was really a mode of expression of his desire to be treated on terms of equality within the Guyanese universe'.⁸⁰ In Fiji by the 1890s, most Indian settlements had the basic texts of popular Hinduism.⁸¹ These included *Satyanarayan ki Katha* (a collection of five stories from the Reva chapter of the *Skanda Purana*); *Sukh Sagar* (a discourse on the different incarnations of Vishnu); popular versions of the *Bhagavada Gita*; *Danlila* (a devotional verse in praise of Lord Krishna); and, perhaps most significant of all, Tulsidas' *Ramcharitamanas*, the story of Lord Rama in some 10,000 lines of verse in the Avadhi dialect of Hindi familiar to most of the North Indian migrants. Rama's story struck a particular chord with the Fiji Indians. Rama was exiled for fourteen years for no fault of his own, but he did return; good ultimately did triumph over evil. His story gave them hope and consolation: one day, their ordeal, too,

would come to an end.

Other texts circulating in the Indian community ranged from simple instructional texts on astrology (*Shigrabodh*) and witchcraft or how to cast spell on others (*Indrajajal*) and manuals on the proper mantras to be chanted when carrying out ablutions (*Rampatal*), to ballads, folk songs (*Allaha Khand*) enchanting tales of ghosts and goblins (*Baital Pachisi*) and poems and stories of romance and heroism and adventure (*Salinga Sadabraj* and *Indra Sabha*) which provided relief from the distress of the work place. These books were not read individually—there were just a handful of copies available and literate people were few in number anyway—but recited at social gatherings in the evenings, at weekends, on holidays and at festive occasions such as marriages. Festivals such as *Ramlila*, stage presentations of Lord Rama's life, the joyous Spring festival of *Holi* (or *Phagwa*), and *Tazia*,⁸² the Shia festival commemorating the death of Prophet Mohammed's martyred grandsons Hassan and Hussein, also fostered a sense of community. By the early years of this century, formal Hindu organisations, such as the Sanatan Dharma (eternal religion) and the Arya Samaj were established which continued in a more systematic way the task of religious, cultural and educational instruction of the Indian community. They were joined in the 1920s by Muslim, South Indian, Gujarati and Sikh organizations.⁸³

Interestingly, most Fiji Indians—and Indians in other colonies as well—did not initially embrace Christianity. This was not for lack of trying on the part of particularly the Fijian Methodist Church which, through Hannah Dudley and J.W. Burton, did valuable social and charity work among the Fiji Indians in the early years of this century. Burton's exposure of some of the worst evils of indenture in his *Fiji of Today*⁸⁴ provided valuable ammunition in the anti-indenture campaign in India. Yet, Christianity failed to impress the Indians. Pride in their own culture was one factor. In Mauritius, writes Seetanund Peerthum, religion was used to resist the dehumanising influence of the new environment. 'The red flag of Mahavira on the top of a bamboo pole in front of their hut helped them resist the icons of proselytism. The katahs of *Ramacharitamanas* and the *Puranas* stood them in good stead. They succeeded in preserving their identity'.⁸⁵ Kusha Haraksingh writes about the unease that Indians felt about 'Christian designs on the faith of their ancestors, a mood which clearly indicated that while others were welcome to their own beliefs, they themselves expected to be shown a similar courtesy'.⁸⁶

The Indians' experience of the Europeans in the colonies was another factor. 'You call them true Christians', Totaram Sanadhya asked Burton of

the European employees of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company in Fiji. 'How can that be when these people treat their workers like animals and skin them alive? Their cruelty knows no bounds. They pay them a pittance. Look at the atrocities they commit against our women. And yet in a court of law they take the oath on the Bible and deny their evil deeds. Does baptism wash away all their evil deeds?'⁸⁷ At the same time, Indians viewed their own religion as superior to the others. On the question of baptism, for instance, which Sanadhya debates with Burton, he says that 'there is no need for baptism as long as one follows the right path and serves mankind. This is true religion. All this has been preached by our sages long before Christianity'.

