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**A HISTORY OF INDIAN IMMIGRATION
AND SETTLEMENT IN FIJI**

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, the causes, nature and effects of Indian immigration and settlement in Fiji from 1879 to 1919 are studied from documentary and oral data. The subject is treated broadly from several angles, not analysed rigorously in relation to any single hypothesis.

Indentured Indian immigrants were introduced into Fiji by the first Governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, who wished to obtain revenue from a limited commercial development of the colony without disrupting Fijian society. This object was successfully achieved, but at the price of creating other problems for the future. Investment of Australian capital in the sugar industry ensured the continuance of the immigration.

Emigration from India was organised, commercialised and subjected to elaborate government regulation. In an age which believed in laissez-faire and free international movement of labour, the Indian governments favoured properly-regulated emigration as a way to the advancement of the individual, but for political reasons refused to lend it active encouragement and later

prohibited it. In North India, there was great popular resistance to emigration and it was difficult to obtain recruits, especially women. The emigration system was unsuited to Indian conditions, the regulation did not always work in the way intended, and abuses were widespread. Most of the emigrants were young and fit, and were recruited as individuals in the towns. They were a fair cross-section of village castes, had been driven by economic pressure or alienation from kin, and enlisted to secure high wages, with the intention of returning to India. The areas of recruitment were determined by economic, and, secondarily, by cultural factors. Most of the 60,965 emigrants came from the Gangetic plain, but 25% were recruited in Madras, where there was less resistance to emigration. Conditions on the ships were satisfactory.

The pace and volume of Indian immigration into Fiji were determined primarily by the needs of the sugar companies for labour; in the second half of the period, following a rise in world commodity prices and the break-up of the large estates, immigrants were spread over more employers and occupations. Until about 1886, the conditions on the plantations were not rigorous, but afterwards there was a deterioration because of the

increased financial difficulties of the planters and Government. The Colonial Office was more zealous and effective than the India Office or the Government of India in pressing for improvement. Later, criticisms by missionaries and Indian nationalists helped to induce further reforms.

On the plantations, impersonality and drudgery were the rule. Inspection safeguards were inadequate and immigrants found it difficult to secure redress in the courts. Assaults and excessive numbers of prosecutions were serious problems. The food and medical attention were adequate over most of the period. Vice was rampant because of the disproportion of the sexes, unsatisfactory living conditions and the breakdown of social controls. Because of the nature of Indian society, the breakdown was much greater than in most migrations. But the caste system and religious barriers largely disappeared, and opportunity was opened to all.

Few of the immigrants kept up ties with India, but about 40% returned - many of them suffered great hardship. Those who stayed did so because of new kinship ties or enhanced economic and social opportunity; the Government encouraged them to stay. Most of them settled on the land as farmers, prospered and multiplied;

the pattern of settlement was very loose and new social institutions and controls were slow to develop. The Fijians were critical of Indian settlement, but the two races kept apart and there was little friction between them.

The final years of the period saw a political and educational awakening. Leaders emerged within the Indian community. Most of these men gained their standing through traditional status or wealth, but the most important of them all - Manilal - was an educated free immigrant. (Apart from those who were returning to Fiji, most of the free immigrants were Punjabi farmers and Gujarati artisans and traders.) The indenture system came under increasing attack in India, for reasons of national pride. Although conditions had improved, the social and moral case against the system was unanswerable, and after several investigations, culminating in a crusade by C.F. Andrews, it was ended by the Government of India. This spelled the end of the plantation system in the sugar industry, but a beginning had already been made with the settlement of the Indians as tenant-farmers growing sugar-cane for the companies.

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The bond of kinship that prevails within a community not only protects it from wanton cruelty and injustice from inside but is the natural nerve channel through which we directly feel our own race in its entirety. But the stranger from outside can easily be unjust, owing to the fact that he has not to pay for his conduct in his own feeling and be checked by that deeper sensibility which goes directly beyond the miscellany of facts into the heart of a living unity. And for the sake of his own benefit and others' safety he must bring with him his inner light of imagination, so that he may feel truth and not merely know facts.

- Rabindranath Tagore.

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A NOTE ON SPELLING

Indian place names have commonly been spelt in a variety of ways. Here, the revised form adopted since Independence has been selected: for example, Banaras, not Benares; Kanpur, not Cawnpore; Krishna, not Kistna.

For Fijian words, the local form used by the Fijians rather than the phonetic form has been selected: for example, Cakobau, not Thakombau; Nadi, not Nandi.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN FOOTNOTES

A.G.I.	Agent-General of Immigration, Fiji.
B.M. 00000	British Museum, Manuscript Department, Additional Manuscript No. -
Bengal E.P.	Emigration Proceedings, General Department, Bengal Government.
C., or Cd., or Cmd. 0000/(0000)	United Kingdom Command Paper No. -, of the year - .
C.O.	Colonial Office.
C.P. 00/00	Fiji Legislative Council Paper No. - of the year -.
C.S.	Colonial Secretary, Fiji.
C.S.O. 000/00	Colonial (before 1874, <u>Chief</u>) Secretary's Office, Fiji, Minute Paper No. -, of the year -.
C.S.O. Outward 000/00	Colonial Secretary's Office, Fiji, Outward Letter No. -, of the year -.
C.S.R./Fiji	Manager in Fiji of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, Nausori.
C.S.R./G.M.	General Manager of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, Sydney.
E.A.	Fiji Government Emigration Agent, Calcutta.
India E.P.	Emigration Proceedings of the Department of Revenue, Agri- culture and Commerce, Government of India.

I.O.	India Office.
I.O./P.H.C.	India Office, Public Home Correspondence, 1858-79.
I.O./J. & P.00/0000	India Office, Judicial and Public Department Correspondence, No. -, of the year -.
Madras G.O. 00/00	General order of the Madras Government No. -, of the year -.
P.P. 0000,XX,00	United Kingdom Parliamentary Papers for the year -, volume -, page -.
P.R.O.	Public Record Office, London.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of the causes, nature and effects of a particular modern migration - the movement of over sixty thousand indentured labourers and free emigrants from India to Fiji - and an examination of policy and administration in the countries affected. The period that has been selected extends from the time of the first proposals for the introduction of Indian labour into Fiji before its cession to Britain in 1874 to the abolition of the indenture system in 1919. The main aspects of the history of Indians in Fiji considered in the thesis - the nature of contract emigration from India, the administration of the indentured labour system, and the life led by the immigrants as indentured labourers - no longer existed after 1919; their place was then taken by problems of social advance, the development of new institutions, political rights and equality of status, and racial relations. The selected period is, therefore, not an arbitrary one.

The treatment of the subject is descriptive rather than analytical. There is no central theme, or conscious

attempt to impose an elaborate pattern upon events. In adopting this course, the writer has been influenced by the fact that there is, as yet, no published history of the Indians in Fiji, no adequate study of the nature of Indian migration,¹ nor even a general history of the Colony of Fiji. Because this is a pioneer work, comprehensiveness of treatment has been aimed at, and some details have been included, as a deliberate concession "for the record", since such a record does not exist elsewhere. Moreover, the topic does not lend itself to a rigorous, theoretically directed analysis, least of all a sociological one. For one thing, the data for such an analysis do not exist; for another, as will be explained later, the nature of the migration was such that the sort of analysis appropriate to other migrations could not be employed here with profit.

The data in this study have been gathered from a wide variety of sources. Unpublished information from government archives in England, Fiji and India constitute the main primary source, supplemented by published official documents, and non-official data, including the archives of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company.

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Only two detailed analyses of the nature of Indian migration are known to the writer: Gillion, 'The Sources of Indian Emigration to Fiji' in Population Studies, Nov. 1956, and de Klerk, De Immigratie der Hindostanen in Suriname.

No relevant book, article or manuscript in English or in Hindi has consciously been neglected. To supplement this, much information was obtained orally, in approximately fifty interviews. Some of these were with people who had been well-informed about conditions at the time, and others were with immigrants who had only their own experiences to relate. (Interpreters were used for most of the latter.) While nearly all the facts used in the thesis were derived from written sources, the emphasis placed on them and many of the interpretations were influenced by material obtained orally. For the statistics, reliance has been placed on official data: after thirty, or even fifty years, an attempt to tabulate the information obtained in interviews would have led to an entirely spurious exactitude. Many of the conclusions about the nature of the migration must, like much of the rest, depend upon personal judgment and a sense of historical truth.

The nineteenth century was the greatest period of intercontinental migration in world history; its two most important movements were of Europeans to the Americas, South Africa and Australasia, and of Asians, especially Chinese and Indians, to plantation areas. It is important to distinguish clearly between the various Indian migrations. First, the most important, numerically, was the

intracontinental movement of plantation labourers from Madras, particularly, to Burma, Ceylon and Malaya. Until 1922, this was largely unregulated by the Indian authorities. The migrants were recruited as "free labour", or as indentured labourers, or under the kangany or maistry (headman/middleman) systems. Secondly, indentured labourers were taken to plantation colonies under State supervision. Thirdly, Indian traders have for centuries traded in East Africa and Asia; they went to other areas in the wake of the indentured labourers. Fourthly, the unassisted, unregulated, intercontinental migration of unskilled workers from India was confined almost entirely to Punjabis, who went to many parts of the world. Fifthly, specialists, such as clerks and policemen, were recruited under contract by several colonial governments, and elite groups such as missionaries, lawyers, teachers and doctors, have followed the labourers.

This study is primarily concerned with the second type - the movement of indentured labourers. Except for their common roots in the nineteenth century expansion of Europe, the exploitation of the resources of new countries with the labour of the old, and the laissez-faire ideas which prompted and sanctioned these, this type of migration had little in common with the con-

temporaneous European migration. They differed in several important respects. First, Indian migration (of the type discussed here) was semi-servile. No European migration of this period carried penal sanctions to enforce contracts, and usually there were no contracts at all. Indian indentured emigration is rightly regarded as the successor to the African slave trade, which indeed it replaced, rather than the successor to any form of earlier European indentured emigration (such as to the American colonies). In this respect, the difference in race and culture of the masters and the labourers was decisive. Secondly, Indian emigration was far more organised than European migration, even allowing that the latter was, because of the activities of the shipping agents, far from being the laissez-faire ideal (of labour naturally finding its own best market). Without organisation, there would have been, over most of the period, practically no intercontinental migration from India. Thirdly, unlike most of the European emigrants, the Indian emigrants did not intend to settle abroad, and, despite their having few personal contacts with their relatives at home, retained a close cultural and social identification with their homeland. But in contrast to the seasonal labour migration within Europe, and the annual flow of labourers from the

Madras Presidency to Burma, Ceylon and Malaya, most of the indentured Indian emigrants were not recruited from their homes, did not return to them, were accompanied at the outset by a comparatively high proportion of women, and were encouraged to stay permanently in the countries to which they went. Fourthly, the Indian indentured emigrants were recruited as individuals. Unlike European migrants, few went in family groups or sent for their relatives later. Kinship ties, social organisation and controls were almost completely absent at the outset. Finally, Indian immigration differed from most European migration in that the immigrants were not expected, and were unable to become integrated into a common pattern of roles and values in their new country. Their role was intended to be purely economic; they were to form one sector of an economically pluralistic society, and nothing more. No social or political demands were made upon them, while any aspirations on their part to assume new roles were resisted. As a result, that pluralistic structure which is a common accompaniment of immigration was to achieve a most pronounced and durable form in Fiji, where, unlike the West Indies and Mauritius, there is still a vigorous indigenous culture.

In this development of a markedly plural society, Indian immigration into Fiji was similar to Chinese immigration into Malaya, for instance. But there were important differences. The Chinese immigrants maintained close personal ties with their homeland, developed strong forms of social control, and possessed an occupational mobility which took them into business rather than agriculture. But Indian immigration into Fiji was similar to agricultural migration within Europe and Indian immigration into Malaya, in that the migrants did not normally develop new aspirations beyond the rural orbit (at least in the first generation). The indentured Indian immigrants into Fiji maintained few contacts with their relatives in India, were slow in developing new social institutions, and, after their terms of service had expired, remained on the land as independent farmers, side by side with the indigenous Fijians, living in their communal villages. (Instead, Gujarati free immigrants from India became the small traders of Fiji.) While Indian indentured emigration shared some of the features of other migrations, particularly of other Asian migrations, it had a special character of its own.¹

¹ Comparative material from: Eisenstadt, The Absorption of Immigrants; Freedman: 'Nang Yang: Chinese South East Asia' in Asian Horizon, vol.1, no.3, 1948; Furnivall, Colonial Policy and Practice; Taft and Robbins, International Migrations.

The problems to be studied are, therefore, different; or, rather, they are fewer. Typical questions such as acculturation, institutional dispersion and dissolution of the group, and "chain" migration are irrelevant. Nor was the issue of racial relations significant in this period, for there was little contact (although ultimately it may be the most important problem of all). The main questions were, rather, the forces and motives which prompted emigration, its effects on Fiji and India, the new conditions of life which the immigrants faced, the social and personal disorganisation which resulted, and the building up of new forms of association, leadership and control. The latter was only beginning in this period, and the data do not exist to study the emerging social structure in the settlements.¹

Because of the organised character of Indian indentured emigration, Government policy and administration in Fiji, India and London were very important, and other questions which have been studied include the respective functions and relative importance of the various governments and offices, the influences at work upon them, the attitudes of the officials, and their effects on the lives

¹

This has been done for a later period. (Mayer, Indian Rural Society in Fiji - unpublished thesis.)

of the migrants. Implicit are such problems as: the importance of personality, economic forces and power, public finance, and political power in the determination of policy; the nature of the control exercised by the Home Government over the Governments of Fiji and India; and the way the administrations worked in practice, when dealing with people of a different race. The history of Indian immigration in Fiji is particularly suitable for such an administrative study, because within a span of forty years it is possible to observe a wide variety of conditions. In India, the system can be seen with incomplete or full regulation, and with and without strong public criticism. In London, two different Offices of Government, the India Office and the Colonial Office, can be compared. In Fiji, the effects can be assessed of prosperity and depression, different Governors, and the absence and then presence of publicity - missionaries and politicians. Diversity and change can thus be studied, as well as the more constant factors in the experience of the migrants, thus suggesting an approach which is partly narrative and partly topical.

The subject is reasonably self-contained. Although the indentured labour system was in force in several British and foreign colonies, it was Fiji which held the

centre of the stage in India at the end, and, except for Natal, events in other colonies did not materially affect the supply of labour to Fiji. Events in India itself were much more decisive. Nor was British policy in other colonies of great importance in the history of Indian immigration into Fiji. Even in the much more important question of native policy, decisions were made primarily on the spot, not in Whitehall, and in this field, Fiji was a pioneer, owing little to other colonies or to any "Imperial policy". Moreover, there is no evidence that policy towards Indian immigration in Fiji was influenced in any way by successive changes of government in the United Kingdom;¹ even the advent of Joseph Chamberlain at the Colonial Office did little if anything to affect that economic expansion in Fiji after the turn of the century which resulted in a great expansion of Indian immigration. But in one decisive, if negative sense, "Imperial policy" did determine both the necessity for, and the character of Indian indentured labour in Fiji. The doctrine (if it may be so called) that colonies were

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The views of individual officials have been mentioned or quoted, for these were important, while the names of individual Secretaries of State have not been given in citations, except in the case of private letters.

expected to live on their own resources, and not off the British taxpayer, meant that the Fiji Government was dependent upon commerce for revenue and was forced to exercise a rigid economy in its expenditure. This enhanced the indispensability and power of commercial interests, and, over much of the period, prevented the Government from imposing reforms in the conditions under which the immigrants lived. But, otherwise, Indian migration was but little affected by "Imperial policy". India's emigration policy was determined, not in London, but in India. The only "policy" in London was that if colonies wanted Indian immigrants they could have them, providing the Government of India, which was responsible for governing that vastly more important Imperial possession, did not object and as long as their treatment was not such as to invite the attention of Parliament or the humanitarian societies, or to disturb the humane and conscientious gentlemen who comprised the staff of the Colonial Office.

But this non-controversial character of Indian immigration over most of the period covered by this study - its acceptance by the majority of the enlightened and humane Englishmen of the day - was a condition which had not always prevailed. It is as well (if not essential)

to remember that, before 1879, when the system was extended to Fiji, it had a long history of nearly fifty years, during which it had been investigated, cleansed of its worst features, and consolidated into a system, supported in India and the colonies by elaborate machinery for the prevention of abuses. Of course, the history of emigration from India was more than two thousand years older than the indenture system, although the latter marked the beginning of mass migration. The Hindu penetration into East and South-East Asia testifies to the enterprise of the Hindus of the past. But subsequently, this emigration, which had consisted largely of traders and the professional classes, dried up, probably because of the unsettled political conditions and increasing rigidity of caste restrictions (especially an interdict on sea voyages) which followed the advent of the Muslims in India. Then, for over a thousand years, normally only traders from Kathiawar, Kutch and Malabar ventured across the ocean to neighbouring Asian and African ports. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was some unregulated emigration to neighbouring countries. But it was not until the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833 deprived the planters of their African labour that the modern Indian emigration of contract labourers began.

First, it was to Mauritius, then to British Guiana and the West Indies, and subsequently to Natal, Malaya, and French, Dutch and Danish colonies. From the beginning, it was organised and stimulated by labour recruiters, for the peasants of India did not have the knowledge of the opportunities in other lands, nor the inclination to go, let alone the money to pay for their passages. From the beginning, too, it was semi-servile, for the employers in the colonies had to be re-imbursed for the cost of the passages; without coercion, the immigrants would not have stayed on the plantations to work long hours for low wages, when, like the Africans they replaced, they could have enjoyed, in freedom, the bounties of empty lands and fertile soil.¹

From 1837, the contracts were regulated by the authorities in India, with a view to preventing irregularities in recruiting, and ensuring good treatment in transit to the colonies. The indenture "system" was thus established. It was at once attacked by humanitarian circles in England and India as a revival of the slave trade, and for a few years was actually prohibited, until

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Survey from: Report on Indian Emigration by Geoghegan, P.P. 1874, XLVII, 421; Decennial Report on India, P.P. 1884-5, LX, 1; Cumpston, Indians Overseas; Kondapi, Indians Overseas.

the distress and importunity of the colonial planters compelled reconsideration. In subsequent years Indian indentured labour was extended to new areas, over the opposition of the humanitarian vanguard in England (whose efforts were, however, losing their impetus by this time), and soon became an accepted institution. From 1870 to 1875 the system was reformed in British colonies, and harsh restrictions on the civil rights of ex-indentured Indian immigrants removed. It came to be regarded by Englishmen, not only as a means of prosperity for the colonies, but as a road to the social and economic advancement of India's poor. They considered it almost as a humanitarian venture, for the temporary loss of freedom was justified, in their eyes, by the ultimate advantages, while they did not appreciate the social and personal disorganisation produced by the system. By the time Indian immigration was extended to Fiji in 1879, some 335,000 Indians were living in British colonies. ¹ Many of them had been born there, and many intended to stay.

¹

India in 1878-9, P.P. 1880, LIII, 1.

Although it was unable to take advantage of Indian labour before it became a British Colony in 1874, Fiji's commercial possibilities had long been recognised. In the sixties, European planters supplemented the earlier traders, whalers, adventurers and missionaries. They grew cotton, which fetched a very high price because of the blockade and devastation during and after the American Civil War, and brought immigrants from other Pacific Islands to work on their plantations. The problem of reconciling European and Fijian interests and aspirations within the framework of a political order acceptable to both assumed importance. Attempts to form stable governments commanding the loyalty of all groups were unsuccessful, and, on several occasions, only the intervention of British warships prevented a complete breakdown of law and order. The most noteworthy of these governments existed, under the nominal authority of Cakobau, from 1871 to 1874. Finally, in 1874, the British Government reluctantly accepted a second offer of cession from the Fijian chiefs. (An earlier offer had been declined in 1862.) The strongest motive for annexation was a feeling of moral responsibility to put an end to the anarchy which had resulted in Fiji after a European settlement which was largely of British subjects; another important reason was

to effect greater control over the Island labour traffic, which was accompanied by abuses and atrocities which had aroused strong indignation in England and Australia. The main argument against annexation was financial. The British Government did not want to pay for the government of this unwanted acquisition, and this difficulty had an important influence on many subsequent events.¹

¹

Survey from: Derrick, A History of Fiji, I; Drus, 'The Colonial Office and the Annexation of Fiji', in Transactions of Royal Historical Society, XXXII, 87-110.

Chapter I

THE COMMENCEMENT OF INDIAN IMMIGRATION

Indian immigration into Fiji did not come about simply through the needs of the sugar industry; rather was it due to Government initiative and social and financial considerations; it was conditional upon Fiji becoming a British possession; it preceded the establishment of an economic sugar industry; and, although it was designed to meet the needs of the planters for labour, it was resisted by the planters of the day.

Before cession, the planters had better opportunities than after to obtain Fijian labour. It was procured in three ways: by voluntary engagement with the consent of the chief; by the purchase of prisoners from the Government, including defaulting taxpayers (since taxation was individually assessed in money terms); and by the purchase of labourers from recruiters who had themselves obtained them from chiefs.¹ The supply was not sufficient and, for at least ten years before cession, planters had supplemented

¹

Note, circa Nov.-Dec. 1876, Stanmore Papers, B.M. 49237.

it with labour brought from other Pacific Islands on three-year contracts, especially the New Hebrides (particularly Tana), the Solomon Islands and the Gilbert, Kingsmill and Tokelau Islands. These "Polynesians" were employed principally at the cultivation of cotton and coconuts on the small estates of a large number of individual planters.

Other sources of labour were discussed before cession including China and India. In 1867, the planters F. and W. Hennings enquired about Indian labour from the British Consul in Levuka, who replied that the British Government would be unlikely to agree. In 1870, another planter, Nathaniel Chalmers, was refused permission by the Government of India to introduce Indians. Two years later, in order to strengthen the hand of his brother who was going to India, he asked the Cakobau Government to make an official request.³ Thurston who was, inter alia, Cakobau's Minister of Foreign Relations, wrote to the Government of India. "In consequence of a desire evinced by the majority

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This was the term used at the time. The expression "Island labour" is substituted in this study.

2

About the beginning of 1874, there were 648 plantations, C.1011 (1874).

3

C.S.O. 211/72; C.S.O. 378/72.

of the settlers in these islands", he asked that a Convention be concluded to permit Indian emigration to Fiji. Aware that political instability in Fiji would count against his request, he added: "I am of opinion that there is nothing in the character of the native Fijians which, even were this country still without Government, would render probable a collision between the two races". This request was also rejected in Calcutta where an official wrote of the Cakobau Government: "The experiment is too recent and too strange to warrant the Government of India in confiding its subjects to 'Kakobau Rex' and the Polinesians¹ cotton planters". On his copy of the letter to Fiji containing a polite rejection "at present", someone in the India Office in London pencilled "ever"², and the decision was fully approved. British rule was thus a precondition of Indian immigration into Fiji.³

By the time of cession, however, the economic conditions which had induced the planters to seek Indian

¹ India E.P., Jan. 1873, A.2-4.

² Minute on despatch dated 27 Dec. 1872, I.O., Collections to Public Despatches, 1873, LVI.

³ I.O. to Govt. India, 12 Feb. 1873, India E.P. Mar. 1873, A.11.



labour had changed. The price of cotton had fallen, following the revival of American cotton production and the collapse of the French market during and after the Franco-Prussian War,¹ and the planters could not afford to introduce any more labour. They were unable even to pay and send back to their homes those Island labourers whose contracts had expired; at the time of cession, approximately three thousand were awaiting repatriation.² It was not the planters, but the first permanent Governor of Fiji, Sir Arthur Gordon, who revived the proposal to introduce Indian labour. On his assumption of Government, he made a speech to the assembled colonists at Levuka, which included these words:

Shall we attempt, not to supplant, but to supplement Polynesian labour by that of Indian coolies? I think we shall do well to do so. I have nothing to urge against Polynesian labour, but I think we must admit that the supply of it is decreasing and the cost increasing. All the evidence I have been able to obtain tends to show that this state of things will continue.³

The earliest reference to Gordon's intention to bring in Indian labour is dated July 1875.⁴ Whether he had

¹ Derrick, A History of Fiji, 197.

² Gordon to C.O., no.80, 28 Apr. 1876.

³ Fiji Times, 4 Sep. 1875.

⁴ C.S.O. 531/75.

considered it before his arrival in Fiji is an open question. It is, however, certain that he was not concerned merely with economic considerations. Given the suitability for sugarcane cultivation of the broad river valleys and plains of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu and the proximity of a large and expanding market and source of capital in Australia and New Zealand, Fiji, would, like other sugar-producing colonies, have turned to indentured Indian labour anyway. Even before cession Sir Robert Herbert, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office, had recognized that sugar cultivation in Fiji meant imported labour.¹ But if circumstances were important so were intentions and timing. Indian immigration in Fiji began as an adjunct to Gordon's Fijian policy. Without Gordon it would probably have come later and had different results. Conversely, without it, Gordon's policy might not have succeeded and the subsequent history of Fiji would have been different. To understand why Indian labour was brought to Fiji in 1879, we must understand the conditions existing at the time, Gordon's character and the policies he evolved to meet those conditions.

¹

Minute dated 24. Feb. 1873, on telegram from Sir H. Robinson, 20 Feb. 1873, C.O. 201/573.

His first problem was the need to maintain order and adjust relations between the Fijians and the European settlers. The Fijians being far the most numerous (about 150,000 at cession), loyal to their chiefs and unaccustomed to the restraints of an alien, unitary government, provided the greatest problem. They were dispirited by the measles epidemic of 1875 which had killed an estimated 40,000¹; embittered by what they had so far experienced of Europeans; indebted to traders and planters; worried by the threatened loss through past reckless alienation of the bulk of their best land; and by no means inclined to submit tamely to interference with the remainder. In the absence of strong countervailing power (and Gordon had no British troops except a Company of Royal Engineers), it was apparent that the new Government, if it was to rule at all, would have to do so with the consent of the Fijian chiefs. Gordon realised this very clearly:

So long as the native population outnumbered the European by an hundred to one, it is through these Chiefs that the country will be most peaceably, cheaply and easily governed, - and the Governor has already observed that in those districts where for one or another cause the Chiefs have lost their hold on the people, the administration of affairs is attended with a difficulty and confusion unknown elsewhere. If deprived of position and employment

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Derrick, 130.

they would, not improbably, from being docile and useful instruments, become a constant source of trouble if not even of danger.¹

The mood of the planters was as unhappy as that of the Fijians. Many were living from hand to mouth, caught between the fall in cotton prices and the accumulation of interest on borrowed capital. Already their numbers had fallen from about 3,000 in 1871-2 to 1,500-2,000 at² cession; many of the others were only waiting until they could secure confirmation of their land titles. They hoped for much from British rule; relief from their debts through the passing of a bankruptcy law; confirmation of their land titles so they could sell the land or borrow on it; and ample supplies of Fijian labour. They expected that the Pax Britannica would restore commercial confidence and induce capital to flow in to develop new crops and processing and shipping facilities for those that rotted on the ground. Some of these aspirations were incompatible with the interests of the Fijians.

Gordon's second problem was to find sufficient revenue to carry on the administration of the colony. It had

¹

Gordon to Legislative Council, 21 Dec. 1876, C.O. 85/2.

²

Gordon to C.O., no.45, 21 Aug. 1875. There is much doubt about the numbers of both Europeans and Fijians (Derrick, 130-3).

been made clear to him that, especially in those days of financial stringency in London, he could not rely on the British taxpayer to meet the expenses of governing this unsolicited colonial liability. Then, governments like individuals, were expected to cut their coats according to their cloth; any other policy would have been considered contrary to prudence and economic law alike. The colonies were not economic assets; they were expensive liabilities. They were insignificant both as markets and suppliers of raw materials,¹ but the British taxpayer had, nevertheless, been called upon to provide large sums for their upkeep.² Fiji was given a grant-in-aid of only £100,000 to be repaid when the colony could afford to do so. Expenditure exceeded ordinary revenue during every year of Gordon's governorship and in the early years by substantial sums. It followed, therefore, that the government would need to be conducted frugally for some time to come; that the salaries of only a limited number of European officers could be paid; that some highly

1

Fisher, British Commercial Interests in Tropical Dependencies in the Third Quarter of the Nineteenth Century (Institute of Commonwealth Studies Seminar Paper).

2

Knowles, The Economic Development of the British Overseas Empire, 88.

productive method of taxing the Fijians was necessary; and that commerce and economic development should be encouraged, so that the government could raise a substantial revenue from customs duties also. The scattered nature of the group and of European settlement added to the difficulty and expense of administration.

Given these circumstances, it is tempting to regard the policies Gordon adopted as "inevitable". They were not; another Governor might have taken different and less novel paths with different results. Gordon had great ability and energy and was, above all, a man of noble, humanitarian and Christian aspirations, an aristocratic Liberal and a friend of the underdog. He was a complex person; introspective, sensitive, inquiring, scholarly; but at the same time ambitious, egotistical, autocratic,¹ provocative and devious at times - a man who could inspire devotion or hatred. He wanted to achieve greatness but through service to his fellow men. He came to Fiji from Trinidad and Mauritius, where he had shown himself a friend of the underprivileged;² after

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"I wish the Sultan would make me Governor of Armenia", he joked. (Gordon to Gladstone, 27 Jan. 1882, Stanmore Papers, B.M. 49209.

2

J.K. Chapman, The Career of Arthur Hamilton Gordon to 1875 (unpublished thesis).

he left Mauritius, over a thousand Indians and creoles wanted to follow him to Fiji.¹ He was specially picked for the new colony by Lord Carnarvon, then the Secretary of State for the colonies. As a condition of acceptance, he was given a wide choice in deciding his policies and selecting the men who would assist him to carry them out,² and it was an exceptionally able team he chose.

Gordon had one overriding aim in Fiji - to preserve the Fijian people from the fate which had overtaken so many other non-European peoples in the expansion of Empires. For him it was a mission. Retrospectively, and in one of his frequent pessimistic moods, he wrote:

I see too plainly that it is only a question of time how soon another page is added to the dark record of the triumph of greed and selfishness. How dark that record is in our Colonies you at home have little idea.³

He wanted Britain to be able to point with satisfaction to this example of her treatment of subject races. But others had good intentions, too. Gordon was distinguished rather by his insight, as can be shown by one of the many lucid and persuasive defences of his policy which he made during and after his term as Governor:

1

C.S.O. 1221/76.

2

Gordon to Gladstone, 4 Dec. 1874, Gladstone Papers, B.M. 44320.

3

Gordon to Selborne, Stanmore Papers, B.M. 49218.

Fortunately on this occasion, policy and indeed necessity, pointed in the same direction as right and justice. The white settlers in Fiji had not colonized an empty waste, or cultivated for the first time land until then roamed over by nomadic savages. The estates of the planters were scattered here and there among a large and industrious settled population, owners and cultivators of the soil, and possessing a complex social and political organization in vigorous activity. Where this is the case and when a native population also outnumbers, by more than fifty to one, the strangers dwelling among them, it is not safe even if it be practicable, to deny to the natives a large measure of self-government.

Such an acknowledgment, indeed, might have been grudgingly accorded, and accompanied by a jealous reluctance to extend such privileges one hair's breadth beyond the narrowest limits within which, consistently with safety, they could be confined, but this was not the spirit in which the question was approached, either by those in authority at home, or those to whom the practical direction of affairs in the new Colony was entrusted.

They were well aware that it was not enough to abstain from seeking hastily to replace native institutions by unreal imitations of European models, but that it was also of the utmost importance to seize the spirit in which native institutions had been framed, and develop to the utmost extent the capacities of the people for the management of their own affairs, without exciting their suspicion or destroying their self-respect. Every effort was therefore made to preserve the traditional laws and customs, to maintain in authority the local chiefs, and in all possible ways to utilize the existing native organisation.¹

The main features of his policy were: the continued utilisation of Fijian chiefs and political organisation

¹

Gordon, 'Native Councils in Fiji', in Contemporary Review, May 1883, 713.

in administration; the conscious preservation of Fijian social structure and customs codified in a separate code of laws; the prohibition of further land alienation and the vesting of the land not already alienated in Fijian communities and not in the Crown; the introduction of a highly-productive system of communal taxation in cash crops; and the imposition of restrictions upon the engagement of Fijian labour. Secure in familiar customs and working in communal fashion under the authority of their traditional leaders, but learning new agricultural and industrial skills, the Fijians were to advance at a pace which would ensure their survival. He wrote to his friend Gladstone:

If they are at present treated as 19th Century British subjects, their extinction in a short time is inevitable: - if they can get some 25 years for their present civilization to grow and root itself firmly, they will hold their own without need of further adventitious help.¹

The price Gordon paid was the bitter opposition of the majority of the European settlers and the hatred of not a few of them. With the exception of three or four officials, every white person in Fiji opposed the tax scheme, wrote MacGregor to Gordon.² This opposition had,

¹

Gordon to Gladstone, 12 Oct 1876, Gladstone Papers, B.M. 44320.

²

MacGregor to Gordon, 30 Mar. 1879, Stanmore Papers, B.M. 49203.

as might be expected, a solid basis in considerations of power, prestige and economic self-interest. Small traders found they could no longer buy the bulk of the Fijians' cash crops, and planters found they could not hire the labourers they required to work their plantations. The planters had their land claims adjudicated (and generously at that)¹ but they had gained none of the other tangible benefits they had expected to result from the establishment of British law, British Government and economic laissez-faire. Through the Press, books, petitions and questions in the British Parliament, they assailed Gordon's policy as slavery for the Fijians and ruin for the Europeans, but Gordon's character and the trust reposed in him by the Colonial Office and two successive Secretaries of State ensured their failure. Herbert wrote to him in 1876:

The Native policy was, as you have anticipated, rather a large pill to swallow, but we have swallowed it bravely in order to give you the chance you desire of proving that you can govern the natives instead of killing them off. Do not, however, check white settlement more than you can help.

Finance is, of course, as ever, my chief anxiety with regard to Fiji. Neither you nor Lord Carnarvon

¹

Possibly with "undue liberality", thought his successor, Des Voeux. (Des Voeux, My Colonial Service, I, 358-9.) Title to 414,615 acres of the best land in the Colony was confirmed, out of a total area of Fiji of 4,581,500.

will be considered to have succeeded as long as you are in deficit.¹

After land, labour was the main pre-occupation of the planters; with land they could borrow, but without labour they could do nothing. "The all-absorbing question of the hour, one which seems to supersede almost every other consideration, at least in the minds of the producing class in this Colony, is that of the labour Supply", declared the Fiji Times in May 1877.² Fiji was possessed of a substantial indigenous population which the planters naturally expected would provide labour for their plantations. They proposed that the Fijians should be released from their communal obligations and permitted, as free British subjects, to work where they liked; some recognising that the supply of voluntary Fijian labour would in any case be insufficient, proposed various forms of direct or indirect pressure, such as a labour levy or a poll tax.³ The system of taxation which had existed before cession had been an indirect aid to the planter because the Fijians earned the money to pay their poll tax by

1

Herbert to Gordon, 9 Jun. 1876, Stanmore Papers, B.M. 49199.

2

Fiji Times, 19 May 1877.

3

Labour in Fiji (Confidential Print), Jul. 1879, C.O. 808/36.

working for him. Sir Hercules Robinson, the temporary Governor, had substituted a labour tax which had the same effect. Gordon's taxation scheme reversed this pressure because the chiefs had an incentive to keep their people at home, working on the produce gardens. This incentive was buttressed by legislation requiring the specific permission of Fijian officials before a labourer could engage for service. Furthermore, an attempt was made, not immediately or completely successful, to put a stop to the acceptance of gratuities by chiefs. Then, too, the measles epidemic had carried off nearly one-half of the people of some of the districts which had formerly supplied labour.¹ For these reasons, the planters were unable to secure the Fijian labour they required.²

Even without Gordon's policy, a substantial volume of voluntary Fijian labour would not have been available. The inducements offered must have seemed most unattractive

¹ Gordon to C.O., 9 Aug. 1877, P.P. 1878, LV, 241.

² Number of Fijian contract labourers employed:

1875	- 604	(incomplete)
1876	-1213	
1877	- 976	
1878	-1249	
1879	-1193	
1880	-1001	

(C.S.O. 47/82. Like other contemporary figures from Fiji, these must be treated with considerable reserve.)

to the average, well-adjusted member of a village community. As Thurston wrote:

The fact is that no Fijian will go from home to be worked from morning to night, upon paltry pay, indifferent fare, and frequently anything but mild treatment, if he can avoid doing so.

His wants are few, and he is indisposed to sustained labour. He also prefers the presence rather than the absence, of his wife and children; and the cultivation of his own Qali land is infinitely more interesting to him, and more in accordance with his proclivities, than the cultivation of a stranger's land, distant a hundred miles perhaps from the place in which he was born.

The native villager is a member of a commune, and to move out of that commune is opposed to his natural instincts and habits. It is this fact, observable in all the islands of Polynesia, which prevents natives working upon their own islands for Europeans.¹

It is not surprising that many of those who enrolled did so only because of the pressure of their friends, relatives and elders influenced by presents,² and that others were "very young men who, owing to domestic trouble, desire to see the outside world, or other (sometimes objectionable) motives, would be willing to seize the opportunity of engaging on any terms".³ Long-term labour recruitment was

¹

Thurston to Des Voeux, 25 Nov. 1878, in Labour in Fiji, C.O. 808/36.

²

Gordon, 'Native Councils in Fiji', in Contemporary Review, May 1883, 713.

³

Des Voeux to C.O., no.60, 20 May 1879.

regarded by Gordon and his officials and the Council of Chiefs as a major social evil, which broke up homes and families, interfered with the supply of food, created a vagabond class and caused depopulation.¹ Gordon wrote:

If the Fijian population is ever permitted to sink from its present condition into that of a collection of migratory bands of hired labourers, all hope, not only of the improvement, but the preservation of the race, must inevitably be abandoned.²

The Government and chiefs had, however, no objection to local labour on short engagements, but this was not as reliable as labour brought from outside.

If plantation enterprise was to survive at all in Fiji, within the orbit of Gordon's policy, imported labour was thus a necessity. The most obvious source was the Pacific Islands which had before cession supplied the planters with an abundant supply of cheap, docile labour. For various reasons, however, these conditions were approaching an end. The supply was more limited, owing to depopulation and increased competition from Queensland, Samoa and New Caledonia, whose agents offered higher wages.³ Recruiting vessels would have to spend longer in the

¹ Des Voeux to C.O., no.30, 3 Mar. 1879.

² Gordon to C.O., 9 Aug. 1877, in P.P. 1878, LV, 241.

³ Ibid.

recruiting grounds, with consequent greater expense and risk of financial loss or attack. Moreover, the Pacific Islands labour traffic had occupied the attention of humanitarian opinion in England for many years and a desire to curb its abuses had been one cause of the British Government's acceptance of the offer of cession. Gordon was expected to do this and in his first speech in Fiji, he gave the colonists notice that the British Government was likely to insist on restrictive measures which would still further increase the cost of introduction of labourers.¹ Such measures were in fact adopted, and many of the ship-owners who had previously engaged in the traffic withdrew. It became increasingly difficult to charter ships and for some years after cession the introduction of Island labour was a most precarious undertaking, with wide fluctuations in costs and supply.² The repatriation (in some cases with Government assistance) of time-expired labourers still further increased the planters' difficulties.

¹ Fiji Times, 4 Sep. 1875.

² Number of Island labourers:

	<u>Introduced</u>	<u>Under Service at 31 Dec.</u>	<u>Repatriated</u>
1875	404	3835	582
1876	469	2410	1829
1877	539	1697	1193
1878	1520	2847	700
1879	1858	3863	345

(Immigration Reports for 1877 and 1879.) The cost rose from about £5 at cession to £10 in 1880. (C.S.O.2974/82.)

This situation was due partly to Government restrictions and it was but natural, therefore, that the planters, whose interests were affected, should accuse Gordon of endeavouring to suppress the traffic altogether by imposing unreasonable conditions on those who sought to engage in it. This was unjustified. He was by no means as hostile to the traffic, since it had been reformed, as the humanitarians would have liked;¹ during his visit to London on leave in 1879 the philanthropic societies raised the question again.² In 1877 £5,000 was voted as a subsidy for the introduction of Island labour. Yet, however improved the conditions of recruitment, its social consequences in the Islands could not have been better than those he deplored in the case of Fijian labour recruitment. The explanation of this contradiction is that he regarded a continuation of Island immigration as "of the utmost moment to this Colony",³ because it was necessary to provide the planters with an alternative source of labour to the Fijians he denied them, and it was the Colony of Fiji with which he was primarily concerned. His

¹

Gordon to C.O., Apr. 1879, Records of Private and of Public Life, III, 294.

²

Minute on Gordon to C.O., no.94, 16 Aug. 1880, C.O.83/23.

³

Gordon to C.O., 9 Aug. 1877, in P.P. 1878, LV, 241.

successor, Des Voeux, wrote, retrospectively:

The conditions of this system of immigration seemed in several respects unsatisfactory; but Sir Arthur Gordon had found the system in operation, and, whatever his objections to it, he could not abolish it without facing the certainty of greatly increased pressure for the enforced employment of Fijian labour. And so he tolerated one evil in order to avert a greater, doing probably all that was then possible by way of modifying it, especially in passing a law which greatly improved the system.¹

But Gordon did not feel that he was paving the way for the perpetuation of the traffic. He believed that it was likely to die a natural death, for the reasons which had brought about a decrease in supply. It is this belief which prompted him to advocate Indian immigration. Thirty-five years later (when he had no axe to grind), he explained to the Sanderson Committee (on Indian Emigration) exactly why he brought the Indians to Fiji:

I started it, in the view, as I said, that the introduction of the Pacific Islands' labour was quite certain to die off before very long, and I utterly objected to the measures by which they wanted to force the native population, who were almost all owners of land themselves, to come and work on estates, not in their own neighbourhood, which would be a very good thing, but at distances off, in other islands, and I proposed the Indian immigration. It was enormously opposed by the planters at the time.²

¹ Des Voeux, My Colonial Service, II, 348.

² Cd. 5193 (1910), 348.

The first Indian immigrants did not arrive until 1879, although, following his speech on the assumption of government, funds had been voted for Indian immigration for 1876. The delay was due principally to the resistance of the planters to the proposal. They were at first very favourable,¹ but after they saw the draft Ordinance, they considered its provisions too restrictive. They believed that Island labour should be subsidized by one-third, as was intended for Indian immigration.² There were doubts in another quarter also. The Aborigines' Protection Society in London addressed the Secretary of State for the Colonies:

Having regard to the manifold abuses which have hitherto proved inseparable from the system, we think it is very undesirable that the Government of Fiji should be encouraged to resort to India for a supply of labourers. We fear that the result would be costly and burdensome to the new Colony; and judging from past experience, we are equally convinced that, especially on plantations remote from the central authority, it would be even more difficult to secure adequate protection for the natives of India than for the Islanders of the Pacific.³

The Colonial Office pointed out to Gordon that there was opposition in England to the extension of the system of

¹ C.S.O. 32/75.

² Fiji Argus, 20 Oct. 1876; Fiji Times, 23 Aug. 1876 and 18 Oct. 1876.

³ Aborigines Protection Society to C.O., Feb. 1876, C.O. 384/112.

indentured Indian immigration to new colonies.¹ By this time, however, even Gordon was having doubts about his proposal. In November, 1876, he made a speech in which he declared that although he still felt Indian labour to be ultimately the best for Fiji, he feared that at that time it was beyond the means of the colony and the planters.²

Within a short time, however, he had returned to his original view. The labour shortage had become more acute (1877 was the most critical year) and negotiations for the chartering of ships for the Island labour traffic had completely broken down. In July, 1877, he announced his decision in a message to the Legislative Council:

The events of the last six months have strongly confirmed His Excellency's previous conviction that it is hazardous in the extreme for the planters of the Colony to rely exclusively on so manifestly precarious a supply of labour as that previously referred to, and that Polynesian immigration must henceforth be supplemented, if not ultimately superseded, by immigration from other quarters, especially from India.³

Not only was the supply more certain, he felt, but it would be cheaper in the long run. He announced that he

1

C.O. to Gordon, 29 Jun. 1876, in P.P. 1876, LIV, 65.

2

Speech at Vuna, 23 Nov. 1876. (Fiji Times, 29 Nov. 1876.)

3

Gordon to Legislative Council, 5 Jul. 1877, in P.P. 1878, LV, 241.

intended to send to India Charles Mitchell, his Agent-General of Immigration, to negotiate for the opening of immigration with 400 to 500 Indian labourers to arrive in 1878 as a precaution against another failure of the supply from the Islands. At the same time he sought the approval of the Secretary of State, and in his despatch gave an additional reason for his proposal:

I must confess, moreover, that the consideration weighs not a little with me that unless labour is thus obtained, I fear it will be very difficult long to withstand the pressure which will be brought to bear upon the Government to consent to measures intended to coerce the native population of this Colony into an involuntary servitude, or at all events to wink at practices not consistent with fair dealing.¹

It was considered in the Colonial Office that Gordon had made out his case, on the grounds of necessity,² and the scheme was approved on the understanding that the necessary protective ordinances would be passed and that the public revenue would not be called upon to pay more than one-third of the cost of introduction and repatriation of the labourers.³ The Aborigines' Protection Society,

¹ Gordon to C.O., 9 Aug. 1877, in P.P. 1878, LV, 241.