By the time the missions began to take an interest in the Indian community, the Indians had already started to reconstitute fragments of their ancestral culture and fashion a new moral universe, helped after the turn of the century by visiting religious figures from India. The reformist-minded Arya Samaj was formed in Samabula in 1902, while the more orthodox Sanatan Dharam had numerous *mandalis* throughout the areas of Indian settlement. Besides providing religious instruction, they started their own schools to educate generations of Indian children when the colonial government was indifferent to their educational needs. While they followed a colonial curriculum, these schools also imparted cultural and language instruction that deepened the Indians' attachment to their ancestral civilisation. So colonial indifference, and the Indians' marked lack for enthusiasm for Christian schools in the early years, helped to produce a distinctively 'Indian' education for the children.

Once they had served their indenture, the Indians were left to their own devices. Some experimented with other occupations, but limited opportunities, family obligations, kinship ties and lack of education and marketable skills, forced most to depend on agriculture.⁸⁸ The government created special settlements for time-expired immigrants, but Indians settled wherever they could find land. Scattered homesteads on individually leased parcels of land were the pattern in Fiji. Expediency and contingency and tolerance born of need or circumstance, rather than status or prestige, determined relations among the settlers. They cooperated on projects requiring reciprocal exchange of labour such as building and maintaining temples and roads, planting and harvesting crops.⁸⁹ And they devised or recreated their own mechanisms for regulating behaviour or enforcing conformance to the norms of the society they were establishing. To this end, they resurrected the traditional village-based *panchayat* system to resolve communal disputes. The *panchayats* declined in influence as the Indians

were integrated into the administrative and legal apparatus of the colony.⁹⁰ Obviously, life in the post-indenture period was difficult, but as Roy Glassgow has remarked of Guyana, and this would apply elsewhere as well, 'the emergence of an independent peasantry, perhaps more than anything else, has made it possible for East Indians to preserve much of their traditional culture'.⁹¹

The self-absorption which such a development engendered was encouraged by other factors. Cultural prejudice was one. Whether in the Caribbean, Africa or the Pacific, the Indian migrants and the indigenous communities they encountered found little common ground. Indeed, muted hostility and contempt characterised relations between them. The Fiji Indians called the indigenous Fijians 'jungalis', meaning bushman, while the Fijians, for their part, found little admirable in the Indians, beasts of burden cooped up on European estates and leading a servile existence.⁹² In Guyana, the blacks saw the Indians as unfortunate victims of oppression and worked well only as long as they were 'convinced that they enjoyed a superior position to the East Indian'.⁹³ In Trinidad, Indians 'strenuously objected' to intermarriage with blacks'.⁹⁴ And in Jamaica, the Indians called the blacks 'kafari' meaning an infidel.⁹⁵

The cultural gulf that separated the two groups was compounded by a colonial policy which had the effect of keeping the groups apart. Its effectiveness varied from colony to colony, but it existed everywhere. In Fiji, ethnic separation was sanctioned by law. The first colonial governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, devised a system of native administration, based on the principle of indirect rule, that effectively insulated the Fijian people from the mainstream of colonial life and restricted the opportunity for meaningful cultural borrowing and adaptation. The Fijians lived in their subsistence villages, and Indians in their scattered settlements; even those few Indians who had been accepted by the Fijians as 'one of their own' were evicted from the villages. Separate schools were established for Fijian, European and Indian children, a pattern that continued until the middle of this century, when community committee schools emerged. In politics, too, racial separation was the norm as the three groups elected (or nominated) their own (ethnic) representatives in the Legislative Council from racially-segregated rolls. Inevitably, such a system discouraged the development of common perceptions and a non-communal consciousness in the populace. The gulf between the communities that resulted from culture, language, and religion was exacerbated by government practice.⁹⁶ And so both choice as well as necessity forced the Indians in Fiji and elsewhere to fashion their identity from the fragments of their remembered past in the new

surroundings in which they found themselves.