² Minutes on Gordon to C.O., 9 Aug. 1877, C.O. 384/113.

³ C.O. to Gordon, 14 Nov. 1877 and 25 Feb. 1878, in P.P. 1878, LV, 241.

disarmed probably by Gordon's humanitarian sympathies¹ and record, was silent; earlier one of its leaders had merely suggested that a programme of industrial training² of the Fijians might make Indian immigration unnecessary.

It was now that the planters and Press began to attack the proposed Indian immigration as premature and unnecessary.³ The unpopular Fijian and 'Polynesian' labour regulations were even attributed to a desire on Gordon's part to force Indian labour on the colony.⁴ Predicting that Mitchell's mission would prove a failure because of the recent famine in India, the Fiji Times, the planters' voice, proclaimed in one remarkable passage:

While deploring the miserable cause, we can join in the congratulation which accompanies the failure. Awaiting the day when Fijians shall labour in the development of the riches of Fiji, the interests of the country are better served by the immigration of Polynesians, than the introduction of a class whose lives, traditions, habits, and thoughts are so widely opposed to those of the people amongst whom they would have to reside.... 'India for the Indians, Fiji for the Fijians'.⁵

¹ Minutes on Gordon to C.O., 9 Aug. 1877, C.O. 384/113.

² Chesson to Gordon, 19 Jan. 1877, Stanmore Papers, B.M. 49137.

³ Fiji Argus, 3 May 1878, Fiji Times, 11 Aug. 1877, 15 Aug. 1877, and 12 Oct. 1878.

⁴ Fiji Times, 12 Oct. 1878; Des Voeux to C.O., no.43, 1 Apr. 1879.

⁵ Fiji Times, 27 Oct. 1877.

There is, however, no record of the Fijians having been consulted or having expressed any opinions on the proposal, which was in any case thought by Gordon to be in their interests.¹ The resistance came from the planters and was based on substantial grounds. Most of them had small estates (200-1000 acres),² were indebted and could not afford the large initial payments needed for Indian immigrants, or the elaborate hospital requirements laid down in the draft Indian Immigration Ordinance. Moreover, Indian labourers were an unknown quantity, except to a few coffee planters who had come from Ceylon and thought that Tamils should be introduced.³ Most of the planters wanted Fijian or Island labour, with which they were familiar. By 1878, Island labour was again available,

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This view was expressed in the Colonial Office also. When the Roko Tuis of Fiji, in a letter to the Queen, complained of labour recruiting and asked for "measures to alter this", an official minuted: "This, it will be remembered, the Government has done by negotiating with India for a supply of coolie labour. It remains to be seen in the future how this supply will affect the demand for native labour, and whether the naturally indolent Fijian will be able to hold his own in the days of competition." (Minute by Fuller of 17 Apr. 1878 on Gordon to C.O., no.22, 25 Jan. 1878, C.O. 83/16.)

2

Mitchell to Govt. India 13 Nov. 1877, in Fiji Royal Gazette, 9 Feb. 1878.

3

Report of Meeting of Fiji Agricultural Society, 3 Oct. 1878 in Fiji Times, 9 Oct. 1878.

perhaps because repatriation had restored Fiji's credit in the recruiting fields.¹ Nevertheless, now that his mind was made up, Gordon pushed on with his scheme. In London, he wrote that delay would be "unspeakably disastrous to the Colony".² Had he been in the colony at the time he might not have been so sure, for few applications for the first shipment of Indians were received.³

The planters and Press were unjust in accusing Gordon of being biassed in favour of Indian immigration and determined to introduce it regardless of the circumstances he found in Fiji. He answered the charge of bias himself in these words: "I wish I could think I was mistaken in perceiving that the supply of Polynesian labour is rapidly failing".⁴ His short-lived doubts in 1876-77 should also be remembered. Nevertheless, it would be well to recognise that, like most public men of his day, he believed that well-regulated Indian immigration was a boon to the colonies and the individual

¹ Immigration Report, 1879.

² Gordon to C.O., 9 Sep. 1878, C.O. 384/121.

³ By 28 Apr. 1879, applications had been received for only 107 of 464 immigrants (including children), who arrived by the Leonidas on 15 May 1879.

⁴ Minute by Gordon on Des Voeux to C.O., no.43, 1 Apr. 1879, C.O. 83/19.

immigrants alike and on that account to be encouraged. In Trinidad and Mauritius he had found the system of indentured Indian labour already in operation and had reformed it in the interests of the labourer. The system itself he did not object to, but just its abuses. He had seen the prosperity it had brought to other colonies and to individual Indian immigrants and expected that it would do the same in Fiji.¹

Gordon was accused also of desiring the ruin of the existing planters in the colony. That their displacement was the result of his policy, or at least his policy plus the circumstances, is true enough: but it is unjustified to say that it was the aim of it. Gordon was prepared to help the planters provided their interests did not clash with his humanitarian objectives. Moreover, he was worried by an exaggerated impression of their political influence in London. It is, however, certain that he had no great opinion of them. In public he could call them "the most important portion of the community",² but they knew he

1

Gordon to C.O., 9 Aug. 1877, P.P. 1878, LV, 241. By contrast, he considered Fijian labour recruitment as "simply a species of coolie immigration, without any of the advantages to the immigrant which exist in the case of immigration from India". (Labour in Fiji, C.O. 808/36.)

2

Speech at Vuna, 23 Nov. 1876. (Fiji Argus, 1 Dec. 1876.)

thought otherwise. The following passages later deleted from the draft of a despatch to London (for tactical reasons probably - many despatches were published) are revealing. They also help explain why Gordon was hated.

The white settlers have as a body been painted in blacker colours than they deserve. There are among them some very bad characters but as a rule they are well meaning indolent bankrupt folks.

.....

But though I do not think they deserve morally the censures which have been heaped upon them I must nevertheless confess harsh as the sentiment may appear that I believe the best thing which could happen to Fiji would be the utter sweeping off of its present race of ruined proprietors. The Colony would have a much better prospect before it were there no settlers in it at all than it has now with bankrupts and gamblers stopping up every avenue.

.....

Harsh as it may seem I believe that prosperity will be unknown in Fiji until the majority of the present planters have either sold their holdings to others or have sunk under mortgages and have made way for men of larger capital and wider views.¹

If Gordon's remarks on the character of the planters (not all of which are reproduced here) were uncharitable, his assessment of their capabilities was probably near the mark. After the collapse of cotton, they experimented

¹

Draft, circa Jul.-Aug. 1876, Stanmore Papers, B.M. 49199.

with various crops, but lacked practical knowledge.¹ Many returned to copra, but others had not taken the precaution of planting coconut trees and were ruined. Leaf disease ruined the prospects for coffee and inadequate shipping facilities hindered the development of a large-scale fruit trade.² Sugar seemed to have the best future but mills and capital were required.

Gordon wanted at least some economic development because, without financial assistance from London, he needed to expand the revenue to provide for administration and positive welfare measures. It was a question of public finance, and it would be a mistake to imagine that his interest in development was as great as his concern for the Fijians. It is true that before coming to Fiji he told the Aborigines' Protection Society that a well-regulated system of immigration was necessary to ensure a speedy and extensive development of the natural resources of the new colony.³ Nevertheless, after reaching Fiji he

1

Horne, A Year in Fiji, 138-9. Horne was Director of Woods, Forests and Botanical Gardens in Mauritius, and had been invited by Gordon to make a survey of the agricultural possibilities of Fiji.

2

Tippett, The Nineteenth Century Labour Traffic in the South-West Pacific, 59-61 (unpublished thesis).

3

The Times, 18 Mar. 1875 (C.O. 83/8).

considered that the capabilities of the group had been over-estimated¹ and he wrote to Carnarvon: "I am by no means impatient for the development of the Colony: my first care is to try to organize and administer the Colony as it is"². The impetus for development appears to have come not from Gordon but from Thurston, an able, hard, and essentially practical man. He thought that the Government should assist the establishment of the sugar industry by giving financial guarantee to private investors if they would erect two central sugar factories, and by sponsoring Indian immigration. He wrote:

Without a European population all sources of revenue other than by direct taxation upon natives must fail, and fail they certainly will, unless the Government steps in to develop the commercial resources of the country.

Assistance in the way of coolie immigration is necessary and is a legitimate purpose to which borrowed money may be devoted.

Capitalists will not settle here unless they can obtain a better class of labour than that obtainable at the New Hebrides or Solomon Islands. £5,000 would introduce 250 coolies to begin with. It would initiate the immigration. At present and apart from the question of land titles, the Capitalist is waiting for the Immigration Department to introduce labourers, and the Department is waiting for the Capitalist to invest his money and make his

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Draft, circa Jul.-Aug., 1876, Stanmore Papers, B.M.49199.

2

Gordon to Carnarvon, 24 Dec. 1875, Carnarvon Papers, P.R.O. 30/6/39.

applications. The introduction of a few men would solve the difficulty.

.....

Fiji, it is believed, is capable of producing sugar equal in quality to the finest in the world and it would by the introduction of Capital be in a position to supply all Australia with sugar in the course of a very few years.¹

Although the British Government would not agree to any proposals for financial assistance to the sugar industry,² Thurston's ambitious ideas were shared by many of the settlers. They approved of his efforts to induce overseas sugar firms to commence operations in Fiji, for it was not intended that these should displace the individual planters. Thurston's view that Indian immigration was a pre-condition of capital investment was probably correct. Later he said that, but for the certainty of Indian labour being available, capitalists would not have invested their money in Fiji.³ Thus, financial as well as social

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Memo. by Thurston with Gordon to C.O., no.79, 9 May 1877.

2

Meade, Deputy Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office wrote: "I would stamp out at once the proposal artificially to foster the establishment of sugar planting (I thought at any rate Fiji could grow sugar without financial assistance) and as for central sugar factories we have enough on our hands already in the West Indies." (Minute of 23 Aug. 1877 on Gordon to C.O., no.79, 9 May 1877, C.O. 83/13.)

3

Fiji Royal Gazette, 1886, 104.

considerations lay behind the Government initiative in regard to Indian immigration. Fiji was to become a major sugar producer without disrupting Fijian society in the process.

No objections were raised by the Government of India to the extension of the system of indentured labour to Fiji now that it had become a British Colony. Mitchell submitted a draft Ordinance which was modelled on those of Trinidad and British Guiana. The changes were generally in favour of the immigrant rather than the employer;¹ the few outstanding differences of opinion concerned minor matters only. The main features of the arrangements were that immigrants were to be recruited in India under Government supervision, to be given a free passage to Fiji, to serve under Government supervision and protection as indentured agricultural labourers for five years with penal sanctions to enforce the contract, and to be entitled to an optional, free return passage after spending another five years in the colony. One matter where there was difference of opinion should be mentioned, because it shows again Gordon's concern for the welfare of all people, Indians as well as Fijians. He

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Note by Sir S. Walcott (Land and Emigration Commissioner), 25 Mar. 1878, C.O. 384/121.

insisted, against the opinion of the Colonial Office, which had the concurrence of the Government of India, that a clause be retained in the Indian Immigration Ordinance, giving immigrants the right to commute for a money payment the fourth and fifth years of their period of indentured service. He wrote:

Although I cannot hope that my voice will be listened to when it is raised nearly alone, I desire to record my decided protest against the abolition of the right to commute engagements in the 4th and 5th years of service.

I hold it to be one of the most valuable privileges of the immigrant and one of the very strongest of those indirect checks on fraud and ill usage which are so very much more useful and operative than more explicit and direct provisions for that purpose.¹

His view prevailed and the provision was given a trial.

Gordon did not intend that the suffering of Indians should be a subsidy to the protection of Fijians.

Of all the provisions of the scheme, by far the most pregnant was the one that immigrants need not return to India. This was not, of course, accidental. One of the main advantages Gordon expected from Indian immigration was the availability of a supply of time-expired Indian

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Gordon to C.O., 30 Sep. 1878, C.O. 384/121. The objection to the proposal was that it had been shown in Trinidad that immigrants borrowed at ruinous rates of interest to secure commutation. Gordon denied that they did so when well treated. In Fiji, the provision was repealed under Governor Des Voeux.

labour; this was the only justification of its high cost of introduction and the Government subsidy of one-third, which was not afforded Island immigration.¹ He attached great value to the provision that the right to a free passage would accrue only after ten years' residence and he expected three quarters of the immigrants to remain, an estimate based on West Indian experience.² Des Voeux also expected most of the immigrants to remain.³ Thurston said later that the object of introducing immigrants for ten years was "to secure a working population and nothing more",⁴ but that they should be induced to remain permanently by the offer of facilities for settlement after ten years. Moreover, Mitchell told the Government of India that he believed Indian immigrants would, as in Trinidad,⁵ become the retail shop-keepers, carters and

¹ Des Voeux to Legislative Council, 28 Dec. 1881, C.O. 83/27; Thurston to C.O., no.158, 21 Dec. 1886.

² Gordon to Legislative Council, 5 Jul. 1877, in P.P. 1878, LV, 241.

³ Des Voeux to Legislative Council, 28 Jan. 1881, C.O. 83/27.

⁴ C.S.O. 1380/93.

⁵ Mitchell to Govt. India, 13 Nov. 1877, (Fiji Royal Gazette, 9 Feb. 1878). Horror was expressed in Fiji at this idea, which presaged the displacement of the European storekeepers of the colony. (Fiji Argus, 29 Mar. 1878.)

market-gardeners of Fiji; and also that the land was suitable for growing rice. But whether Gordon would have desired extensive Indian settlement on the land is doubtful. There are contradictions in the evidence, or perhaps in Gordon's policies. When Thurston sent him a report of a speech by Lord Kimberley, then Secretary of State for the Colonies, advocating "that means should be taken in every possible manner to induce the coolies to settle permanently in the Colonies", Gordon replied that it was he who had started the first Indian settlements in Trinidad.¹ But when the Colonial Office suggested that Island labourers be settled in Fiji if they so wished, Gordon replied inter alia:

The system of granting small allotments of land, in lieu of return passages, to industrial immigrants was one which I introduced in Trinidad with the best results. But there is an essential difference between the condition of Trinidad and that of this Colony. In the former Island there are vast tracts of unoccupied and unclaimed land, available for such grants. Here we have to deal, not with an empty land, but with an already settled country, almost every acre of which has a known owner and over which villages and gardens are more or less thickly scattered.²

This objection was surely relevant to Indian settlement too.

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C.S.O. 1417/88.

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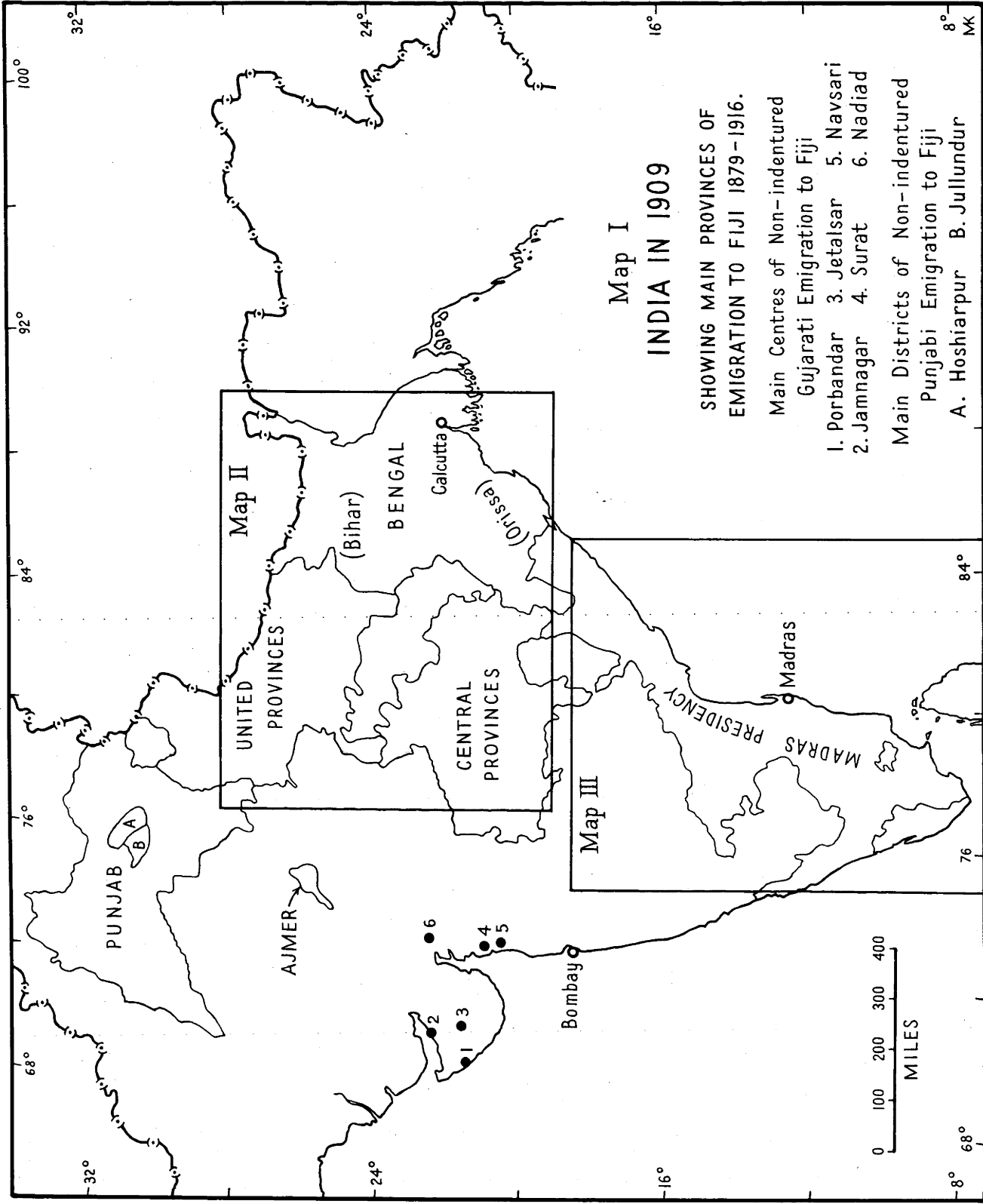
Gordon to C.O., no.140, 23 Sep. 1876.

Gordon does not appear to have adequately considered the implications of settlement. Why? Of Jamaica, where there were Indian immigrants, he wrote astutely of the lack of "homogeneousness", showing he was not unaware of the problem of a plural society.¹ Yet his own policy in Fiji created a similar problem. The explanation seems to be that Gordon was concerned with immediate necessity. He sought to buy time for the Fijians to ensure their survival and considered that for this an assured outside supply of labour was necessary immediately. Indian immigration in Fiji was an experiment in development and welfare. But it achieved even more than he thought. Gordon could not have foreseen that the Fijians would continue to decline in numbers for thirty years and that it would ultimately be the revenues derived from the sugar produced by Indian labour which would enable positive measures of welfare to be taken to arrest the decline of the Fijian race. Other problems he did not foresee. He did not know that the descendants of Indian immigrants would multiply at the remarkable rates of recent years (for the disproportion of the sexes had kept their rates of increase down in the colonies and, after all, in 1875 it

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Gordon to Gladstone, 21 Jan. 1882, Gladstone Papers, B.M. 44321.

was the peoples of Europe who multiplied at those rates, not Asians); nor that those ultimate benefits conferred on Indian immigrants which he had seen in the West Indies were to be marred in Fiji by deplorable conditions of plantation employment and social life; nor that the positive aspects of his Fijian policy would be neglected and that Fijians and Indians would, unlike the Jamaicans, remain in separate social and economic compartments; nor that, under the stimulus of rising sugar prices after 1900, Indian immigration and settlement would assume a momentum independent of Fijian interests; nor that the descendants of Indian labourers would one day aspire to very much wider social and political opportunities. The very protection of the Fijians which Gordon intended Indian indentured labour to be, by denying them the stimulation of full participation in the economic life of the country (and later turning them into landlords of Indian farmers), made them less able to meet future competition. The very preservation of Fijian social structure which was the foundation-stone of his policy was the guarantee that when that competition came, it would be expressed in racial terms. His solution of one problem was the seed of another.



Chapter II

INDIAN EMIGRATION: POLICY AND PRACTICE

The Government of India was given substantial autonomy in its emigration policy, for it was responsible for preserving order in India. But, if the policy was made, not in London, but in Calcutta or Simla, it was still made by British officials who were largely unresponsive to Indian opinion. It was not that they were consciously permitting India to be exploited for the benefit of the rest of the Empire. Their main interest lay in governing India, not in helping the colonial planters, with whom they felt no particular sympathy. Rather, their policy stemmed from abstract ideas of economic freedom. They were products of an age of individualism and laissez-faire and believed that it was the individual's right to sell his labour where he liked, since the prime object was the betterment of the individual and it would be more likely that this would be achieved if each were left free to pursue his own advancement. The fewer restrictions there were on the movement of capital and labour the better it would be for everyone. Perfect mobility of labour, internationally, was a corollary of free trade.

Of course, there had to be fair play, and economic liberalism was tempered by paternalism. Government regulation - in fact, that part of the indenture "system" which lay in India - originally arose out of the desire to prevent the abuses of uncontrolled labour recruitment. The Government of India aptly described its emigration policy as one of seeing fair play between parties to a commercial transaction.¹ But, this policy, consistent with contemporary European ideas of freedom, and entailing elaborate regulations based on a real desire to prevent abuses, was nevertheless an inappropriate one because it did not make sufficient allowance for the actual administrative, economic and social conditions in India, and ignored the social consequences of emigration.

Emigration - any emigration - was not popular in India. For one thing, it was opposed on religious grounds; for hundreds of years there had been an interdict on foreign travel among Hindus, especially in North India. To cross the kali pani (the black waters) meant to lose caste, and in the Muslim and early British periods (although not in earlier times, as the great Hindu civilizations in South-east Asia demonstrated) normally only

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Govt. India to I.O., 3 May 1877, India E.P. Feb. 1880, A.4-29.

traders had ventured across the ocean. Moreover, Indians possessed an extremely strong attachment to their homeland. Indentured labour emigration was regarded with disfavour for additional reasons. Emigrants were collected in questionable ways by disreputable people, they were mixed together regardless of caste or religion, they were taken away, usually never to return, and the most fantastic accounts of their fate were circulated. Many imagined that they were sent to populate certain desert countries or were converted to Christianity; the more thoughtful believed that the poor, ignorant villagers of their country were being exploited for the profit of the European.¹ Until the political awakening of India after the turn of the century, this opposition took the form of silent disapproval rather than active resistance.