This essay has attempted to delineate aspects of both the history as well as the historiography of Indian indentured labourers, their social background, journey from India, their life and work on the plantations, and how they coped with the new world they encountered. I have suggested that the indentured labourers themselves lived in a crisis, caught between the demands of two worlds, one which they had left and to which they could not return and the other where they had come for a short time and stayed longer than they had expected or wanted. The ironic thing is that a century later, that tension between alienation and attachment still animates the lives of many overseas Indians. They adopt many postures and make gestures to things western and eastern but, as Vijay Mishra has observed, 'when these momentary infatuations are over, [they] come face to face with the void again, with a sense of emptiness compounded by helplessness'.⁹⁷ It is of this identity crisis that the Fiji Indian writer Subramani has written: 'Everything, history and custom, had prepared me for this impasse. There is no alternative life: a hundred years of history on these islands has resulted in wilderness and distress'.⁹⁸ Brinsley Samaroo of Trinidad echoes a similar view: 'The Westindian East Indians will be neither Westindian nor East Indian until they first of all come to terms with themselves; and this process certainly involves an understanding of their Indian connection'.⁹⁹ The legacy of indenture will need to be confronted.

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Endnotes

1. Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness. Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1977), ix.
2. Colin Clarke, Ceri Peach and Steven Vertovec, 'Introduction: themes in the study of the South Asian diaspora', in their edited volume, *South Asians Overseas: Migration and Ethnicity* (Cambridge, 1990), 2. These figures should be taken as a guide, not exact numerical description of the overseas South Asian population.
3. As seen in a series of books published under the editorship of I.J. Bahadur Singh of the India International Centre, New Delhi, on Indians in the Caribbean, Southeast Asia and on overseas Indian communities more generally.
4. There is a vast literature on the South Asian diaspora in Southeast Asia. The most accessible introduction is S. Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore* (London). The latest compendium on the Southeast Asian Indian community is K.S. Sandhu and A. Mani (eds.), *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia* (Singapore, 1993)
5. G. Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration from India*, 67, and *Census of India*, Vol. XVI, part 1 (1921), 44.
6. Quoted in I.M. Cumpston, *Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834-154* (London, 1953), 174.
7. Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920* (London, 1974), 60. Tinker has reiterated this view in U Bissoondoyal and S.B.C. Servasing (eds), *Indian Labour Immigration* (Port Louis, 1986), 1-8 (Continuity Between Slavery and Indian Immigration).
8. I.M. Cumpston, 'A Survey of Indian Immigration to British Tropical Colonies to 1910', *Population Studies X* (1956-1957), 159.
9. Among those who lean to this view are K. Hazareesingh, *A History of Indians in Mauritius* (London, 2nd ed. 1975), K.L. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants. A history to the end of indenture in 1920* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962), John La Guerre (ed.), *Calcutta to Caroni. The East Indians of Trinidad* (Port of Spain, 1974); Judith Weller, *The East Indian Indenture in Trinidad* (Rio Piedras, 1968); K.O. Laurence, *Immigration into the West Indies in the Nineteenth Century* (Kingston, 1971); Leo Despres, *Cultural Pluralism and Nationalist Politics in British Guyana* (Chicago, 1967), Morton Klass, *East Indians in the West Indies: A Study in Cultural Persistence* (New York, 1961), and many other studies.
10. Kusha Haraksingh, 'Aspects of the Indian Experience in the Caribbean', in John La Guerre (ed.), *Calcutta to Caroni: The East Indians of Trinidad* (St. Augustine, 1985), 155. This volume is a revised and expanded version of the 1974 publication.
11. For example, Kusha Haraksingh, 'Control and Resistance Among Overseas Indian Workers: A study of labour on sugar plantations of Trinidad', in David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo (eds.), *India in the Caribbean* (Warwick, 1987), 61-80; Maureen Swan, 'Indentured Indians: Resistance and Accommodation, 1890-1913', in Surendra Bhana (ed.), *Essays on Indentured Indians in Natal* (Leeds,