The British officials were well aware that emigration was unpopular in India, but regarded this opposition as prejudice which it was their duty to counteract, although they believed that it would be removed in time by the spread of education. As in many other questions, they

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Report by Major Pitcher on emigration from North-West Provinces and Oudh, India E.P. Feb. 1883, A.1-12; Report by Mr Grierson on emigration from Bengal and Bihar, India E.P. Aug. 1883, A.9-15.

considered the welfare rather than the feelings of Indians. Nevertheless, they did not go as far as their countrymen outside India in considering emigration to be beneficial to India. We have seen that men like Gordon and Kimberley regarded Indian emigration as a great boon to the colonies and to the individual emigrants. This opinion was shared by other Englishmen of their day. The benefits extended, in their imagination, to "superstitious", poverty-ridden and plague-stricken India. Periodic calamitous famines reminded the British public of the plight of that unhappy country. The condition of the labouring classes in India was "melancholy to contemplate", declared Lord Salisbury, the Secretary of State for India, in the House of Lords in 1877.¹ He felt that emigration would afford these classes an outlet and would also quicken enterprise and give new life and energy to the whole country. At this time, only a handful of philanthropists, centred on the Aborigines' Protection Society, publicly opposed the indentured labour system, but their force was spent. Reform of the system had deprived them of their best arguments, and for thirty years from 1880, they were largely inarticulate on the subject - to remain so

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On 20 Jul. 1877 (I.O./J. & P. 2202/1902).

until the awakening of Indian nationalism. Moreover, at this time, men who had at first opposed the system later came around to its support. One of these was Des Voeux, Gordon's successor in Fiji, who, earlier in his career, had been a Magistrate in British Guiana and had precipitated a Commission of Enquiry into the abuses of the system. In 1906, he wrote that he had formed there "a somewhat exaggerated estimate of the indentured system and regarded it as wholly unjustifiable. This view, however, has been modified by calm retrospect. --- A system cannot be condemned if it proves a benefit to the great majority."¹ Far from being thought of as an evil, even as a necessary one, the indentured Indian labour system was adjudged by most contemporary English opinion to be universally beneficial. It was a natural belief for an age which thought of welfare primarily in terms of individual economic advancement.

In 1874, the West India Committee, which represented in London the interests of the West Indian planters, wrote to Lord Salisbury, and pointing to the recent famine in

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Des Voeux, 'Chinese Labour in the Transvaal: a Justification', in Nineteenth Century and After, Apr. 1906, LIX, 582.

India, suggested that emigration should be encouraged, not just tolerated, by the Government of India and should develop into permanent colonization through the elimination of return passages. It is not surprising, in view of the prevailing view of Indian emigration, that this suggestion met with the ready acceptance of Lord Salisbury and Sir G. Campbell (of the Judicial and Public Committee of the Council of India). The Colonial Office was in full agreement and a despatch was sent to the Government of India, which led to a full re-examination of the latter's attitude to emigration. The despatch was lengthy and persuasive, although it was realised in the India Office that "It is highly unlikely that the Indian Government will either consent to 'encourage' or to dispense with the back passage proviso."¹

Lord Salisbury first pointed to the benefits of Indian emigration:

While then, from an Indian point of view, emigration, properly regulated, and accompanied by sufficient assurance of profitable employment and fair treatment, seems a thing to be encouraged on grounds of humanity, with a view to promote the well-being of the poorer classes, we may also consider, from an Imperial point of view the great advantage which must result from peopling the warmer British possessions which are rich in natural resources and only want population, by an intelligent and industrious race to whom the climate of those countries

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I.O./P.H.C. 8/106.

is well suited, and to whom the culture of the staples suited to the soil, and the modes of labour and settlement, are adapted. In this view also it seems proper to encourage emigration from India to colonies well suited for an Indian population.¹

He suggested that there should be, therefore, a considerable change in the Government of India's attitude towards emigration. On the one hand, its officers should directly encourage emigration; on the other, through the stationing of its agents in the colonies, it could obtain fuller information about the treatment of the emigrants and greater security against any unfairness towards them, either in the colonial laws and regulations, or in the terms and conditions of their employment and treatment. Special attention could be given to the problems of the scarcity of suitable female emigrants and want of family life. Permanent colonization was to be the object and if this should be achieved, he would insist on the colonial authorities making such provision for the education of the children and for otherwise ensuring the welfare of the immigrant population as would conduce to their ultimate elevation to a position far superior to that from which they had emerged. Finally, he declared:

¹

I.O. to Govt. India, 24 Mar. 1875, India E.P. Feb. 1880, A.4-29.

Above all things we must confidently expect, as an indispensable condition of the proposed arrangements, that the Colonial laws and their administration will be such that Indian settlers who have completed the terms of service to which they agreed, as the return for the expense of bringing them to the Colonies, will be in all respects free men, with privileges no whit inferior to those of any other class of Her Majesty's subjects resident in the Colonies.¹

The emigration policy of the Government of India was largely decided in the Department of Revenue and Agriculture in Calcutta (Simla in the summer months). Day-to-day administration of the Emigration Act and Rules was, however, conducted by provincial governments. Since the governments of Bengal and Madras were responsible for the protection of emigrants leaving the ports of Calcutta and Madras, they had more questions referred to them by the Government of India for expressions of

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Ibid. This paragraph has been widely quoted - in Fiji on many occasions - in advocacy of the rights of Indians overseas. It had been inspired by the discriminatory pass laws which had been in force in Mauritius and the West Indies and was a promise that such civil disabilities would be a thing of the past. Whether it could be stretched to apply to such matters as political representation or land tenure is, to say the least, debatable. Moreover, it would appear to have been conditional - "as an indispensable condition of the proposed arrangements" - upon the adoption of the proposals as a whole. In rejecting one side of Lord Salisbury's despatch, did not the Government of India lose the other too? The question whether Indian emigration was to be permanent colonization or temporary labour migration was left open, and, with it, the question of Indian rights in the colonies.

opinion than had the others, including questions pertaining to Indians already in the colonies. Lord Salisbury's despatch was, however, of sufficient importance for it to be referred to all ten local governments. The weight of their opinion was against the proposals. Only the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal supported them, although the Chief Commissioner of Oudh did so partially. The Bombay Government opposed them on the ground that emigration meant loss of revenue. The Madras Government because a change in the policy would almost certainly have been attributed to a desire to promote the interests of English planters in the colonies at the expense of India. The Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Provinces doubted if encouragement of emigration would produce more emigrants of a suitable type. With the conspicuous exception of the Bengal Government, the local governments considered that State encouragement of emigration would be unjustified since there was plenty of room¹ in India for surplus population from overcrowded areas.

The Government of India adopted the same view and replied to London, rejecting Lord Salisbury's proposals. It wrote that emigration had only an infinitesimal effect

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India E.P., Feb. 1880, A.4-29.

on the relief of population pressure, and added that encouragement of it would be extremely impolitic:

Our objections have reference to the effect which the direct and active interposition of the Government in this matter would be likely to have on the minds of a people prone to regard with the utmost suspicion the acts and motives of their foreign rulers, and especially on the minds of the uneducated classes from which the emigrants are drawn; and to the difficulty and embarrassment in which the Government would become involved by undertaking responsibilities towards the Colonies on the one hand, and towards the emigrants on the other, which it would be practically impossible for it to discharge in a satisfactory manner.¹

In the discussion of the question in the Revenue and Agriculture Department, this political consideration was an important one. One official, who had made a thorough study of colonial emigration, wrote:

I cannot form to myself any definite picture of the 'help and countenance' to be given by local authorities to the agents. Let it be remembered that the agent is at Calcutta and is represented in the recruiting grounds by men for the most part unscrupulous scoundrels. As it is, the recruiters too often dupe ignorant countrymen and countrywomen into the belief that it is the order of Government that they should emigrate, and if they were to be aided and countenanced instead of being jealously watched, the mischief they do would only be multiplied a hundred-fold. Indeed, I am not at all sure that to change our attitude as proposed might not be politically dangerous.²

¹ Govt. India to I.O., 3 May 1877, India E.P. Feb. 1880, A.4-29.

² Minute by J. Geoghegan, 2 Jun. 1875, India E.P. Feb. 1880, A.4-29.

The Government of India was, thus, unwilling to become too closely identified with colonial emigration, because of public opinion; it was, after all, but twenty years since the Indian Mutiny. This line of policy was maintained until the end of the indenture system. It was based not on respect for the views of the Indians but on the desire for internal security. It was abandoned in the end for the same reason.

If it had failed in its major purpose, Lord Salisbury's despatch was not entirely without fruit, however. On the one hand, it gave rise to an examination of the condition of Indians in the colonies, and, on the other, it led to alterations in the Indian Emigration Act and Rules and the way in which they were administered. After the reply was received in London, and accepted gracefully, the colonies which introduced Indian labour - Fiji was not included then - were invited by the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1877 to give their attention to several questions, including the institution of periodical visits by a Commissioner appointed and paid by the Government of India to report on the condition of the emigrants, and "the importance of making the best possible provision for the education of the children of Immigrants and for raising the status of the Immigrant population

generally."¹ The first question, which had been raised initially by the Government of India in 1875, was soon disposed of. That Government wrote to London:

The tenor of the correspondence of the last four years has been to show that the welfare of the coolies may, on the whole, be safely left in the hands of the Colonial authorities, guided by such directions from Her Majesty's Government as may from time to time appear necessary in deference to representations made by the Government of India.

Moreover, the present time appears to us inopportune for incurring the expense involved in the deputation of an officer, whose reports would probably give us little information in addition to that which we already possess. We can imagine that such a measure might be attended with most beneficial results in the case of Colonies where serious abuses were proved or were believed to exist; and we would wish to reserve the power in such cases of deputing a special officer with the fullest authority to investigate and report.²

The second question was dealt with similarly:

It would seem that sufficient provision has been made in all Colonies for the education of the children of Indian immigrants, and that the condition of the coolies in the Colonies is far higher than in our own country.³

There was thus general satisfaction with the condition of Indians overseas (in British colonies anyway), because

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C.O. to governors of colonies where there were Indian immigrants, 26 Oct. 1877, C.O. 384/116.

2

Govt. India to I.O., 10 Mar. 1880, India E.P. Mar. 1880, A.18-19.

3

Minute by W.W.H., 23 Dec. 1879, India E.P. Feb. 1880, A.4-29.

they were in advance of those of the labouring classes in India, and there was also an assumption that their interests could safely be entrusted to the British officials in the colonial governments.

There were, however, changes in the emigration system in India itself. Through the medium of Lord Salisbury's despatch and other correspondence, complaints had reached the Government of India from the West Indian colonies that officers of the provincial administrations and police, motivated by prejudice and the desire for gain, were obstructing emigration by refusing to register recruits on the slightest pretext and by molesting and extorting money from recruiters. The Government of India had, in its reply to Lord Salisbury, expressed itself as willing to ensure that its policy of neutrality was actually enforced on the ground. Accordingly, in 1882, two detailed enquiries were held into the emigration system in the North-West Provinces and Oudh and in Bengal and Bihar, which established that there was much truth in the allegations of the colonial emigration agents.¹ A thorough review of the Indian Emigration Act and Emigration Rules was undertaken, in consultation with the colonies, their

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India E.P., Apr. 1882, A.64-73; Feb. 1883, A.1-12; Aug. 1883, A.9-15.

emigration agents, and others concerned. The outcome was a new Emigration Act and Rules, which made changes in the details of the system, chiefly in matters concerning registration.¹ There was also a change in the spirit of the administration of the system.

The attitude of the Government of India towards emigration in this period could be described as one of benevolent neutrality. Secretariat officials favoured it and regretted any interruption such as occurred during the depression of the eighties. They thought emigration was beneficial to the individuals who left and perhaps mildly advantageous, too, for India as a whole, because the savings brought back increased agricultural capital and because it might lead to an increase of the spirit of enterprise in India. But they did not consider it important in relation to other problems. Very little space was devoted to the subject in contemporary books on India, and the Revenue and Agriculture Department had many more important functions, including land revenue collection and assessment, famine relief and public works. As a means

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This was the Indian Emigration Act of 1883, which superseded that of 1871, and was itself superseded in 1908. The new rules came into force in 1886. The 1908 Act consolidated previous legislation, without making any changes in substance.

of relieving population pressure, emigration was dismissed as a negligible force by the Government of India; nor was it considered to be a practicable way of relieving famines, because of the magnitude of those disasters and because the colonies wanted able-bodied labourers, not emaciated unfortunates. But while officials in the central Secretariat differed in their views of the advantages to be derived from emigration, not one seems to have regarded indentured labour emigration as an evil. Their intention was that, while no direct official aid should be given to recruitment, any needless obstruction should be removed to genuinely voluntary emigration and that emigrants should be speedily registered in accordance with the Emigration Act and Rules. Between 1906 and 1912, however, there was a marked change in the attitude of the officials, who became more critical, because of the public agitation against the indenture system, and because greater competition for labour gave rise to more and more abuses.

The Government of Bengal was even more favourable to emigration. At a conference on the Relief of Over-Populated Tracts held in Delhi in 1888, the Government of Bengal was the only one seriously perturbed by over-population, particularly in Bihar, which it then administered.

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Relief of Over-Populated Tracts - Proceedings of Delhi Conference, 1888. (West Bengal Secretariat Library.)

On many occasions it made statements in favour of emigration, and one of the more ambitious of these was in 1886:

The Lieutenant-Governor is glad to observe that in spite of the decline elsewhere there has been an increased demand for Indian labour in Fiji, for the proximity of these islands to Australia and New Zealand give them a special value as future fields for emigration. The great colonies beyond the Indian Ocean are somewhat nearer to this country than are the other settlements to which coolies are taken; ordinary wages in that region are very high, and there is an amount of reclaimable land which suggests the possibility of emigration at some future time on a scale large enough to give appreciable relief to the over-populated districts of Bengal.¹

The desire to stimulate emigration as a way of relieving population pressure coloured the Bengal Government's attitude towards all questions concerning emigration and the indentured labour system. The other governments were not as enthusiastic, either because they did not face the same pressure as in Bengal, or because they were more realistic in their assessment of the amount of relief which emigration could provide.

The system did not work in practice in the way the Secretariats intended. Under the Indian Emigration Act, the emigration of unskilled labourers was confined to the ports of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. At each port,

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Resolution of Bengal Government, General Department, 7 Dec. 1886, India E.P. Mar. 1887, A.3-6.

a Protector of Emigrants was appointed by the Provincial Government. A colony wishing to obtain immigrants from India had to nominate an Emigration Agent to reside at the port of embarkation, and maintain an approved Emigration Depot. The Colonial Emigration Agent appointed recruiters, who were licensed by the Protector of Emigrants. In fact, large numbers of unlicensed men, boys and women, called arkatis, were illegally engaged in the business also. Sometimes, the licensed recruiter was a mere dummy. The Protector of Emigrants who issued the licence and the District Magistrate who had to countersign it usually did so as a matter of course, without detailed enquiry into the character of the recruiter. If the recruiter's licence were cancelled for misconduct, he simply became an arkati. A recruiter was allowed to recruit only for those colonies for which he held a licence; but, in fact, recruits were transferred from one recruiter to the other if, as sometimes happened, another agency or employer in India offered a higher commission. Payment by commission was probably the only practicable way of recruiting, and once the commercial element was introduced, it was impossible to exercise a close check on who did the recruiting.

All emigrants had to be brought by a licensed recruiter to a registering officer, usually a sub-divisional Magistrate, who could be either an Indian or a European. It was his duty to examine the emigrant, apart from the recruiter, to see that he understood the terms of his engagement as shown on a printed statement (which the recruiter had to give to every recruit), and confirm that he was emigrating of his own free will. If satisfied, the registering officer formally registered him as an emigrant and witnessed his signature to the agreement. Actual practice varied considerably. First, the recruiter had to gain access to the registering officer, which frequently cost him a bribe to the latter's clerk (2 annas for each recruit in Bengal in 1883). Otherwise, the clerk could keep him waiting and, in the meantime, deter the prospective emigrant, for "a native subordinate is more powerful than his master in such matters"¹. Recruiters were an unpopular class who were in no position to defend themselves against molestation or extortion. On the other hand, a clerk, once bribed, could be a valuable ally to the recruiter. Finally, the recruit was brought before the registering officer. The examinations

¹

Note by E.C. Buck (Secretary, Revenue and Agriculture Department), 15 Jan. 1882, India E.P. Apr. 1882, A.64-73.

varied widely in thoroughness. If the registering officer was unsympathetic to emigration, he might reject outright all doubtful cases where he suspected the emigrant to be under 18, or a married woman without her husband, or he might order enquiries to be made, a process that could take months. A perennial complaint of the emigration agents was that some registering officers asked recruits if they knew they would have to cross the kala pani, for, on hearing those words, they would refuse to go. Magistrates were often unsympathetic to emigration. One former Magistrate wrote in 1915:

Emigration to the Colonies from the Central Provinces has now practically ceased. But 12 or 15 years ago, when I was District Magistrate of Jubbulpore, I saw a good deal of the system. One could not help feeling that one would sooner have nothing to do with the business: the suspicion which often attached to the recruiter's methods, and the collection of non-descript human beings who seemed not to mind what happened to them. I imagine that this feeling is fairly common among Government Officers in the recruiting Districts; it is almost impossible to avoid having it.²

One old immigrant told the writer that, in his case, the registering officer at Agra, a European, had actively

¹ Cd. 5193 (1910), 29.

² Memo. by Chief Commissioner, Central Provinces, 19 Jul. 1915, enc. to Govt. India to I.O., 15 Oct. 1915. (British Guiana Court of Policy 860/16.)

endeavoured to dissuade his batch of emigrants, but they believed the recruiter instead, for he had taken the precaution of telling them beforehand that the Sahib would try to stop them going to the El Dorado which was Fiji. (He added that it was not until he reached Fiji that he realised that it was the Sahib and not the recruiter who had spoken the truth.)

On the whole, Indian magistrates were harder on recruiters than were European magistrates in India, because most of them shared the prevailing view of emigration and the religious objections to it. This was a frequent complaint of the emigration agents, and they suggested several times that registration be entrusted to Europeans only. But much registration remained in the hands of Indian officers. A complaint of obstruction by Indian registering officers was made by the Fiji Emigration Agent in 1907, with reference to the important emigration district of Basti, in the United Provinces. The agent charged that two successive registering officers - Indians - had, for several years, engaged in oppression, highhandedness, and maladministration and that they were abetted by the police and courts, who were biassed against the recruiters. The complaints included: the restriction of the area of recruitment to Basti town, and even to

certain streets; refusal of registration on inadequate grounds, particularly to unattached women; delays; and efforts to dissuade the recruits. The registering officer had even abused the recruiters, and told them that he would root out emigration from the district. The agent added that these conditions were not confined to Basti alone, and that the district officers - Europeans - were often ignorant of the fact that emigration was organised by the colonial governments, imagining it to be a private affair. The Government of India was asked to correct such impressions.

Nevertheless, most enquiries by magistrates were "of the most meagre and stereotyped description"¹. Recruits were schooled by recruiters on what to say. Often they were threatened by the recruiter that if they did not give the proper answers they would be beaten up, or imprisoned, or sued for the recovery of the money already spent on food and clothing. All were told to say that they were going willingly. "Say 'yes' to everything the Sahib asks you," was a typical instruction. Often, by the time the recruit was ushered into the Sahib's presence, his one idea was that he should be pleased at all cost.

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Bengal E.P. Jun. 1877, A.27-29.

Most had never spoken to a European before and some had difficulty in understanding his accent. Usually the only question asked was, "Are you going willingly?" It was not remarkable, therefore, that emigrants were registered who did not know Fiji was outside India, thinking it to be a district near Calcutta, where high wages were to be obtained; that others were under age; that others thought they would receive employment as clerks or teachers; that others were women temporarily separated from their relatives or even kidnapped; that others were wanted by the police; and that others were Nepalis whose emigration had been prohibited by the Government of India in 1894. In many cases, recruiters gave the emigrants false names, addresses, or castes, or declared men and women to be husband and wife in order to avoid enquiries. Some old immigrants told the writer that they had at first been rejected, but had subsequently been registered by the same magistrate who had previously rejected them.

After the recruit was registered, it was the recruiter's responsibility to convey him to the depot at the port of embarkation, providing him with food and lodging on the way. In actual fact, many never reached the depot, being abandoned or sold to someone else. Strenuous but not entirely successful efforts were made

in the 1890's by the Government of Bengal and by the Emigration Agent for Fiji to reduce this discrepancy between the number registered and the number who arrived in Calcutta.¹ Emigrants were escorted to Calcutta in batches by rail, in ordinary third-class carriages. An effort was made to keep them apart from other passengers, to prevent them being deterred by their fellow travellers, or encouraged to desert. They did not always escape the jeers of the railway officials or railway police. After arrival at Howrah Station, there was, frequently, opposition by the public, or obstruction by the subordinate police or officials, and more gratuities were needed. In 1882, the amount levied at the Howrah Station by the police was four annas for each recruit and one rupee for the man in charge; at the Howrah Bridge, recruits were not allowed over unless the constables were paid.² In 1894, the British Guiana Emigration Agent complained to the Bengal Government that on four occasions the police had stood idly by, while 300 to 400 railway labourers rushed batches of emigrants, with the result that a total of 106 prospective emigrants had absconded. This was

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Bengal E.P. Dec. 1891, A.1-7; India E.P. Aug. 1892, A.31-34; India E.P. Sep. 1895, A.1-3.

2

India E.P. Apr. 1882, A.64-73; Aug. 1883, A.9-15.

an unusual event but the police report shows how compulsion was not entirely absent after emigrants had been registered, and how the general public regarded emigration with disfavour well before nationalistic feeling on the subject was aroused:

The occurrence of the 21st is believed to be due to friends of the intending emigrants, who, having received intimation of their having been induced to emigrate, came to the station to dissuade them from going. These men were joined by the coolies working at the station and goods yard, most of whom are up-country men, and many of them residents of the districts from which the coolies were coming, and they jointly advised the emigrants not to go; and to assist those wishing to escape, they rushed through them. Many of the unwilling emigrants took the opportunity to run away.¹

At one time, emigrants were marched across Howrah Bridge and through the streets of Calcutta to the depot on Garden Reach but the police would terrify the recruits by telling them that they would be made Christians or would be suspended upside down to have oil extracted from their heads. Later, to avoid obstruction, they were taken by boat instead to Garden Reach.

The protectors of emigrants, appointed by the Bengal Government were qualified medical men and took a keen interest in the welfare of emigrants. The protector visited the depots twice a week; all emigrants not

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Bengal E.P. Aug. 1894, B.68-76.

previously examined by him were brought before him and the terms of their engagement explained to them in his presence. Each individual was then brought in separately and questioned in order to verify that he or she understood the terms and was willing to emigrate. Those found to be incapable of understanding the terms, or suspected on other grounds of being mentally defective, were set aside for further observation if need be, or for return to the place of registration. Those who expressed unwillingness were further questioned as to the cause in each case. This procedure was so elaborate that it was not surprising that this was the opinion of one Protector of Emigrants on the possibility of deception:

In order to secure intending emigrants, it is probable that misrepresentations are sometimes made by men engaged in the work of recruitment before the emigrants are taken up for registration; but it is incredible that any emigrant can continue in a state of deception after registration and admission into any Agency's depot.¹

Nevertheless, deception and other malpractice, there certainly was. Probably even the agent was unaware of some of the practices in his depot. Emigrants were carefully schooled by the subordinate depot staff. Old immigrants related to the writer how peons were posted

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India E.P. Apr. 1894, A.21-22.

at the door to tell emigrants to say that they were going willingly. Fear of displeasing the Sahib, of acting differently from the other emigrants and of being beaten or imprisoned, general confusion and bewilderment, and a disposition to believe the recruiter, who had fed and clothed the emigrant and excited his cupidity for perhaps a week, rather than the protector who saw him for perhaps two or three minutes, all detracted from the efficiency of the examination. In any case, by the time most emigrants reached Calcutta, they were, whatever their original intentions, resigned to whatever fate was in store for them; this was particularly true in the case of the women who had nowhere else to go anyway. An emigrant refusing to embark could be sued for breach of contract, but in practice this was not done, because he was penniless anyway, and having him prosecuted and imprisoned (for up to a month) would have been futile and expensive for the agent and likely to bring colonial emigration into even greater disrepute. Emigrants were not allowed to leave the depot, although anyone who vocally objected to going was at once sent out, to prevent the possibility of disaffection spreading.¹ While they were normally

¹ Cd. 5192 (1910), 17.

unwilling expressly to refuse to emigrate, nevertheless, in any confusion, numbers escaped, which suggests that they were not cognisant of their rights and position. The women were more cowed than the men.

The Protector of Emigrants had other duties, including the inspection of the depots. He was assisted by the Medical Inspector of Emigrants, also an officer of the Bengal Government, who supervised the general sanitation, accommodation, food, water supply, clothing, latrines, hospital arrangements and vaccination of the emigrants. The agents were responsive to the representations of these officers and, by 1897, the arrangements of the depots in Calcutta left little to be desired. The Medical Inspector of Emigrants inspected all emigrants before departure and certified that they were "fit to emigrate" and "free from all bodily and mental disease". (The determination of their fitness to undertake labour was no part of his duties; this was the responsibility of the colonial emigration agents.) Finally, after enough had been collected to fill a ship and at least seven days had expired in each case, the protector countersigned each emigration pass, and his duty was complete.

The emigration procedure in the Madras Presidency was similar to that in Bengal. There was, however, no

full-time Protector of Emigrants; he was also the Collector of Madras. In Madras, colonial emigration under the Indian Emigration Act was only an insignificant part of a large overseas movement of labour, especially to Ceylon, Burma, and Malaya, most of which was unregulated. There was, therefore, less occasion for government supervision than in the north, where there was less spontaneous emigration. Even in Madras, however, there was both deception and obstruction of recruiters. Nevertheless, if emigration was more acceptable, both in the villages and among the educated observers of it, there was strong opposition from European and Indian planters and land-owners. The Madras Government considered this opposition to be purely selfish and as late as 1910, when the United Planters' Association of Southern India wrote to it, objecting to emigration, they were rebuffed. The Chief Secretary wrote:

The object of the Planters' Association, as they ingenuously admit, is to promote the supply of cheap labour for planting purposes, by restricting emigration. The policy of Government, on the other hand, is to improve the economic conditions of the labouring classes, especially in thickly populated districts, by promoting emigration to countries outside of India - except where the circumstances of such countries justify permanent or temporary prohibition.¹

¹

Madras G.O. 906/10.

The Government of Madras had no illusions about the defects of the recruiting system, but considered these to be inseparable from a system which was beneficial not only to those who emigrated, but had important direct and indirect effects on the prosperity of the labouring classes as a whole. In 1912, the Government of Madras wrote:

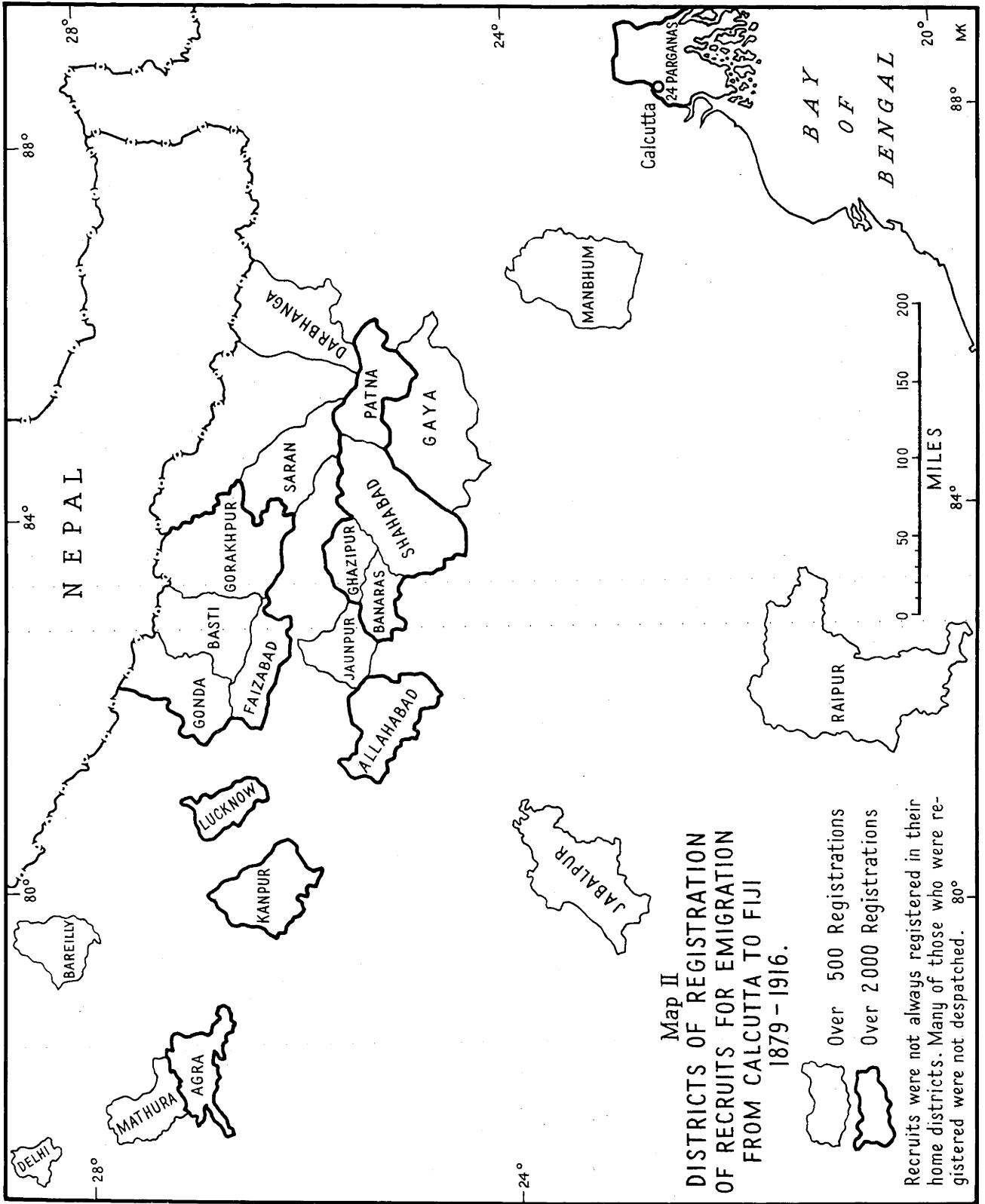
There is general agreement that the present system of recruitment is attended by abuse. Recruiters resort to improper devices in order to secure coolies; cases of illegal recruitment and of kidnapping are not unknown, and it is probable that in not a few instances persons are induced to emigrate by misrepresentation of facts. At the same time it is recognised that the preventing of abuses of this character, so long as recruitment by private agency is permitted, will be attended by serious practical difficulties.¹

We have seen that the emigration system as it worked throughout India was marked by many imperfections, which persisted despite strenuous efforts on the part of the Secretariats and the Protectors of Emigrants to remove them. Many would have been inseparable from a system of payment by commission anywhere; others were inevitable in Indian conditions. With great illiteracy, poverty and economic pressure, the assumption that a contract could be fair and equal was invalid. So, with the administrative



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Govt. Madras to Govt. India, 3 Dec. 1912, Madras G.O. 1472/12.

machinery available in India, was the assumption that registration could ensure that all those who wished to better themselves could emigrate and those who had been deceived could be eliminated. Since so much of its day to day administration depended on Indian officials, who shared the public antagonism to emigration, to say nothing of those European magistrates who also regarded recruiters as scoundrels, all sorts of obstructions were placed in the way of recruiters. But more important was that the bureaucratic inertia, the perfunctory examinations by overworked magistrates, the fewness of the European officials, the underpayment of the subordinates and police, and a tradition of bribery facilitated the operations of the recruiters. The system worked in many different ways, depending on the people who administered it, but seldom in the way it was intended.



Map II
 DISTRICTS OF REGISTRATIONS
 OF RECRUITS FOR EMIGRATION
 FROM CALCUTTA TO FIJI
 1879 - 1916.

-  Over 500 Registrations
-  Over 2000 Registrations

Recruits were not always registered in their home districts. Many of those who were registered were not despatched.

Chapter III

THE COLLECTION OF EMIGRANTS IN NORTH INDIA

As with the emigration policy of the Government of India, the organization of recruiting had been established in detail by the time the indentured labour system was extended to Fiji. The Fiji Government had, therefore, merely to secure the services of one of the existing Government Emigration Agents in India. The pattern of emigration to Fiji bore a close resemblance to those of other colonies importing Indian labour, particularly those, which like Fiji, took most of their immigrants from Calcutta rather than Madras. Three-quarters of the emigrants to Fiji embarked from Calcutta, where, until 1902, there was the only Fiji agency in India.

Fiji shared its Calcutta agency with other colonies. The Government Emigration Agent was appointed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies and was under his direct control. He had to seek instructions from London on all but routine questions, which were settled direct with the colony concerned. There were several alterations over the years in the division of the agencies among the

colonies, as the sizes of requisitions varied. Over most of the period, Fiji shared its Calcutta agency with Trinidad, Jamaica and Mauritius and, at times also, with Grenada, St. Lucia and St. Vincent. In 1914, in an attempt to improve supervision over recruiting operations, to eliminate undesirable competition between agencies, to reduce expenses, and to raise the status of the Emigration Agent, the two British agencies in Calcutta were amalgamated, which meant that British Guiana, too, received its emigrants from the same agency as Fiji. At the same time, a second depot was established at Banaras. The location of the Fiji depot in Calcutta was changed several times, but, until 1914 it was always in Garden Reach. The depot was bounded by walls on three sides and the Hughli river on the other, and had its own pier. The agent lived in part of the house, and in the extensive grounds were several sheds and buildings, a hospital and barracks for the emigrants, who bathed in the river. The depot was frequently inspected by the Protector of Emigrants and by the Medical Inspector of Emigrants. Generally, it was a happy place for emigrants, for they had plenty of food and only minor chores. But some suffered pangs of remorse at leaving their homes or associating with those of lower caste, for there was no caste differentiation in

the depot. For the first time in their lives, Brahmins might have to rub shoulders with Chamars and eat the food cooked for all. Hunger strikes occasionally occurred, but most high-caste emigrants, still in their teens or early twenties, seem to have accepted their changed circumstances without much demur. The time emigrants spent in depot varied from the statutory seven day minimum to several months or even more than a year, in the case of prolonged illness.

Fiji emigrants were usually despatched during the first half of each year. During the period of collection for Fiji, recruiting operations for other colonies using the same depot were suspended. Over most of the period, Fiji was in competition with Natal, which had the same agency as British Guiana. In 1911, however, emigration was prohibited to Natal, and Fiji was left only with competition from Surinam, and from employers in India. When the agent received his requisition from the Fiji Government for the number of labourers applied for by employers, he would make arrangements with sub-agents up-country for the supply of emigrants, and would see that sufficient recruiting licences for Fiji were issued. These sub-agents were a cosmopolitan lot and were often shop-keepers as well. The emigrants who went to Fiji on

the ship Bruce in 1886, for instance, were collected by 12 sub-agents, including 1 Christian, 3 Muslims, 4 Jews and 4 Hindus.¹ The sub-agents were not people of high standing in the community, as the work was extremely unpopular. Nevertheless, there were many applications for it; if emigrants were wanted, and the applicant seemed respectable and the district suitable, the emigration agent arranged for a licence. Few sub-agents had any but the most insignificant financial means. They were in many cases exceedingly ignorant, and often unscrupulous;² for instance, they sometimes assumed two names, so that they could recruit for Surinam at the same time. They were paid by commission, the rates of which fluctuated according to the supply of labourers and the competition for labour, and rose considerably throughout the period of recruitment for Fiji. Different rates were paid for men, women and children and to different sub-agencies, depending on their distance from Calcutta.³ The business was less

¹ C.S.O. 2610/86.

² Resolution of Bengal Government, General Department, 7 Aug. 1891, India E.P. Sep. 1891, A.11-13.

³ In 1886, the rates varied from Rs.17 to Rs.25 per man, Rs.24 to Rs.34 per woman and Rs.10 to Rs.12/8 per child. In 1904 the emigration agent reported that Natal had raised its commission by 75%, because of large requisitions and a great shortage of recruits, and received authority to do the same. In 1905, commissions were Rs.40 for a man and Rs.55 for a woman. By 1908, they had fallen to Rs.25

profitable for the sub-agents than the figures would suggest. They had to pay recruiters, bear the cost of housing, feeding and clothing prospective emigrants and sending them under escort to Calcutta. They had also to pay for the return of those who were rejected in Calcutta, and meet most of the loss on those who deserted en route. Great profits were not gained in India from colonial emigration.

The actual recruiting was done by recruiters and their unlicensed assistants. They usually had contracts with the sub-agents, to whom they were often indebted. They received a commission from the sub-agent for each emigrant, which was very much lower than the sub-agent was paid by the agent.¹ The recruiters were often mere boys, although it was decided in 1907 that in future a licence

3 (continued)

for a man and Rs.35 for a woman, but thereafter, rose steadily, because of competition from Surinam, Natal, and Assam and from public works and industry. In March, 1910, they rose to Rs.35-40 for a man, Rs.45-50 for a woman and Rs.17/8-20 for a child. In 1915, they had risen even higher; Rs.45 for a man and Rs.55 for a woman in the Western United Provinces. (India E.P. Feb. 1883, A.1-12; Madras G.O. 1472/12; Andrews and Pearson, Indian Indentured Labour in Fiji, 10.)

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Of the Rs.18 paid for a man in Allahabad in 1882, and the Rs.28 for a woman, the recruiter received Rs.6 and Rs.8 respectively. By 1912, their commissions had risen to Rs.6-9 per man and Rs.18-20 per woman.

would not be issued to anyone under 21 years of age. In any case, recruiters employed boys as scouts. Unlicensed women assistants were also used by recruiters to secure female emigrants. Sometimes recruiters made it known that they would pay so much for each recruit brought to them. The recruiters enjoyed low social standing, very few could read and write and often they were engaged in trade or agriculture and recruited as a sideline. They were described by the Madras Government in 1910: "It is generally agreed that the typical recruiter at present is a man of low class, unscrupulous in his methods, and holding his appointment on an uncertain tenure"¹. Recruiters for the Calcutta agencies were undoubtedly no better. A keen eye and a gifted tongue were the prime qualifications of a recruiter.

The agencies employed inspectors and in 1910, there was one based at Kanpur and one at Faizabad; in earlier years, there had been one in the Central Provinces also. Occasionally, the agent visited the sub-depots himself. But, in practice, there was little supervision over the sub-agents and still less over the recruiters, who were, in reality, chosen by the sub-agents. Money was the real

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Govt. Madras to Govt. India, 3 Dec. 1912, Madras G.O. 1472/12.

nexus. This lack of supervision was one of the principal drawbacks of the system. In 1912, an effort was made to increase the strictness of control up-country by the establishment of an agency at Banaras to which emigrants were sent before going to Calcutta, but this proved to be a cumbrous and wasteful system. Sub-depots were ordinary Indian houses. They varied greatly in their internal arrangements and in the amount of freedom granted the recruits taken there. The sub-agents usually kept their recruits contented and well-fed, for then they were less likely to desert or to be rejected in the medical examination. Sub-depots were regularly inspected by the local authorities, and, in times of plague, they were closed.

Recruiters used many different methods to collect emigrants but there were certain regular features of the system. Although most emigrants were villagers, there was little recruiting in villages. One reason for this was that recruiters were afraid to go there, for fear of meeting unpleasantness, especially personal violence. Another reason was that it was hard to find potential emigrants in villages, except in famine conditions, because kinsfolk would discourage them from going. So,

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India E.P. Feb. 1883, A.1-12.

normally, emigrants were recruited in or near towns. The recruiter would station himself on the road just outside the town, near a bridge or watering place; or he would wait at fairs or bazaars; or near a temple or mela - anywhere, in fact, where there was a crowd and where strangers and travellers were to be found. He would keep a watchful eye out for the destitute, bewildered or gullible villager. He would approach such a person and ask him if he wanted work, or volunteer assistance if this seemed to be needed. Often emigration was not mentioned at this stage, depending on the recruiter's assessment of the intelligence and sophistication of the recruit. Typical procedures were described by Andrews and Pearson:

It is the ordinary villager's cupidity which is the lever most frequently used. If he is of the stupid, ignorant type, then Fiji is referred to as a district near to Calcutta where high wages are to be paid.... If the villager, on the other hand, is of the more intelligent type, then the full details of the indenture are revealed. But the work is made out to be very light indeed, and the most glowing prospects are offered. Nothing is said about the penal laws, or the hard conditions of compulsory labour.¹

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Andrews and Pearson, Indian Indentured Labour in Fiji, 13. A typical statement of the terms offered is reproduced in Appendix F.

The nominal wages offered by the colonies (one shilling a day for Fiji) were four to five times greater than those offered locally to unskilled labour (2-3 annas a day over most of the period, although by 1909, they had risen to 4 annas in the Western United Provinces). Although these nominal wages were not always earned by emigrants and, in any case, prices were much higher in Fiji, these facts were not known to prospective emigrants, nor even to the recruiters probably. The attraction of these apparently high wages undoubtedly operated as an inducement to emigrate, when the prospective emigrant was confronted by a recruiter. But by that time he had already left his home village, for reasons unconnected with emigration or the level of wages. It was the opinion of the Fiji Government Emigration Agent in 1910 that increasing the wages offered would not secure more emigrants. This opinion was shared by all those in India qualified to express an opinion.

There was, in fact, very strong resistance to emigration in North India, and, without the stimulus of organised recruiting, there would have been hardly any, except from the Punjab. The Fiji Government Emigration Agent wrote in 1896:

Emigration of any kind, above all that to the colonies beyond the seas, is most unpopular. In many villages the recruiter dare not show himself for fear of personal violence, and everywhere he is the prey of the police and court officials of the lower grades. The Indian peasant will not emigrate excepting he is actually compelled by stress of circumstances: he prefers to struggle on in his native village, a victim of ever-present poverty varied by seasons of actual want. Bearing all this in mind it is to me almost surprising that the emigrant to the colonies is so satisfactory.¹

The best explanation of this inertia has been provided by Sir W. Crooke in his classic work on the area from which most of the emigrants to Fiji came:

The fact is that the Hindu has little of the migratory instinct, and all his prejudices tend to keep him at home. As a resident member of a tribe, caste or village, he occupies a definite social position, of which emigration is likely to deprive him. When he leaves his home, he loses the sympathy and support of his clansmen and neighbours; he misses the village council, which regulates his domestic affairs; the services of the family priest, which he considers essential to his salvation. Every village has its own local shrine, where the deities, in the main destructive, have been propitiated and controlled by the constant service of their votaries. Once the wanderer leaves the hamlet where he was born, he enters the domain of new and unknown deities, who, being strangers, are of necessity hostile to him, and may resent his intrusion by sending famine, disease, or death upon the luckless stranger. The emigrant, again, to a distant land, finds extreme difficulty in selecting suitable husbands for his daughters. He must choose his sons-in-law within a narrow circle, and if he allows his daughter to reach womanhood unwed, he commits a grievous sin.

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E.A. to C.S., 18 Sep. 1896, C.P. 15/96.

Should he die in exile, he may fail to win the heaven of the gods, because no successor will make the due funeral oblations, and no trusted family priest be there to arrange the last journey of his spirit. So he may wander through the ages a starving, suffering, malignant ghost, because his obsequies have not been duly performed.¹

Other factors inhibiting emigration were the conservatism characteristic of peasants, the joint-family system, fear of and contempt for strange places, and a spirit of acceptance of the lot one's karma had brought. As C.F. Andrews wrote once:

The masses of India, with an acquiescence which is hard for the forceful and practical spirit of the West to understand, will prefer to suffer and die on Indian soil, rather than go abroad to a foreign land across the seas.²

Travel involved the risk of breaking caste rules, in dining for instance, and the emigrant would lose caste through venturing upon the kala pani, the terrible black waters, which, if crossed in defiance of God or nature, would surely bring forth retaliation. Thus, the Indian peasant was very far from being the "economic man", the abstraction on which the Government of India's emigration policy was ultimately based.

¹ Crooke, The North-Western Provinces of India, 326.

² Quoted in Oldham Christianity and the Race Problem, 129.



What sort of person was recruited then? When the writer talked with old immigrants in Fiji, he received the impression that the overwhelming majority had left their homes for non-economic reasons, including family quarrels, the desire for adventure, the desire to escape responsibility and burdensome social restrictions, the death of parents or the undertaking of a pilgrimage. Only one of those interviewed mentioned economic pressure such as famine or great poverty. If this were taken as decisive, then it would be thought that most emigrants had been maladjusted or already alienated from village and family by the time they met the recruiter. Many were undoubtedly deviants of some sort. The Sanderson Committee in 1910 complained that too many loafers and vagrants¹ were recruited and C.F. Andrews estimated that some 10%² may have been in trouble with the police at some time. People who had left home after a quarrel were more likely to succumb to the recruiter's persuasion. Nevertheless, other evidence is available to show that economic pressure was a strong factor in Indian emigration and, over the period as a whole, probably the most important of all.

¹ Cd. 5192 (1910), 19.

² Andrews, mss. 2nd report, 9 (Mitchell Library).