- 1990), 117-135; and Brij V. Lal, 'Murmurs of Dissent: Non-Resistance on Fiji Plantations', *Hawaiian Journal of History* (1986), 188-214. A larger body of literature relevant to the topic will be found in Brij V. Lal, Doug Munro and Edward Beechert (eds.), *Plantation Workers: Resistance and Accommodation* (Honolulu, 1993).
12. See, for example, Marina Carter, *Lakshmi's Legacy: The Testimonies of Indian Women in 19th Century Mauritius* (Stanley, Mauritius, 1994); Brij V. Lal, 'Kunti's Cry: Indentured Women on Fiji Plantations', in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* Vol. XX11 (1985), 55-72; idem, 'Veil of Dishonour: Sexual Jealousy and Suicide on Fiji Plantations', in the *Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. XX (1985), 55-71; John Kelly, *A Politics of Virtue: Hinduism, Sexuality and Countercolonial Discourse in Fiji* (Chicago, 1992), and Verene Sherpherd, 'Indian Women in Jamaica, 1845-1945', in Frank Birbalsingh (ed.) *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience* (Toronto, 1989), 100-107, among many others.
 13. See, for example, Adrian Mayer, *Peasants in the Pacific: A Study of Fiji Indian Rural Society* (London, 2nd. ed. 1973); and Verene Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers: The Experience of Indians in Jamaica 1845-1950* (Leeds, 1993).
 14. Based on figures in the Protector of Emigrants annual reports. See also my *Girmitiyas: The Origins of Fiji Indians* (Canberra, 1983), and R.T. Smith, 'Some Social Characteristics of Indian Immigrants to British Guiana', in *Population Studies* Vol. X111, no. 1(1958), 34-9. L. Brennan, J. MacDonald and R. Shlomowitz of the Flinders University of South Australia are investigating the regional origins and demographic characteristics in more detail. A small sampling of their research can be found in 'The Geographic and Social Origins of Indian Indentured Labourers in Mauritius, Natal, Fiji, Guyana and Jamaica.' Their manuscript is in my possession.
 15. The literature on the subject is vast and controversial. For me the best starting points are the 'Settlement Reports', comprehensive government documents that provide detailed accounts of rural social structure and problems. For some general accounts, see Eric Stokes, *Peasant and the Raj* (Cambridge, 1977), Walter Neale, *Economic Change in Rural India* (New Haven, 1962), and Elizabeth Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions in Northern India* (Berkeley, 1972).
 16. *Census of India*, Vol. XV1, Part 1 (1911), 49, and Vol. XV1 Part 1 (1921), 51.
 17. *Census of India*, Vol. XV1 Part 1 (1911), 49.
 18. *Sultanpur Settlement Report*, 1898, 6.
 19. *Azamgarh Settlement Report*, 1909, 7.
 20. *Ghazipur District Gazetteer*, 1908, 79.
 21. Birendranath Ganguly, *Trends of Agriculture and Population in the Ganges Valley* (London, 1938), 40-1. See also S. L. Srivastva, 'Impact of Emigration on Structure and Relations in a Village in Eastern UP', *Journal of Social Research* Vol. XI, no.2 (Sept. 1968), 73.
 22. Emigration Department Proceedings, A Pros. 44, 30 September, 1882, National Archives of India.
 23. See Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*, for an articulation of this view.