Most of those interviewed by the writer had come in the last few years of indentured immigration, at which time there was rapid economic expansion in North India. Wages were rising, because of the increasing demand for labour from public works and Assam, and recruits were very scarce, as was reported by the agents and demonstrated by the steep rise in commissions. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the percentage driven by economic pressure was less in the later years. Although the rapid economic expansion greatly increased the mobility of labour and thus facilitated the operations of colonial recruiters, it also reduced the economic incentive to emigrate. The type of person recruited was changing. By 1912, the quality of emigrants had deteriorated greatly, and the percentage of misfits recruited had risen. The methods of the recruiters were also becoming even more unscrupulous. In later years, those who emigrated were neither hungry nor in want of alternative employment, but these conditions did not prevail over the period as a whole. It is possible, too, that many of the family quarrels, which were the immediate causes of so many leaving their homes, originated in economic changes or pressures which had repercussions upon family life. Moreover, those who had left their homes after a quarrel would

have been more susceptible to economic pressure, because they were deprived of the support of their kinsfolk.

The emigration agents had no doubts about the effect of economic pressure on stimulating the flow of emigrants, and it may be assumed that they knew their business. Time and time again they referred to the effect of a good harvest on reducing the number of emigrants available. In 1907, for instance, Gibbes reported to the Fiji Government:

The ability of this Agency to supply the full requisition of Fiji each year, which I assume would not exceed 3000 statute adults, depends almost entirely on the condition of the labour market in India - an extremely variable factor which is governed by the success or failure of the crops in the various recruiting districts. From 1901 to 1905, both years inclusive, the harvests were unusually successful and great difficulty was experienced in consequence, not only by the Colonial Emigration Agencies, but by the Assam and Cachar planters, by private employers and even by the Government public works officials throughout India in obtaining labour. For the past two years, however, the harvests have been partial failures, with the result that coolies have been more or less plentiful, and present weather conditions seem to indicate that an ample supply of labour will be available for several months to come.

The reports of the Governments in India often correlated emigration and crop conditions too. Occasionally, ships lay in the Hughli for weeks, building up demurrage, while the agencies searched for recruits. In times of famine, the recruits offering were of lower physical standard,

because of undernourishment and debility. Moreover, crop conditions affected not only the overall recruiting prospects of the agencies in each year, but also the prospects in each district. They also affected the type of emigrant recruited. More families emigrated in times of scarcity and there was probably a lower proportion of strays and misfits. Economic pressure was probably less important in the case of high-caste emigrants than it was for the lower-castes.

Emigrants were a fair cross section of the castes found in Indian villages.¹ The Bengal Government's statistics show that high castes constituted 16.1% of emigrants who left from Calcutta, middle agricultural castes 31.3%, artisan castes 6.7%, low castes and out-castes 31.2%, Muslims 14.6% and Christians 0.1%. The most common castes were from Bihar and the United Provinces, Ahirs (herdsmen and cultivators), Chamars (leatherworkers), Kahars (servants), Koris (weavers), Kumhars (potters), Kurmis (cultivators), Lodhas (cultivators), and Kshatriyas

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This is suggested by the figures below, and confirmed by the testimony of informed observers. (Andrews, mss. 2nd report, 9 (Mitchell Library); Burton, The Call of the Pacific, 118; McMillan, 'Fiji - Where Three Continents Meet', in Pacific Affairs, Jul. 1929, 401.)

('Thakurs' and Rajputs - landowners); from the western United Provinces and Punjab, Jats (cultivators), and Rajputs; from Central India, Chamars (leather-workers), Gonds (tribal), Kols (tribal), Rowts (landowners, probably), and Tellis (oil-pressers). Many other castes were represented, including a small number of Brahmins from all areas. The most numerous individual castes among the North Indians were Ahirs, Chamars, Jats and 'Thakurs'.¹

The Emigration Agencies naturally preferred the agricultural castes, because they were accustomed to manual labour and less likely to become dissatisfied when put to work on a plantation. Certain classes of recruits were, if put up to the agencies as such, altogether refused, such as Brahmins not used to agriculture, Fakirs, Kayasths, Baniyas, Dhobies, Nats, ex-policemen, ex-soldiers and, for many years, Punjabis.² Of course, some of these did slip through. Recruiters did not care who they recruited

¹ This information was gathered from an analysis made by the writer, from the Emigration Passes held in the Labour Department in Suva, of the emigrants brought on the Mersey in 1903. Additional common castes in other years were Kewats (cultivators, fishermen and boatmen) and Muraos (cultivators). Members of the Kshatriya class were usually recorded as 'Thakurs'.

² Hill, 'Emigration from India', in Timehri, Sep. 1919; India E.P. Aug. 1883, A.9-15.

as long as they could collect their commissions, and had no compunction about falsifying particulars of recruits. For instance, educated Brahmins were promised by recruiters that they would receive work as priests, clerks or teachers, but cautioned that they should conceal their antecedents from the doctors and Emigration Agent, who were frequently less able than Indians to distinguish between castes by subtle differences of bearing, manner and appearance. This deception depended on the emigrant himself being a willing party to it. Because of this falsification, it is possible that the percentage of high-caste emigrants was even higher than the Bengal Government's figure of 16.1%. Considering the preference for agriculturists, this large percentage of admitted high-caste people calls for explanation. The largest group of them were 'Thakurs', of the Kshatriya class. Many of the others were Brahmins, who were registered as such, or were falsely registered as belonging to another caste, particularly as 'Thakurs' (often with the addition of 'Singh' to the name). These high-castes were not supposed to work on the land with their own hands, but many did, which accounts for the acceptance by the agencies of such a large proportion of them. Probably, most of them were emigrating because of alienation from village

or family. Others, despite the relatively high economic status of these castes, may have been driven by economic pressure. Profound changes were coming about in Indian economic life, through the supplanting of the products of cottage industries by manufactured articles, by population increase and by the growth of a competitive money economy and new commercial classes, unrestrained by traditional social obligations and protected by the machinery of British justice. The land was forced to support more and more people, while the opening up of new areas of cultivation did not keep pace. The loser in these conditions was usually the small cultivator, who was eventually forced off his land by the fragmentation of his holding and the increase of his debt burden. But this process was not always confined to the middle-castes. High-castes like Rajputs were deeply indebted and were, due to expensive, traditional social obligations and extravagance, losing more land than other castes, particularly to non-agricultural castes and the richer agriculturists.¹ They may have been more enterprising and inclined to accept emigration in the hope of restoring their lot.

¹Blunt, The Caste System of Northern India, 270.

There is, however, a simpler explanation. The higher castes, being better nourished, were physically fitter and less likely to be rejected on medical grounds. Physical fitness was the main quality sought in emigrants. Complaints from Fiji on this score were responsible for much (at times acrimonious) correspondence between the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, the Government of Fiji, the Emigration Agent and the Secretary of State for the Colonies, with the result that the standard demanded of Fiji emigrants was at least as high, and probably higher, than that for other colonies. ¹ For instance, a chest measurement of 30 inches was demanded of adult male emigrants. They had to undergo several medical examinations on behalf of the agency. The first examination was up-country, soon after recruitment (unless the recruit needed to be fed up first) and before registration by one of the agency's two travelling medical inspectors or by a doctor appointed by the agency, usually the Civil Surgeon or Assistant Surgeon of the district. The instructions to the examining doctors were quite explicit; for instance, emigrants were to have horns on the palms or base of the fingers, showing that they were accustomed to hard work. Nevertheless,

¹

Some of this correspondence is printed in C.P. 15/96.

frequent dissatisfaction was expressed by the agents and officials of the Bengal Government at cursory examinations because emigrants slipped through who did not meet the requirements listed above. There were no birth certificates. Old immigrants described to the writer how recruiters rubbed lime into their hands to roughen them before examination. Some of those passed as fit up-country were rejected in the depot in Calcutta. On arrival there, emigrants were examined by the Resident Depot Medical Officer (an Indian) and then by the Depot Surgeon (a Government Medical Officer, employed part-time by the agency). They were examined also by the Surgeon-Superintendent of the emigrant ship. Finally, three or four days before embarkation, they were examined by the Depot Surgeon and the Surgeon-Superintendent together.

There was a large discrepancy between the numbers registered up-country and those actually embarked. For Fiji, there were 68,662 registrations and 45,833 emigrants from Calcutta.¹ Unfitness accounted for much of the difference, although others were abandoned by recruiters, transferred to other agencies, had died, were released at their own request or deserted. There were many reasons

¹

From the Calcutta Emigration Reports.

for desertion, including impatience at being detained long in the depot, change of mind, and the temptation of crimps, aided by the subordinate depot staff sometimes, collecting labour for the Assam tea gardens or factories, coal-yards and docks in Calcutta.¹ Some recruits had signed up only to secure a free ride to Calcutta where wages were higher than up-country. Others were released to relatives, upon payment of the cost of recruitment. Those who were rejected in the depot were, after 1886, awarded compensation, by direction of the Protector of Emigrants, to recompense them for the breach of contract and consequent loss of wages in the colony. Rejections were a sore point with the Bengal Government, as was compensation with the agents. The former deplored "the breaking up of their homes, the selling at a loss, of the little they may have possessed in their native villages, and the crushing of their hopes of better prospects".² The latter pointed out, realistically, that "a large proportion of the emigrants are waifs and strays, who are recruited when wandering about the country seeking work and it can be no hardship to them to be clothed and fed for a week

¹

Report on Emigration from Calcutta for 1903.

²

Report on Emigration from Calcutta for 1892. (India E.P. Jul. 1893, A.5-7.)

or two"¹. Moreover, most of the rejected recruits stayed in Calcutta, where wages were much higher than they were up-country. Before 1894, they were paid their rail-fares in cash, as well as a fixed sum and food expenses, but, thereafter, they were not paid their rail-fares unless they actually intended to leave Calcutta.² During the nineties, the percentage of those rejected in the Calcutta depots was high, but, partly through the representations of the Bengal Government and partly because of the increasing scarcity of recruits, it fell off after the turn of the century and was no longer a cause of complaint by the Bengal Government.

Emigrants were not only of a high physical standard; they were also youthful. An unaccompanied emigrant had to be at least 16 years of age. For male emigrants going for the first time the ages preferred were from 16 to 25, the latter being considered ideal. 86.6% of the emigrants from Calcutta were in the age group 10-30 and 68.7% between 20 and 30.³ Nearly all the others were dependants. For this reason, few of those who had already

¹ E.A. to Govt. Bengal, 24 Jun. 1886, Bengal E.P. Jul. 1886, B.1-8.

² Bengal E.P. Aug. 1894, B.23-25.

³ More detailed figures are given in Appendix E.

served in the colonies were eligible if they applied again. These unfortunate people often found it very difficult to re-integrate themselves on their return to India. They therefore made very willing emigrants, but the colonies normally did not want them back, unless they were particularly strong, had brought back money (evidence that they were good workers), or brought other workers as dependants.¹ There were, however, always a few in each ship. In ships from Calcutta to Fiji usually between 5% and 15% of the emigrants had previously served in Fiji or other colonies. With respect to physical fitness and age, the emigration of Indians under the indentured labour system was very selective indeed.

The recruitment of women was probably the most thorny of all problems connected with colonial emigration, and the one which showed most how inappropriate the emigration system was in Indian conditions. The basic fact ignored by the system was that most Indians are married at an early age. Most of the emigrants were recruited away from home and many had wives back at home² -

¹ Cd. 5193 (1910), 181.

² Garnham, A Report on the Social and Moral Conditions of Indians in Fiji, 19.

how many such men there were it is impossible to say. The joint family system assured protection to the wife when the husband went away to work or on a trip. It would, in any case, have been considered imprudent of the husband to expose the wife to unknown risks in a strange country, even (remembering the youthfulness of most emigrants) if relatives would permit her to go. There would have been little difficulty if all emigrants had returned to India, but, where colonisation was an object, there was, inevitably, personal tragedy in many cases. One official observer wrote: "I found in village after village women with children who had waited faithfully for news, some as long as 18 years, others, not so faithful, who had remarried."¹ Some never knew what had happened to their husbands. There were, moreover, few unattached women in India, because of the almost universal custom (then) of child betrothal and marriage at puberty. For these reasons, there were few unattached female emigrants and few families available as emigrants. This would not have worried the colonies unduly, because they were interested first in productive agricultural workers. They would have been content to take all males, as with

¹

Major Pitcher's Report, India E.P. Feb. 1883, A.1-12.

the Chinese and Japanese emigrants. But this was not the view of the Government of India which, from the early days, had insisted that a minimum proportion of women be taken in each season, in order that emigrants should have the opportunity to build a stable family life. It was a corollary of colonisation which, to an undefined extent, was one of the main objects of the emigration system. This minimum proportion varied from time to time and colony to colony, from 25% to 50%. These were much greater proportions than in any unregulated emigration from India.¹

For Fiji, the required minimum proportion of adult (10 or over) female emigrants was always 40% (i.e. 40 women to 100 men). The actual proportion in the total emigration from Calcutta to Fiji was 41.04%. The slight excess over the legal proportion is to be accounted for by the difficulty in recruiting an exact number; no deficiency was allowed by the Indian authorities. The proportion of all females to males was 43.72%.² At first,

1

In the years 1927-30, the percentage of females to males among unassisted Indian immigrants into Fiji was 6.13%. (Information from Fiji Labour Department.) In 1930, there were 1059.3 Indian males for every 100 Indian females in the United States. (Davie, World Immigration, 342.)

2

From Calcutta Emigration Reports.

the minimum proportion was accepted without demur by the Fiji Government, but, in 1885 following an Emigration Conference in Calcutta, and at the suggestion of the Fiji Government Emigration Agent, the latter was instructed to press for the reduction of the proportion to 33% (as for Mauritius), "as that proportion would be more satisfactory to employers and more useful to the Colony".¹

The official reactions in India to this request show how difficult it was to regulate a system of contract emigration in Indian conditions. The Protector of Emigrants at Calcutta supported the request from Fiji, because of the great difficulty in securing respectable women as recruits. However, his immediate superiors, the Government of Bengal, took the opposite view, but one which showed equal solicitude for the welfare of emigrants. Their view was supported by the Government of India, and the application from Fiji was rejected for the following reasons:

The coolie population of Fiji is at present very small; if a lower proportion of females was allowed, a few shipments would reduce the relative number of women far below the ratio which has been adopted in the interests of the well-being and morals of the emigrating coolie.

.....

¹

C.S. to E.A., 2 Dec. 1885, C.P. 28/87.

It is no doubt true that a large proportion of female emigrants belongs to a class unlikely to benefit a Colony, but this is a lesser evil than the evils caused by a large disproportion of the sexes.¹

In 1889, the Agent-General of Immigration in Fiji again suggested a reduction of the proportion to 33%, but the Secretary of State pointed out that it was 40% in the West Indies, too, and the only question was whether it should not be increased.² After the turn of the century, the C.S.R. Company, recognising that the sex ratio was an important cause of murder and suicide, and general interruption of work among its labour, asked for a higher proportion of women. The Emigration Agent replied that it was difficult enough to recruit even the proportion of 40%, and the matter was allowed to drop.

The legal minimum proportion was at almost all times very difficult to obtain. In times of famine or when the demand from the colonies was not very large, the difficulty may have been felt less, but it was never entirely absent. It led to more problems for the agents, abuses in recruitment and public indignation than any other aspect of emigration under the indentured labour system.

¹ India E.P. Dec. 1887, A.1-3.

² C.O. to Thurston, 10 Jan. 1891, C.O. 384/176.

Commissions for women were much higher than they were for men. The difficulties in recruiting women were reflected in a higher proportion of the low castes than among the men,¹ and, for the same reason, physical standards were not as strict as they were for men.² Of the "adult" females, about one-third were accompanied by "husbands". The percentage of these was highest in times of scarcity, when recruits were easier to obtain and more families emigrated. Many of these were, however, "depot marriages", in which the recruiter induced two recruits to say that they were husband and wife in order to prevent enquiries about the woman, since the husband's consent was necessary before a married woman could be registered. The rest - so-called "single women" - were mostly widows, runaway or deserted wives, girls who had left their homes under a cloud, and girls who formed part of an emigrating family. Professional prostitutes were few in number, for they had no incentive to emigrate, although some women may have gone with a view to making money in that way. C.F. Andrews estimated that up to 20% of the women may have been of "bad character" in

¹

Figures are given in Appendix D.

²

E.A. to C.O., 29 Jul. 1886, C.O. 384/163.

India, but not more.¹ More emigrated as an honourable alternative to a life of prostitution, as other employment opportunities were virtually non-existent. Some of these unaccompanied women brought young families with them, but after 1889, complaints from the Fiji Government brought about a reduction in the numbers of this most unproductive class of emigrants.²

Women were recruited in the towns by recruiters or by their female assistants, who kept a special eye out for those who seemed to be in trouble. They were even less scrupulous than with the men, for the woman's greater timidity, helplessness, ignorance and susceptibility to threats gave them more scope for malpractice, while the higher commissions (and special bonuses and penalties for a greater or lesser proportion than 40%)³ increased the temptation. Notwithstanding the severe penalties imposed by the law, which was administered by magistrates, who were far from sympathetic towards erring recruiters, and the rough treatment meted out by the public if they

¹ Andrews, mss. 2nd report, 9 (Mitchell Library).

² C.S.O. 2776/89.

³ In North India in 1911, a bonus of Rs.10 was paid for every woman in excess of the 4 to 10 ratio. (Madras G.O. 1472/12.)

were caught, there were many cases of abduction, threats and deception practised against timid and bewildered girls and women. Favourite places for recruiters were the great pilgrim centres, such as Banaras, Allahabad and Mathura, which were always crowded with thousands, and, at times of melas, hundreds of thousands, of simple, devout villagers. Women who became lost or separated were offered assistance by the recruiter to see some sacred shrine or to rejoin their husbands. They were taken instead to the depot where, after a few days, the shame of having lived in another man's house sealed their fate. Sometimes, recruiters took women as mistresses in order to trick them into emigrating. Cases of kidnapping were not unknown. As a result of these abuses, the Bengal Government enjoined strict care on magistrates to make enquiries before the registration of doubtful cases brought before them. But abuses persisted, despite considerable concern on the part of the governments in India to prevent them. Before the magistrate and later in the depot, women were often too frightened to speak out because of the threats used by the recruiter and because they feared to differ from the other recruits lest the Sahib become angry. Most female emigrants were simple village people, who having left home for domestic reasons, were picked up by a recruiter

and really did not know what was happening to them.

The emigrants went for many reasons, but the number who wished to settle in a new country was negligible. They went because it was the alternative to misery or because, having already left their homes, they were attracted by the prospect held out to them of easy work at high wages. However, a few emigrants went to Fiji because of contacts with friends there, or because they were impressed by the money brought or sent back by colonial emigrants. This does not seem to have been a very common motive, however. The Government of India wrote in 1908:

It is a significant fact that, although numbers of emigrants return annually from the Colonies, bringing with them in many instances large accumulated savings, no perceptible stimulus to emigration appears to result.¹

Major Pitcher, who investigated emigration in the North-West Provinces and Oudh in 1882, described one interesting case in the diary attached to his Report, which also illustrates some of the aspects of emigration described earlier:

21st March. 'Nayagaon' depot, Lucknow... A large number of coolies collected for Fiji. There were in this depot nine fine young men from one village in Gonda, who told me that seven men had emigrated

¹

Govt. India to I.O., 10 Dec. 1908, Cd.5192 (1910), 12.

from the same village some few years back, of whom three men and one woman had returned, bringing so much money that the speakers were tempted to try their luck also. The three men alluded to had soon again emigrated, disgusted with the cupidity of their fellow villagers.

These men seemed to be in high spirits, looking forward to their new life. They all admitted to having families at home, but considered them perfectly safe with their caste brethren, and remarked that it was the custom of the country to go forth in this way, leaving families behind.

Of the original seven, it was reported that three had permanently settled in Demerara. It struck me that the men before me thought Fiji close to Demerara, so I explained the position.¹

Thus, some migrants accompanied friends, particularly parties of young single men but most went alone. Their expectations did not normally extend beyond high wages and eventual return to India. As the Sanderson Committee wrote in 1910:

It seems doubtful whether the majority of the emigrants leaving India fully realize the conditions of the new life before them or start with the deliberate intention of making for themselves a home in a new country. They go because they are uncomfortable at home and welcome any change of circumstances.²

Emigrants did not usually differentiate between colonies, unless they were going for a second time or had received information from repatriates, and recruits were transferred

1

India E.P. Feb. 1883, A.1-12.

2

Cd. 5192 (1910), 17.

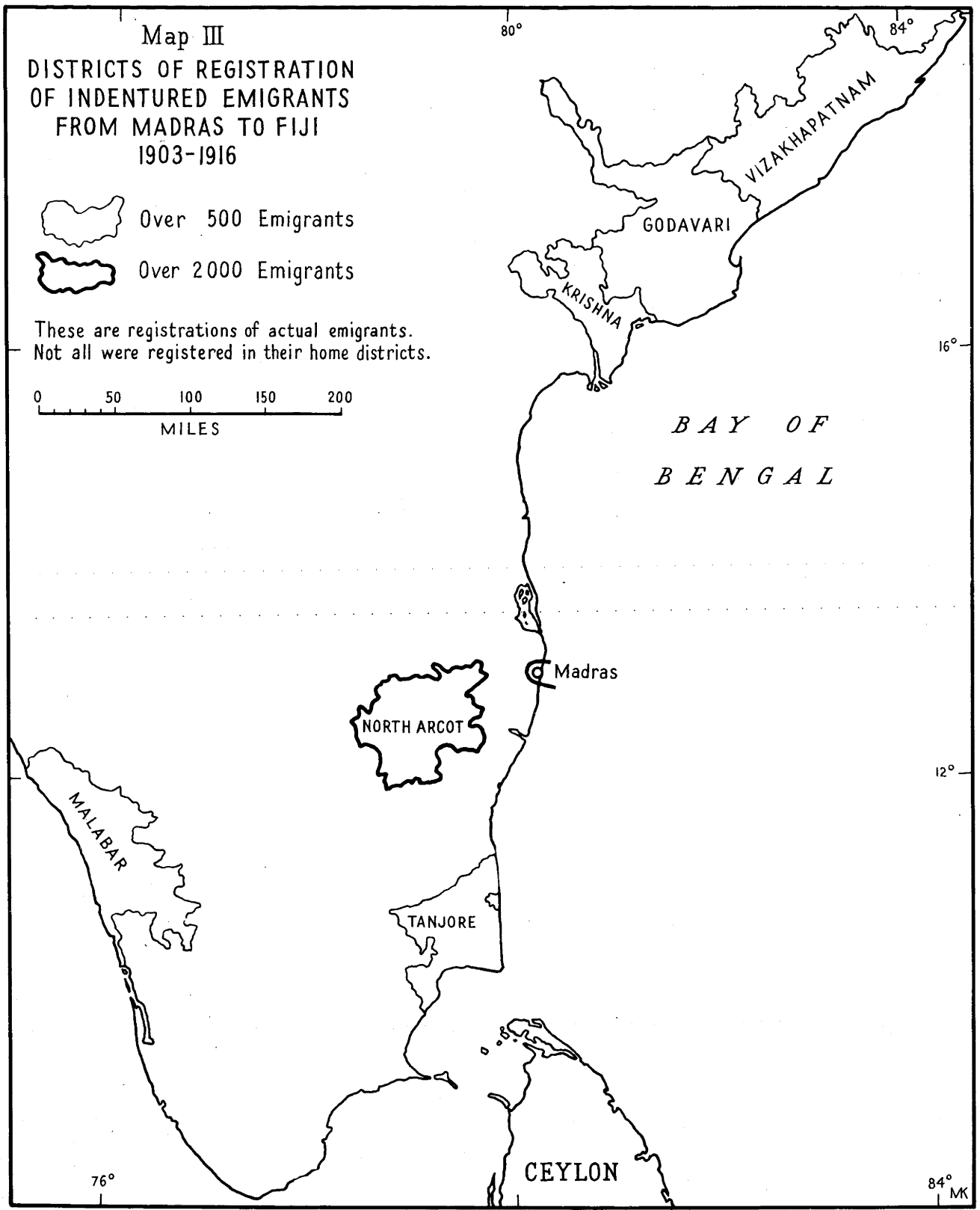
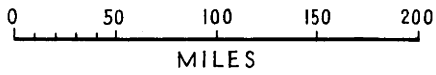
from one agency to another, depending on their requirements and the availability of shipping. Nearly all expected to return to India after a few years.