24. Emigration Proceedings, A. Pros. 12, August 1882, National Archives of India. See also Roy Arthur Glassgow, *Guyana: Race and Politics Among Africans and East Indians* (The Hague, 1970), 74, and Arthur and Juanita Niehoff, *East Indians in the West Indies* (Milwaukee, 1960), 17; M.D. North-Coombs, 'Forced Labour in Mauritius', in Kay Saunders (ed.), *Indentured Labour in the British Empire, 1834-1920* (London, 1984), 106, and most other publications dealing with Indian indentured migration.
25. K.L. Gillion, *The Fiji Indians: Challenge to European Dominance, 1920-1947* (Canberra, 1977), 7.
26. These figures are derived from the Protector of Emigrants Reports for these years. For a detailed discussion, see Brij V. Lal, *Girmitiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians* (Canberra, 1983).
27. Milton Singer, 'The Social Organization of Indian Civilization', in *Diogenes*, 45 (1964), 92.
28. Lal, *Girmitiyas*, 117.
29. Carter, *Lakshmi's Legacy*, 35-39.
30. Estimate based on figures in the Protector of Emigrants Annual Reports.
31. K.L. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants: A history to the end of indenture in 1920*, 67.
32. See Kelvin Singh, 'Indians and the Larger Society', in John La Guerre (ed.), *Calcutta to Caroni: The East Indians of Trinidad*, 39; and Kusha Haraksingh, 'Control and Resistance Among Indian Workers', in Dabydeen and Samaroo (eds.), *India in the Caribbean*, 73.
33. See, for example, Lal, *Girmitiyas*, 37-38; Maureen Tayal, 'Indian Indentured Labour in Natal, 1890-1911', in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. XIV, no. 4, 520; Bridget Brereton, 'The Experience of Indentureship, 1845-1917', in John La Guerre (ed.), *Calcutta to Caroni: The East Indians of Trinidad* (St. Augustine, 1985), 23-25.
34. From the foundation Indenture Legislation for Fiji (1891).
35. Haraksingh, 'Control and Resistance Among Indian Workers: A Study of labour on the sugar plantations of Trinidad, 1875-1917', in Samaroo and Dabydeen, 63. See also Dharam Yash Dev, *Our Countrymen Abroad* (Allahabad, 1940), 14; C. Kondapi, *Indians Abroad*, 8; and Surendra Bhana (ed.), *Essays on Indentured Indians in Natal* (Leeds, 1988), 148; Morton Klass, *East Indians in the West Indies*, 14; C. Kondapi, *Indians Overseas*, 19.
36. Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO) file 2159/1881, National Archives of Fiji.
37. CSO 1955/1892.
38. CSO 2315/1888. See also CSO files 3481/1887, 1029/1887, and Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, 87.
39. CSO 443/1887.
40. *Ibid.*

41. CSO 1955/1892. For corroboration of these points, see Haraksingh, 'Control and Resistance', 71; Verene Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers*, 59 ff; Maureen Tayal, 'Indian Indentured Labour in Natal, 527.
42. CSO 3481/1887.
43. CSO 2494/1894.
44. See also M.D. North-Coombs, 'Forced Labour in Mauritius', in Kay Saunders (ed.), *Indentured Labour in the British Empire, 1834-1920* (London, 1984), 95 where he argues that in Mauritius 'labourers seldom received the rate of wages at which they were hired.' Shepherd, *Transients and Settlers*, 60 says that 'Wage rates were not always promptly paid; neither did the employers always pay the correct wage rates or provide jobs to enable the immigrants to earn sufficient wages.' Kondapi, *Indians Overseas*, 21, on Natal in the 1860s: 'Wages were habitually held in arrears, and in many cases were not paid at all.' Sandew Hira, 'The Evolution of the Social and Economic and Political Position of the East Indians in Surinam, 1873-1893', in I.J. Bahadur Singh (ed.), *Indians in the Caribbean* (New Delhi, 1987), 349: between 1879 and 1891, adult male wages were one third less than the prescribed wage of 60 cents.
45. The figures in this paragraph are derived from the Agent General of Immigration's *Annual Reports* which are available in several places. A similar situation existed in other places including Jamaica, Mauritius, Trinidad and Guyana. See studies cited above.
46. CSO 4215/1899.
47. For more discussion see my 'Murmurs of Dissent.'
48. Quoted in Verene Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers*, 78.
49. 'Indentured Indians: Accommodation and Resistance, 1890-1913', in Bhana (ed.), *Essays on Indentured Indians in Natal*, 128; Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers*, 71.
50. Tyran Ramnarine, 'Over a Hundred Years of East Indian Disturbances on the Sugar Estates of Guyana', in Dabydeen and Samaroo, *India in the Caribbean*, 123.
51. Eric Wolf, 'Specific Aspects of Plantation Systems in the New World: Community Sub-cultures and Social Class', in M.M. Horowitz (ed.), *Peoples and Cultures in the Caribbeans* (New York, 1971), 163. See also George L. Beckford, *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World* (New York, 1972) for an extended analysis. See also Doug Munro, 'The Indenture System and Worker Control on Pacific Island Plantations', paper presented at the Program in Agriarian Studies Colloquium Series, Yale University, 3 February 1995.
52. M.D. North-Coombs, 'Indentured Labour in the Sugar Industries of Natal and Mauritius, 1834-1910', in Bhana (ed.), *Essays on Indentured Indians in Natal*, 33.
53. 1891 Indenture Ordinance for Fiji.
54. CSO 156/1896. See also Tyran Ramnarine, 'Over a Hundred Years of East Indian Disturbances On the Sugar Estates of Guyana, 1869-1978: An Historical Overview', in Dabydeen and Samaroo (eds.), *India in the Caribbean*, 125

55. 'Labour Protest Among Indian Immigrants', in Bissoondoyal and Servasing (eds.), *Indian Labour Immigration*, 132.
56. Quoted in Deryck Scarr, *Fiji: A Short History* (Sydney, 1984), 99.
57. Agent General of Immigration Annual Report, 1885. See also CSO 2026/1880.
58. CSO 1405/1906.
59. Adrian Mayer, *Peasants in the Pacific. A Study of Rural Fiji Indian Society* (Berkeley, 2nd.ed. 1973), 5
60. Brij V. Lal and Yogendra Yadav (eds), *The Story of the Haunted Line: Totaram Sanadhaya ka Fiji* (in Hindi) (New Delhi, 1994).
61. Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution. Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge, 1979), 7
62. Verene Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers*, 67. See also Maureen Swan, 'Indentured Indians: Accommodation and Resistance', 128; North-Coombs, 'Forced Labour in Mauritius', in Kay Saunders (ed.), *Indentured Labour in the British Empire*, 108-110; S.J. Reddi, 'Labour Protest Among Indian Immigrants', in Bissoondoyal and Servasing (eds.), *Indian Labour Immigration*, 126-123.
63. CSO 3237/1900.
64. S.J. Reddi, 'Labour Protest Among Indian Immigrants', in Bissoondoyal and Servasing, *Indian Labour Immigration*, 129.
65. See Lal, 'Veil of Dishonour'.
66. J. W. Burton, *The Fiji of Today*, 264.
67. The Sanderson Committee report, House of Commons Parliamentary Paper, Cd 5192/4.
68. It was universally the case in all the Indian indentured labour receiving colonies. See, for example, Hilda Kuper, *The Indian People in Natal* (Cape Town, 1960), 20; Arthur and Juanita Niehoff, *East Indians in the West Indies*, 89; Arthur Glassgow, 77; Adrian Mayer, *Peasants in the Pacific*. For an informative introduction to the subject, see Barton M. Schwartz (ed.), *Caste In Overseas Indian Communities* (San Francisco, 1967). There are studies here on Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad, Surinam, Fiji and South and East Africa.
69. Leo Despres, *Cultural Pluralism and Nationalist Politics*, 58.
70. Erickson, 142. This view is repeated ad nauseam in virtually every account.
71. C. F. Andrews and W.W. Pearson, *Indian Indentured Labour in Fiji* (Perth, 1918), 6.
72. See my 'Veil of Dishonour: Sexual Jealousy and Suicide on Fiji Plantations', in *The Journal of Pacific History* (1985), Vol. 20, 135-155; also Niehoff, *East Indians in the West Indies*, 100, and Vijay Naidu, *The Violence of Indenture in Fiji* (Suva, 1980).
73. See my 'Kunti's Cry: Indentured Women on Fiji Plantations', in *Indian Economic and Social History Review* Vol. 22 (1985), 55-72.