Map III

DISTRICTS OF REGISTRATION
OF INDENTURED EMIGRANTS
FROM MADRAS TO FIJI
1903-1916

- Over 500 Emigrants
- Over 2000 Emigrants

These are registrations of actual emigrants.
Not all were registered in their home districts.



Chapter IV

AREAS OF RECRUITMENT: EMIGRATION FROM MADRAS

There were emigrants to Fiji from almost every area in India, but, in the main, they came from particular localities. There were economic and cultural differences between different areas of India which affected the volume of emigration. In some, there was a greater spirit of enterprise or less prejudice against emigration; in others, there was greater economic pressure or less competition for labour. The agents had preferences, too. These conditions were not always constant and the proportions of emigrants to Fiji from different areas changed between 1879 and 1916.

The Fiji Emigration Agency in North India was located in Calcutta, but only a negligible number of Bengalis were recruited, despite the lower transport costs involved. In 1913, of 9171 emigrants from Calcutta to all colonies, 12 were Bengalis; in 1914, out of 5145, one was a Bengali!¹ Bengal had a very high population density, but it also had

¹

Govt. Bengal to Govt. India, 2 Nov. 1915, enc. to Govt. India to I.O., 15 Oct. 1915 (British Guiana Court of Policy, no.860/16).

fertile soil, heavy rainfall and profitable crops, such as jute and rice. It contained the great and expanding city of Calcutta and nearby were undeveloped areas, tea-gardens and forests in East Bengal and Assam. These absorbed all of Bengal's labour and that of thousands of immigrants as well.¹ In 1911, nearly two-fifths of the population of Calcutta consisted of immigrants from elsewhere in India. There were also temperamental factors involved. Bengalis were most reluctant to leave their homes, particularly to cross the ocean. Thus, although a high proportion of emigrants was recruited in Calcutta (in the District of the 24 Parganas), they were people who had drifted there in search of work or had been recruited for the Assam tea-gardens and later rejected. In some cases, recruits were brought to Calcutta under the impression that they would be sent to Assam and then enlisted for the colonies. In the 1890's, the Bengal Government made strenuous efforts to check this practice and, as a result, the number of emigrants registered in Calcutta fell off sharply.²

¹ Wattal, Population Problems in India, 36-48.

² P.P. 1894, LIX, 1; India E.P. Aug. 1892, A.31-34.

Bihar, the next area up-country, was a better field of recruitment. Bihar is called the land of sorrow, because it is an exceptionally poor area. By 1916, over one-fifth of the total population was landless. There were then no large industries to engage the people and agriculture required comparatively few hands during the greater part of the cold weather. Many Biharis went away to work; in fact, a higher percentage than from any other province in India.¹ Bihar sent many emigrants to the colonies.² Most were recruited in their home districts. Those which provided most of the emigrants were Shahabad and Patna (especially), Darbhanga, Gaya, Manbhum, and Saran. In the last quarter of the century there was a steady movement of recruiting up-country, and in later years Bihar contributed a smaller proportion of Fiji emigrants than in the earliest years of recruiting operations for that colony. The highest percentage was in the year 1884-5, when 58.56% of Fiji registrations were made in Bengal and Bihar (mostly in the latter).³ This

¹ Wattal, Population Problems in India, 53.

² Grierson's Report, India E.P. Aug. 1883, A.9-15.

³ These and subsequent figures of recruitment were derived from the Calcutta Emigration Reports. Figures for each year are given in Appendices A and B.

exceptional figure was due mainly to scarcity in Bihar and also to the decline in competition from other colonies during the depression in world sugar prices. The Fiji Emigration Agent ~~thought~~¹ that the colony was fortunate in getting such a large percentage of Biharis, as he considered them to be better workers than the people from the United Provinces. The percentage remained high until 1891, when it fell off sharply and never recovered. Thereafter it was normally between 10% and 20%. The explanation for this steady movement up-country was the increasing competition for labour from industry. The recruiters for Assam gave the colonial recruiters great competition in Shahabad especially, although this was the only district where there was much rivalry between the colonies and Assam.² The most prized of all recruits in India were the semi-aboriginal peoples of Chota Nagpur in Bihar. But, although a few were recruited for the colonies, it was not possible in later years for the colonial agencies to recruit them at all, because of the greater commissions offered to the recruiters for Assam and Cachar, and the shorter terms of engagements in those areas.

¹

E.A. to C.S., 18 Apr. 1884, C.S.O. 1192/84.

²

P.P. 1894, LIX, 495.

Next up the Gangetic Plain is the province now called Uttar Pradesh, which was formerly known as the United Provinces, but which for part of the period comprised the separate areas of the North-West Provinces and Oudh. It was this area which provided the great majority of colonial emigrants. In only two years (1884-5 and 1903) did it account for less than half the recruits registered for Fiji. The percentage of emigrants whose homes (as distinct from their places of registration) were in the United Provinces was even higher, because many people left there to work in other provinces and were recruited away from home. Economic conditions in many districts in the United Provinces were as bad as those in Bihar. The plight of most of the inhabitants of the Gangetic Plain has been described by Sir W. Crooke:

The castes which live by unskilled labour are in a wretched condition - ill-fed, ill-housed, ill-clothed, with no resources to withstand a failure of the rains and the scarcity, more or less severe, which attends such a calamity. The smaller tenants, rack-rented, obliged to borrow their food and seed grains, are in little better condition.¹

Moreover, this situation was not a static one. Because of increasing pressure on the land, the creation of a rural proletariat was in Bihar and the United Provinces

¹

Crooke, Natives of Northern India, 10-11.

more advanced than in other areas in India. One reason for this was the increase in population, although this was by no means considerable over the period as a whole, owing to plague and famine. A more important reason was the decline in the number of persons engaged in non-agricultural occupations, because of the supplanting of the products of cottage industries by cheaper manufactured articles. While extensive waste areas lay undeveloped, the increasing land hunger led to fragmentation of holdings, falling production, rising agricultural indebtedness and the transfer of land to money-lenders and landlords. The class of landless labourers was growing, and, since agriculture in these areas could not provide more than seasonal employment, they were often forced to wander far afield in search of work. Rural society became more mobile. This facilitated emigration, because the direct economic pressure provided incentive, and because many of the emigrants came from the ranks of the uprooted and the permanently mobile. Except in famine conditions, the small cultivator would not emigrate at all, but the landless labourer had much less to lose.¹

1

The information on economic conditions in this and following paragraphs was mainly derived from: Wattal, Population Problems in India; Imperial Gazetteer of India; Report of the United Provinces Zamindari Abolition Committee.

Most of the emigrants to Fiji came originally from the north-eastern districts of the United Provinces, especially from Basti, Faizabad, Gonda and Gorakhpur and, in earlier years, Azamgarh, Ghazipur and Jaupur. These were contiguous, densely populated districts where the economic pressures referred to earlier were most pronounced, and the zamindars (landlords) extremely powerful. In contrast to the western districts, there were few large towns, with mills and factories, to absorb surplus rural population. Except for sugar refining, there were no industries of any consequence; Basti, which provided the greatest number of emigrants to Fiji from any one district, was exceptionally poor in this respect. Moreover, over most of the period, there was little recruiting for the tea-gardens in these districts. Although many people went to Assam, Calcutta and East Bengal, these places were a long way off. Thus, the agents for the colonies found that they were most successful in the north-eastern United Provinces. As competition for labour increased, they moved further and further away from Calcutta. Many emigrants were not registered in their home districts, but in other

districts, especially Allahabad, Banaras and Kanpur, which contain the large cities of the same names. These cities were magnets for the unemployed, the curious, the adventurous, the dispossessed, and the runaway. Kanpur and Allahabad were manufacturing centres. Ancient Banaras, the most holy city of the Hindus, on the river Ganga, was the goal of millions of pilgrims. Allahabad attracted pilgrims too, especially when the great melas were held there. For these reasons, many emigrants were recruited in or near these cities. The percentage of recruits who were native residents of the districts containing them was often as low as 10%. Over the period as a whole, the following districts accounted for most of the registrations for Fiji in the United Provinces: Allahabad, Basti, Banaras, Kanpur, Faizabad, Gonda, Gorakhpur and Lucknow. Other districts contributing more than 5% in at least one year were: Agra, Aligarh, Ghazipur, Jaunpur and Mathura.

In the earliest years of recruitment for Fiji, until 1886, numbers of emigrants were recruited in the Punjab, particularly in Delhi. These years, especially from 1881 to 1884, were bad years for recruiting generally. Because of good crop conditions, Fiji requisitions could not be met in the last two years. In these conditions, the agent had to go far afield to secure emigrants, as far as the

Punjab, in fact. But the last decade and a half of the century were good years for recruiting and he did not have to go out of Bihar and the United Provinces. Only an occasional Punjabi was recruited away from home in these years. However, these terrible years of scarcity, which blew well for the colonial recruiters if for no one else, were coming to an end. The turning point was 1899, which was the worst year yet for Fiji recruiting, because of good harvests and plague, which forced the closing of depots. Commissions were raised and the departure of one ship was delayed for four weeks while recruiters searched for emigrants.¹ So, in 1901, recruitment for Fiji was extended again to the Punjab, and some were sent from Delhi.

The turn of the century marked the end of the easy period for the Colonial Emigration Agents. But, at the same time, there was a revival of world sugar prices, following the abolition of the bounties on beet sugar, and in Fiji there was a great expansion, particularly of the operations of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. In 1901, the Company sent one of its officers, Mr Thomas Hughes, to India to investigate the future prospects of

¹

C.P. 24/00.

the labour supply. He made wide enquiries and reported that these prospects were less promising than before for three reasons: the much lower rate of increase of the population in the previous decade due to mortality from famine and plague; the increasing outbreaks of plague and the consequent restrictions imposed upon internal travel; and the increasing opportunities for labour in industry and mines, and in Assam and Burma. For this reason and also because of what he considered to be the relatively poor physique of people from the United Provinces, he recommended that, in future, as few as possible should be taken from there. Instead, he proposed that emigrants should be drawn as much as possible from the Punjab and the Central Provinces, and that an agency should be opened in Madras. He visited Madras and thought the recruits he saw in the Mauritius depot there were of far superior physique to those sent to Fiji from North India. Hughes's recommendations were placed by his Company before the Government of Fiji and largely adopted.¹ Thereafter, the areas of recruitment were determined partly by the wishes of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (as the principal

¹

Report and correspondence with Allardyce (Act. Gov.) to C.O. no.115, 8 Oct. 1901, C.O. 83/72; C.S.O. 3426/01; Madras G.O. 248/02.

employer of indentured labour in Fiji) but principally by the limitations imposed by the increasing scarcity of recruits.

Recruitment in the Punjab continued in 1902, but there was a drop in registrations. The Emigration Agent gave a very good reason for this:

During the earlier portion of this year I received a large number of big, well-developed men from Delhi and Rohtak. Unfortunately my work there is at a complete standstill. There were one or two riots in connexion with my recruiting, during which some of my recruiters were seriously assaulted.

As a consequence my Sub-Agent left Delhi hurriedly and I have been unable to get any one to undertake work there.¹

In the following year, he reported that it was difficult to enlist recruiters and secure emigrants in the Punjab, because, although the Punjabi peasant was more enterprising than the peasant in the United Provinces, he was not so poor and had less incentive to emigrate. Nevertheless, he sent the Assistant Emigration Agent to all suitable districts in the Punjab,² and, as a result, the proportion of Punjabis registered in 1903 was the highest ever. It was not, however, a blessing. In April, 1903, there was a serious riot in the Fiji depot in Calcutta. A gate-

¹ E.A. to C.S., 14 Oct. 1901, C.S.O. 3426/01.

² E.A. to C.S., 16 Dec. 1902, C.S.O. 4585/02.

keeper struck an emigrant after the latter had complained about the food, whereupon the emigrants broke down the fences and, armed with palings, drove all the clerks and gate-keepers out of the compound. They were finally quieted by the agent himself, but so many emigrants had deserted that he had to despatch one ship with a short complement. The rioters were mostly Punjabis, who were bigger and stronger than the usual run of emigrants and also more quarrelsome. They gave the Surgeon-Superintendent of the Mersey an anxious time also, by "their wild and lawless behaviour", and on arrival in Fiji, six were promptly sent back to India. The troublemakers were from Hispar and Karnal districts and recruitment was stopped there. But the men from Delhi and Rohtak were considered by the Colonial Sugar Refining Company to be the finest immigrants ever to land in Fiji, and recruitment was continued there to a limited extent. However, further complaints from Fiji about Punjabis led to the curtailment of recruiting in later years. In any case, irrigation and colonisation projects and railway construction reduced the supply of labour in the Punjab, although there was a sharp rise in recruitment in 1911, 1912 and 1913, because of the cessation of construction.

The period of recruitment in the Central Provinces paralleled that for the Punjab. In 1882-3 a few were registered in Sargaon, and in 1884-5 some in Bilaspur district, but there was no further recruitment in the Central Provinces until 1900, in Jabalpur. Following Thomas Hughes's recommendations, the agent was instructed to send as many as possible from the Central Provinces.¹ The percentage recruited there rose steadily until 1904, the districts of Bilaspur, Jabalpur and Raipur contributing large numbers. There was strong competition from the Assam recruiters, who drew a very high proportion of their labour from this area.² Many of the emigrants from the Central Provinces were the greatly prized janglis (tribal people), who had been expressly requested by the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. But they were also preferred for the tea-gardens. In 1904, the officiating Emigration Agent had to report that the continuous and heavy drain on the population of the Central Provinces from the Assam tea gardens was beginning to tell, and that the difficulty in obtaining labourers from those parts had

¹ Telegram C.S. to E.A., 11 Oct. 1902, C.S.O. 4585/02.

² E.A. to C.S., 16 Dec. 1902, C.S.O. 4585/02.

recently been accentuated by increased vigour on the part of the local officials administering the Registration Rules. Thereafter emigration fell off steadily from the Central Provinces and was negligible again by 1908.

In 1903, the Fiji agency extended its recruiting operations for the first time to the small British district of Ajmer, situated in Rajputana and surrounded by Princely States. Under the Indian Emigration Act, recruiting operations were confined to British India, where, however, small numbers of citizens of the Princely States had been recruited away from home. Now there were more of these, since most of those recruited in Ajmer were from the surrounding States. Thereafter, Ajmer contributed a small percentage of emigrants in most years, although railway construction had its effect there, too.¹

Although there was no recruitment in Nepal, numbers of Nepalis were recruited in British India, especially in the District of Gorakhpur. They had come down from the hills, looking for work or adventure. In 1894, a clause was inserted in the recruiting licence whereby recruiters pledged themselves not to recruit Nepalis.

¹ Cd. 5193 (1910), 196.

The ostensible reason for this restriction was the wish of the Nepal Darbar that its subjects not be recruited for the colonies, but the real reason was the objection of the Military Department to colonial competition with enlistment for the Gurkha units of the army.¹ This should, theoretically, have been the end of the matter. In 1904, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company expressly requested Nepalis and the Emigration Agent replied that their recruitment was prohibited. Yet, in Fiji, the writer met several Nepalis who had come after 1894 (there is a settlement of them near Sigatoka). One said that he had come down from the hills on a visit, had been picked up by a recruiter, had at first been rejected as a Nepali but had later been registered by the same registering officer after particulars of his domicile were changed by the recruiter. (Incidentally, this man had thought Fiji could be seen from India.) This is another illustration of how the Emigration Rules were frustrated in practice.

Orissa provided a few emigrants to Fiji, although in most years there was no recruiting there, because so few were available. Ganjam District (then in the Madras Presidency) supplied some in 1884-5. In 1902 some went

¹ India E.P., Oct. 1894, A.8-9.

from Puri District and gave such a good account of themselves in Fiji that the Fiji Sugar Company at Navua, to whom they had been indentured, asked for more. They were not procurable. In 1913, 1915 and 1916 a few emigrants were registered in Puri and Cuttack districts.

No emigrants were recruited in the Bombay Presidency, except some from Ahmadabad in 1883-4. The Government of Bombay refused permission for recruiting to be carried out in the Presidency, because emigration meant loss of revenue. Of course, some people originally from the Presidency were recruited in other Provinces. This was true of other areas too. Even a few Afghans found their way to Fiji under the indenture system!

In 1902, Fiji established an agency in Madras, shared with Mauritius and Trinidad. This followed Thomas Hughes's Report and the request from the C.S.R. Company based upon it. The Company's object was "to get a better class of labour at a lower cost, and to get out of the plague infested Districts".¹ The location of the depot was changed three times. All were in the north-eastern corner of the city, and the emigrants were marched through the streets to the jetty.

¹ C.S.R./Fiji to C.S., 3 Oct. 1901, enc. to Allardyce to C.O., no.115, 8 Oct. 1901, C.O. 83/72.

There were important differences in recruiting conditions between South and North India. Emigration was much more popular in the South where there was less religious prejudice against crossing the waters and a higher proportion of the depressed castes, to whom the prohibition did not apply. Colonial emigration was a minor movement compared to the unregulated, temporary labour migration to Burma, Ceylon and Malaya. Thus, in the ten years from 1903 to 1912, 3,477,676 people left the Madras Presidency for overseas destinations as passengers, while 2,906,988 returned in this period. But only 55,766 were despatched under the Emigration Act. In the Madras Presidency, the peasants were mainly smallholders rather than tenants, and many of them worked part of their time for wages, as the holdings were often insufficient to support them. Most emigrants for the colonies were recruited when away from home looking for work. Unlike the Natal recruiters, the Fiji recruiters did not advertise in the villages.¹ The recruiters in Madras were of the same low character and social standing as in the north. One difficulty in Madras was that the agent never knew in advance how many recruits were required (since Madras

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Asst. E.A. to E.A., 4 Feb. 1913, C.P. 127/13.

made up the Calcutta deficiencies), and could not maintain a regular staff of recruiters. Nevertheless, there was probably less fraud in emigration from Madras, although there were complaints that some colonial emigrants had been told up-country that they were being recruited for Ceylon.¹ There were years, too, when the supply of emigrants was very limited, as in the north. There was strong competition from recruiters for Malaya and Ceylon. In 1911, the recruiters for Ceylon were working as far as 250 miles north of the city of Madras. Generally, however, the bulk of those who were accustomed to go to Ceylon, Burma or Malaya, for short periods, were not potential colonial emigrants. The colonies were competing for the newcomers. The commissions in Madras were actually higher than they were in the north.² Recruitment was not easy during December and January, because of the Christmas holidays and Hindu festivals which prospective emigrants liked to attend. The recruitment of women was more difficult in the south. In several years, permission was given to the Fiji Agent to make up a deficiency in the proportion of female emigrants from one season in the next,

¹ Madras G.O. 760/03.

² In 1912, they were Rs.40-45 for a man, and Rs.50-55 for a woman.

and in one year, 1914, to make it up by an increase in the proportion sent from Calcutta.¹ No statistics are available from the Indian end of the sex or age distribution of Madras emigrants, although it is likely that the proportion of females and families was slightly lower² than for Calcutta emigrants.

The first shipment of emigrants from Madras to Fiji went in the Elbe in 1903, and were recruited mainly in the districts of Madras, North Arcot, Anantapur, Vizakhapatnam and Godavari. Telegu interpreters were sent also. The emigrants did not turn out as well for the C.S.R. Company as Thomas Hughes had expected, because their physique was poorer than the average from North India, and their performance in Fiji not as good. Accordingly, the Company decided to take no more emigrants from Madras, unless this were unavoidable. Nevertheless, the increasing scarcity of recruits in North India was to force them to take most

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Madras G.O. 656/14.

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Comparative percentages are available for immigrants for one year - 1905.

Ages	Males		Females	
	Madras	Calcutta	Madras	Calcutta
20 and under	27.82	41.28	44.47	52.46
21-30	63.02	56.62	47.78	46.44
31-35	6.53	1.87	4.64	0.82
over 35	2.63	0.23	3.11	0.28
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(C.P. 24/06.)

of their emigrants from Madras in future and it was arranged that the Madras Agent would supply the numbers that the Calcutta Agent was unable to supply. In 1905, the Agent in Calcutta could send only 45% of the number requested, and so two shiploads of emigrants went from Madras to Fiji in that year. Recruitment was widespread. The most common districts were North Arcot, Madras, Nellore, Tanjore and Malabar. In subsequent years, most were from North Arcot, Madras (these two supplied more than half the emigrants in all years except 1911, 1912 and 1913), Krishna, Godavari, Vizakhapatnam, Tanjore, Malabar and Coimbatore. In 1911, 1912 and 1913, exceptionally large numbers of emigrants were embarked from Madras, recruitment was correspondingly widespread and many were taken from Malabar, Krishna and Coimbatore. No figures of home districts of Madras emigrants are available, but it may be assumed that most of those recruited in Madras District had come or been brought from neighbouring districts, such as North Arcot and Chingleput.

Emigrants from South India were extremely diverse, and included people who spoke Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi and Hindustani, with Tamils in the majority. Even Punjabis were occasionally collected in Madras; 28 were recruited there in one party in 1912.