74. See particularly Carter, *Lakshmi's Legacy*; Brij V. Lal, 'Kunti's Cry', and 'Veil of Dishonour', Jo Beall, 'Women Under Indenture in Natal', in Bhana (ed.), *Essays on Indentured Indians in Natal*, 89-116, and John Kelly, *A Politics of Virtue*.
75. CSO 3121/1893.
76. This is supported by the investigations of Viviane Johnson and Nicole Duncan; their research is being planned for publication.
77. Jo Beall, 'Women Under Indenture in Natal', 103.
78. Marina Carter, *Lakshmi's Legacy: The Testimonies of Indian Women in 19th Century Mauritius* (Stanley, Mauritius, 1994), 142.
79. 'East Indian Women in the Caribbean: Experience and voice', in Dabydeen and Samaroo (eds.), *India in the Caribbean*, 232.
80. Roy Glassgow, 79. See also Brinsley Samaroo 'The Indian Connection: The Influence of Indian Thought and Ideas on East Indians in the Caribbean', Kusha Haraksingh 'The Hindu Experience in Trinidad', in I.J. Bahadur Singh, *Indians in the Caribbean* (New Delhi, 1987); J.B. Brain, 'Religion, Missionaries and Indentured Indians', in Bhana (ed.), *Essays on Indentured Indians in Natal*, 209-225, and studies by Klass, Niehoff and others cited above.
81. Information below comes from Brij V. Lal and Yogendra Yadav (eds.), *Bhut Len Ki Katha: Totaram Sanadhya ka Fiji* (The Story of the Haunted Line: Totaram Sanadhya's Fiji) (New Delhi, 1994).
82. In nearly all accounts of Indians in the Caribbean, Tazia (tajah) or hosay, is mentioned as a very popular festival celebrated both by Hindus as well as Muslims.
83. See Kelly, *A Politics of Virtue*, Purusottama Billimoria, 'The Arya Samaj in Fiji: A Movement in Hindu Diaspora', in *Religion*, Vol. 15 (1985), 103-129; and several contributions in Bahadur Singh (ed.), *Indians in the Caribbean*.
84. Published in London in 1910.
85. Seetanund Peerthum, 'Forms of Protest and Resistance of Indian Labourers', in Bissoondoyal and Servasing (eds.), *Indian Labour Immigration*, 92.
86. Haraksingh, 'The Hindu Experience in Trinidad', 180.
87. *Bhut Len Ki Katha*, 92-93.
88. See, for example, Ahmed Ali, *Society in Transition: Aspects of Fiji-Indian History, 1879-1939* (Suva, 1976), 9; see also Adrian Mayer, *Peasants in the Pacific* for more information.
89. See Adrian C. Mayer, 'Fiji Indian Kin Groups: An Aspect of Change in an Immigrant Society', in *Oceania*, Vol. XXIV: 3 (March 1954), 161-164.
90. Verene Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers*, 234-235 discusses some problems that the panchayat system encountered in Jamaica. See also Adrian C. Mayer, 'Associations in Fiji Indian Rural Society', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 58: 1 (Feb. 1956), 97-108; J.C. Jha, 'The Indian Heritage in Trinidad', in Guerre (ed.), *Calcutta to Caroni*, 13.
91. Roy Glassgow, 61. See also Brereton, 108-109.

- ^{92.} See Ahmed Ali, *Fiji: From Colony to Independence, 1874-1970* (Suva, 1977), 15.
- ^{93.} Glasgow, 75.
- ^{94.} Arthur and Juanita Niehoff, *East Indians in the West Indies*, 67.
- ^{95.} Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers*, 187.
- ^{96.} For more discussion, see my *Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century* (Honolulu, 1992); see also Kelvin Singh, 'Indians and the Larger Society', in Guerre (ed.), *Calcutta to Caroni*, 33-60..
- ^{97.} Vijay Mishra in his edited volume, *Rama's Banishment: A Centenary Tribute to the Fiji Indians, 1879-1979* (Auckland, 1979), 4.
- ^{98.} In his edited volume, *The Indo-Fijian Experience* (St. Lucia, 1979), 139.
- ^{99.} Samaroo, 'The India Connection: The influence of Indian Thought and Ideas on East Indians in the Caribbean', in Dabydeen and Samaroo (eds), *India in the Caribbean*, 56.