There are no collated statistics as to the religions and caste groups of the emigrants from Madras, such as there are for those from Calcutta. However, the writer has ascertained from the complete files of emigration passes held by the Fiji Government that they were extremely diverse; for one ship alone - the Elbe in 1903 - approximately one hundred different castes were recorded (although differences in spelling and nomenclature would have accounted for many of these). The proportion of Muslims was lower than for North India, and that of Christians higher (as would be expected from the geographical distribution of these groups in India). The most common castes among the Hindus were Kapus (cultivators), Vannias (cultivators), Paraiyans (field labourers and village servants), Balijas (traders and cultivators), and Kammias (cultivators). The Balija name of "Naidu" and the Kapu name of "Reddi" are extremely common in Fiji. Among the immigrants from Malabar, Nayars (cultivators mainly) were well represented. It would appear that South Indian emigrants to Fiji, like those from the North, represented a fair cross section of village castes, and were predominantly of the middle agricultural castes.

It has been shown that the selection of the areas of recruitment was to a very large extent beyond the

control of the employers in Fiji and the Emigration Agents. They preferred North Indians, but 25% were recruited in the south; they wanted janglis, Nepalis and people from towards the Punjab border, but most of the emigrants came from the north-eastern United Provinces. Although cultural factors were important, particularly the reluctance to emigrate of the Bengali and the willingness of the Madrasi, the main causes of this distribution were economic. In the main recruiting areas, there was great economic pressure, while there were seasonal fluctuations determined by crop conditions. During the period of recruitment for Fiji, there was a steady trend up-country and an increasing scarcity of recruits, because of the growing competition for labour. Indeed, in the last decade of recruiting, the number of emigrants available from North India was, in most years, not equal to the demands of the colonies, while difficulties were being experienced even in the south.

Chapter V

THE PASSAGE TO FIJI

Immigrant ships made 87 voyages to Fiji from India in the years 1879 to 1916, carrying 60,965 emigrants, 60,553 of whom arrived in the colony (including births at sea). The average mortality was thus less than 1% on voyages that averaged 73 days for sailing ships and 30 days for steamers. This contrasts very favourably with the emigrant ships from Europe to America, and was far removed from the abuses of the African, Chinese or Pacific Island labour traffic, or of earlier Indian emigration to the West Indies, Natal and Mauritius. The achievement was the result of very successful regulation. The worst recollection most old immigrants have of their ship is of being seasick.

Two companies were associated with the carriage of Indian emigrants to the colonies - James Nourse and the British India Steam Navigation Company. Over most of the period the story of their competition is the story also of the rivalry between sail and steam. Each year tenders were called by the Crown Agents for the Colonies

(acting under instructions from the Colonial Office and in communication with the Emigration Agents in India) for the conveyance of Indian emigrants to Fiji, in conformity with the detailed requirements laid down in the Indian Emigration Act and Colonial Emigration Rules. The Crown Agents had taken over the work of the Land and Emigration Commissioners in 1878, and they made all contracts connected with Indian emigration, chartered the ships required, and appointed and despatched the Surgeons-Superintendent. Normally tenders were submitted only by the companies mentioned. There was considerable fluctuation in the rates, depending on how much competition Nourse faced in a particular year. In the early years his rates were very high, but with competition from the British India Steam Navigation Company, rates fell in the 90's. Nevertheless, he was still usually successful until another consideration - the preference for steamers - began to outweigh that of cost.

Nourse had a fleet of sailing ships, which were usually of about 1000-1800 tons and carried between 550 and 650 immigrants. They were specially fitted out for colonial emigration and were normally engaged in this business, although at slack periods they carried miscellaneous cargo, including jute and gunny bags, to the

United Kingdom. They carried some cargo to Fiji with the immigrants. In later years, the quantity of cargo increased, as more food was required for the growing Indian population. Normally it amounted to only 400-600 tons of gunny bags, rice, dal, and rattan furniture. Three-quarters of the cargo was for the C.S.R. Company.¹ Two special shipments in 1885 could be mentioned - the mango tree and the mongoose. Occasionally cargo was carried on to New Zealand. Return freights were small. Sometimes the ships carried passengers (immigrants paying their own passages) and, occasionally, interpreters recruited for the Government. The ships were fitted according to the requirements of the Government of India, laid down in minute detail in the charter party. The between decks, the poop and the upper deck were reserved for the emigrants. A hospital, dispensary and galley were to be provided on deck and toilet facilities at the stern. The between deck was divided into three compartments, one for the single men in the bow, one for the married couples, and one for the single women in the stern, with sleeping platforms stretching from end to end. Only one deck below was to be used for the accommodation of

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C.S.O. 1441/97.

emigrants and at least 72 cubic feet of space was to be allowed there for each "statute adult". There were many other requirements concerning ventilation, drinking water, etc., and they were rigidly enforced.¹

The most important man on an Indian emigrant ship was the Surgeon-Superintendent, who had charge of and responsibility for the welfare of the emigrants. The Surgeons-Superintendent belonged to a distinct Indian emigration service under the authority of the Crown Agents and were recruited from experienced medical men in England. In 1908, there were 10 Surgeons in the service, of whom 8 had served 14 to 31 years. Usually they made only one trip a year. They were well paid, demonstrated marked esprit de corps and were, on the whole, efficient and humane. They were required to report in great detail on each voyage. Their principal routine duties were to watch the medical care, ventilation, clothing, feeding, cleanliness and exercise of the emigrants, and their authority on the ship extended to all matters connected with their welfare. They could, for instance, ask the Captain to take in sail if discomfort to the emigrants was

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There is a copy of a typical charter party giving details of the arrangements on board an emigrant ship on C.O. 384/174.

being caused in a heavy sea, or to tell the crew to desist from painting over the recreation space or hammering near the hospital (and report him if he refused). To assist the Surgeon-Superintendent in caring for the emigrants, there were compounders, usually two in number, or three on the larger steamers. They were Indians or Anglo-Indians. The senior compounder looked after the hospital and dispensary, and the junior the galley, cleaning arrangements and discipline. The comfort of the emigrants and the smooth running of the ship depended to a large extent on the zeal and efficiency of the compounders. On the whole, they were well-liked and did a good job. The compounders were paid a fixed salary plus a gratuity on each emigrant landed alive. They were well-paid and competition for their positions was keen. The Surgeon-Superintendent was paid by gratuity and was given a free passage back to England. Small gratuities were also paid to the ship's officers and crew members who had direct contact with emigrants, such as the storeman and donkey-man. In the event of complaint, these gratuities could be, and were occasionally, withheld.

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The details of conditions on board the ships in this and following paragraphs were derived from extensive official correspondence over the period; from Dr J.M. Lang, Handbook for Surgeons Superintendent of the Coolie Emigration Service (I.O./J. & P. 565/1889); and from Lubbock, Coolie Ships and Oil Sailers, and White, Ships, Coolies and Rice.

Before the ship left Calcutta or Madras, the Emigration Agent selected from among the emigrants a number of sirdars. Each was responsible for the good conduct and wellbeing of 25 emigrants, and for the cleanliness of the portion of the between-decks occupied by them. They also guarded the hatchways at night, prevented contact between the single men and single women and watched for fire - the greatest danger of all. Generally, they were men of good caste, to give them influence among the emigrants. During the voyage, they could be replaced by the Surgeon-Superintendent. The agent also appointed, from among the emigrants, bandharries (cooks), who were usually of high caste in order to allay caste scruples of emigrants, and topazes (cleaners and sweepers), who were low-caste. There were about half a dozen of each of these to a ship. One female nurse was appointed for every 25 female emigrants. Two barbers, two hospital attendants, and two tailors were also selected. All these people usually received ten shillings each for the voyage.

Emigrants were provided with blankets and clothing for the voyage. Sailing ships went to the south of Australia, where very cold and stormy weather was usually encountered, but steamers went through Torres Strait to the north of Australia, so thick clothing was not necessary



in their case. Detailed ration scales were laid down for emigrants, different ones for those from Calcutta and Madras. To provide fresh mutton, sheep were carried in pens on the deck; beef was not included in the ration. The rations were liberal, and an intelligent Surgeon-Superintendent would try to provide as much variety as he could. Usually there was one rice and one flour meal a day. In rough weather, they were fed on dry meals such as churah and sugar. There were special diets for nursing women, young children and convalescents. Medical supplies were shipped, and also musical instruments and playing cards for the amusement of the emigrants. These stores were inspected by the Surgeon-Superintendent before departure and certificates signed. Any defects in quality detected during the voyage brought forth vigorous criticism, and the quality was thus kept up to the mark.

On the day of departure, the emigrants were inspected for the last time by the Protector of Emigrants, issued with blankets and clothing and embarked. As they were transferred to the ship, there would be much excitement among the emigrants and wailing among the women. This confusion and excitement continued during the two days the ship was towed down the Hughli by tug to the open sea. A boat was towed behind to collect those who might decide

to jump into the water. Occasionally, high-caste Hindus threw themselves overboard in despair at losing their caste. After the ship reached the Bay of Bengal, there was much sea-sickness and for the first week or ten days it was impossible for the regular ration scale to be followed. High-caste people had to be carefully watched lest they starve themselves rather than eat proscribed food, cooked in common. One "active and intelligent" Surgeon-Superintendent explained:

At the beginning of the voyage, detection of these people, and feeding them as they wish for a time is very important. They can usually be brought to take general diet in a few days by persuasion or judicious management.¹

Dr Lang's Handbook for Surgeons-Superintendent declared on the same point:

Sometimes Brahmins and other high caste Hindoos will come up and say that they cannot eat food prepared in the galley, and this, although they have been told before embarking that their food would be thus prepared. Often this man's prejudice (his caste has been broken by the mere fact of his having lived in the depot even up country) can be satisfied by putting him in the galley as a bandharrie, if the complaint has not been made for that purpose, and there is a vacancy. After a time, if the Surgeon-Superintendent goes frequently to the galley and examines the food, and shows his care that it shall always be well cooked and impartially distributed,

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Dr Whitelaw to Crown Agents, Dec. 1882, Bengal E.P. May 1883, B.1-2.

and that all articles unfit for food are thrown overboard, all those complaints will cease.¹

It should be remembered, in considering the ease with which age-old caste customs were discarded, that emigrants were young and removed from the support of their caste fellows and traditional social system. There were other causes of depression too, as explained by Dr Lang:

I know that many people die from nostalgia pure and simple 'quocunque alio nomine vocetur vel vocari possit'. And can it be wondered at with all their caste prejudices, their leaving their native land, perhaps never to see it again, and being thrown among people strange in habits, language, and even colour? The excitement of the newness of everything keeps them up for a time, but soon dies away, and is followed by depression when they realise what they have done; and to prevent this I would urge their being employed as much as possible while on board, and encouraged in every available means of entertainment. If I had ever had any doubts about the advantage of exercising the men and women as before described, they would have been dispelled by seeing the different expression on their faces after exercise.²

On board a typical Indian emigrant ship, the emigrants' day began at 6 a.m. They rose, tied their blankets in bundles and hung them on bamboo poles. They went on deck, performed their ablutions and breakfasted on deck (unless the weather was bad) between 8 and 8.30 a.m. Then, the between decks were cleaned by the topazes and the emigrants

¹ Lang's Handbook, I.O./J. & P. 565/1889.

² Ibid.

went below while the topazes cleaned the decks, at which the emigrants also took a hand, under a roster system. They were brought up again and, in fine weather, except in the hottest zone, had the run of the deck until dinner at 3-3.30 p.m. Emigrants ate in long rows, sitting on the deck. The men took their share in pumping water for drinking and cooking, keeping the two decks clean and drawing provisions. The women were generally employed in grinding curry and other light kitchen work. Emigrants were exercised for an hour and encouraged to sing to drums, play cards and wrestle. At 8 p.m. all were below decks, except in very hot weather. The Surgeon-Superintendent made a daily inspection of the emigrants' quarters and facilities. There were regular days for bathing and washing blankets on deck. Bathing in hot water was enforced once a week and oiling twice a week. There was a daily inspection of skins, conducted, in the case of the women, by the nurses. Every Sunday, there was a thorough examination of emigrants. Sensible and well-intentioned as these precautions were, they may, nevertheless, have appeared degrading to some of the emigrants.

Maintaining discipline was an important problem for the Surgeons-Superintendent. Because the more serious quarrels were nearly always due to disputes over women,

segregation was strict, except on deck. The most common punishment employed by the abler Surgeons-Superintendent was ridicule, such as being tom-tommed around the deck as a thief or being made to hold out the tongue as a punishment for abuse. Doubtless some of the sirdars used rougher tactics on occasion, and some sirdars and band-harries abused their authority and showed favouritism (especially with the water ration). The general impression is, however, of firm, impartial and considerate treatment. The only officer of the ship who should have had any contact with emigrants was the third mate, who had charge of stores. The crew were not allowed to interfere with emigrants, but this was sometimes difficult to enforce, because the crew would be annoyed by the noise created by so many people on a small ship. Surgeons-Superintendent often had to prevent emigrants being pushed about by members of the crew.¹ At first the crews on sailing ships were Lascars, but because there were repeated complaints from Surgeons-Superintendent about their sickness and behaviour in cold and stormy weather, Nourse instructed his agents in 1891 not to employ Lascars when Europeans were

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Dr Whitelaw to Crown Agents, Dec. 1882, Bengal E.P.
May 1883, B.1-2.

available.¹ The Poonah was nearly lost in rough weather on a voyage to Fiji in 1882 because of the physical incapacity and instability of its crew during a severe gale.² Later, on the steamers, the crew were nearly all Lascars, as the dangers involved were not as great.

The voyage by sailing ships took anywhere from two to three months. The Ems in 1904 took 122 days, but this was exceptional. There were no intermediate ports. There were, however, minor illnesses, especially measles and whooping cough, and much sea sickness. Normally these were not serious, but there were two disastrous exceptions. The first was the Leonidas which took the first immigrants to Fiji. There were 498 of them, and the Emigration Agent had selected good ones for the new colony. Curiously, five Fijians, who were in Calcutta at the time, had been engaged as topazes and thus provided with free passages back to Fiji. Extra provisions had been shipped.³ On 14 May 1879, the Leonidas arrived off the port of Levuka but, as the boat from the port approached, the Surgeon-Superintendent called out a warning that she was pest-

¹ India E.P. Feb.1892, A.4-5.

² India E.P. Feb.1884, A.17-20.

³ E.A. to C.S. 17 Jun. 1879, C.O. 384/126.

stricken. There had been cholera, smallpox and dysentery aboard. The first stricken had been a sailor who had gone down a few days out of Calcutta. Despite the efforts of the Surgeon-Superintendent, who was "efficient and zealous", there had been 11 deaths from cholera and 6 from dysentery. As smallpox was still on board, drastic quarantine measures were immediately taken by the Fiji Government which knew that the introduction of smallpox or cholera might have more disastrous consequences than the measles epidemic of 1875. The situation was of crisis proportions. The immigrants were landed on Yanuca Lailai, an islet near Levuka, which had been fitted as an Immigration Depot, the Leonidas was sent away and armed guards (with orders to shoot if necessary) patrolled the area in boats to prevent any contact with those on the islet. The immigrants were in quarantine there for 90 days, during which time another 15 died.¹ It was an inauspicious beginning for Indian immigration. An even more serious outbreak of cholera occurred on the steamer Fultala on a run from Madras in 1906. Apparently healthy people were stricken and died in the same day. Because of the rapid

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P.P. 1880, LIX, 51; Des Voeux, My Colonial Service, I, 387-392; Fiji Times, 17 May 1879.

spread of the disease, the Surgeon-Superintendent decided to put into Singapore, where the emigrants were quarantined. In all, 124 were attacked, 61 of whom died.

The worst disaster in the history of Indian emigration to Fiji was the wreck of the sailing ship Syria on 11 May 1884. With inexperienced officers, unfamiliar with Fiji waters, no masthead lookout stationed, and off course but nearing land in a high wind and heavy sea, she hit the point of Nasilai Reef, which was four miles from the nearest land, in the evening. At this time Indian immigrant ships carried only a few lifeboats and a handful of lifebelts.¹ Five of the six boats were wrecked in the heavy sea and the Mate went in the sixth to get assistance. Nothing could be done until morning. Dr MacGregor, then Acting Colonial Secretary, took charge of the rescue operations, which were carried out in boats and Fijian canoes. The wind and tide were rising and the ship was breaking up on the reef. Some had left the ship and were trying to wade ashore, but were stopped by large patches of deep water. But for the assistance from the shore, the loss of life would have been enormous.² In all, 56 im-

¹ After 1902, lifebelts had to be carried for all on board. (Madras G.O. 657/02.)

² India E.P. Nov. 1884, A.8.

migrants and 3 Lascars were drowned. MacGregor wrote to Gordon afterwards: "The scene was simply indescribable, and pictures of it haunt me still like a horrid dream that one is glad to escape from by waking. People falling, fainting, drowning all around one."¹ The survivors received clothing and about £400 raised by private subscription in Fiji. The wreck was the subject of an inquiry by the Fiji Marine Board, which held the Master to be at fault.² The Colonial Secretary wrote to the Emigration Agent: "The ship was lost by the joint effect of carelessness and incompetence."³

The relative advantages of sailing ships and steamers were discussed almost from the beginning of Indian immigration to Fiji. The lower cost of introduction by the former was the most important, but not the only, consideration. The near disaster the colony had faced through the introduction of smallpox or cholera by the sailing ship Leonidas was always present in the minds of the Fiji Government. Sailing ships took much longer and there was, therefore, a greater assurance that any disease would be detected

¹ MacGregor to Gordon, 11 Jun. 1884, Stanmore Papers, B.M. 49203.

² India E.P. Mar. 1885, A.6.

³ C.O. to E.A., 13 Oct. 1884, C.S.O. Outward 1110/84.

and wiped out before the ship reached Fiji. Moreover, the first few experiences with steamers were not encouraging. There was a high mortality on the first, the Newnham, in 1884, although it took only 38 days to reach Fiji.¹ The next steamers, the Virawa and Vadala, did not come until 1895. The Vadala rolled violently, even in moderate seas, and the Surgeon-Superintendent made many angry entries in his journal as his measles cases were thrown about below deck.² As late as 1898, Governor O'Brien reiterated the Fiji Government's preferences for sailing ships.³ There was, incidentally, no substantial difference from the point of view of comfort.

Nevertheless, steamers had their advantages and advocates. The Government of Bengal favoured them because of the quicker voyage, from which a lower rate of mortality could be expected.⁴ Surgeons-Superintendent preferred them because, by going through Torres Strait, they avoided the cold and wet weather to the south of Australia, which

¹ Indian Immigration Report for 1884. (India E.P. Sep. 1886, A.13-14.)

² C.S.O. 1327/95; 2884/95.

³ O'Brien to C.O., no.95, 24 Nov. 1898.

⁴ Resolution of Bengal Government, General Department, 25 Oct. 1882, India E.P. Dec. 1882, A.8-11.

was responsible for many (although seldom fatal) cases of penumonia and bronchitis.¹ There were advantages, too, from the employer's point of view. Their occasional employment forced down Nourse's tenders which, in the absence of steamship competition, would have been much higher, as he had practically a clear field with sailing ships. Also, their dates of arrival could be estimated much more accurately.² It was the C.S.R. Company which settled the question decisively in favour of steamers. In 1899 and 1900, Nourse had no competition and his rates increased sharply.³ In 1901 and 1902, the C.S.R. Company, which, as early as 1888, had asked the government to introduce immigrants by steamers,⁴ made further representations to the Fiji Government and to the Colonial Office urging that the employment of sailing ships be discontinued. Early arrival of immigrants gave them time to be acclimatised before the crushing season commenced in May or June

¹ Indian Immigration Report for 1884. (India E.P. Sep. 1886, A.13-14.)

² C.S.O. 2884/95.

³ They increased from a low point of £5.19.6 per statute adult in 1896 to £9.18.9 in 1900 (C.S.O. 3242/02).

⁴ C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 12 Sep. 1888, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book IV, 462-3.

and they were in time to participate in it. In the Company's view, they were also fitter than after the long period of enforced idleness in sailing ships. Moreover, early arrival enabled immediate replacement of those whose indentures had expired, avoiding transfers from other estates.¹

Notwithstanding these representations, Nourse's tenders being lower, were still accepted by the Crown Agents, so in 1901, the C.S.R. Company took matters into its own hands. In 1901 and 1902, the British India Steam Navigation Company tendered the remarkably low figures of £6.10s and £5.10s a head, which were accepted by the Crown Agents. It was learned later that the C.S.R. Company had come to a secret understanding with the B.I.S.N. Company that it would pay an additional £3 above the tendered rate. The C.S.R. Company charged other employers for their share of this sum.² The arrangement had to be discontinued and in 1903 and 1904 Nourse won again. Nevertheless, the wishes of the C.S.R. Company were decisive - after all, it was by far the largest employer of labour - and the Fiji Government asked that steamers be employed in 1905, even

¹ C.S.O. 3242/02.

² Ibid.

though this involved the Government in added expense because of the higher cost of return passages, which were defrayed by the colony, not by the employers. The C.S.R. Company was anxious to put the conveyance of immigrants on a regular basis with steamers and in 1905 it entered into a contract with the Government for the conveyance of immigrants for the following three years.¹ It was renewed in 1908, for another two years. The Company made a subsidiary contract with the B.I.S.N. Company and made no profit out of the arrangement. Meanwhile, Nourse was building steamers, especially for Indian emigration. Representations were made to the Fiji Government by Nourse and by the Suva Chamber of Commerce, asking that open tenders for the contract be called when the C.S.R. Company's contract expired in 1910. This was done and Nourse secured the contract for the next three years, because of his lower rates and better ships. The new ships had a higher speed, wooden passenger decks, instead of iron ones, and clear between-decks, instead of the divided between-decks of the B.I.S.N. Company steamers. Nourse's ships were not as large, and could carry about 800-900 persons. Although the B.I.S.N. Company steamers could take over

¹

C.P. 14/05.

1000, this was rather a disadvantage, because of limitations of depot accommodation, overworking of the medical staff and danger of epidemics, and a limit of 1000 statute adults was imposed in 1909. The other colonies also made agreements with Nourse, and a fresh contract was made by the Fiji Government in 1913, in the face of competition from the B.I.S.N. Company. Thereafter, Nourse transported all the emigrants to Fiji, and took most of the repatriates as well, in the years that followed the abolition of the indentured labour system.

Thorough medical supervision, kind treatment, good food, warm clothing and well-ventilated and clean ships were features of Indian emigration which characterise few mass movements of labour in history. If the ships were overcrowded by the standards of today, they were not by most standards of the time. The regulation was successful because it was vigorously enforced and administered by a corps of able, experienced and well paid medical men, with no interest other than the efficient performance of their duties, who were given full authority and efficient subordinates and were fully supported by their superiors at home. One writer on ships and the sea has described Indian immigrant ships as happy ships.¹ Old immigrants in Fiji say the same today.

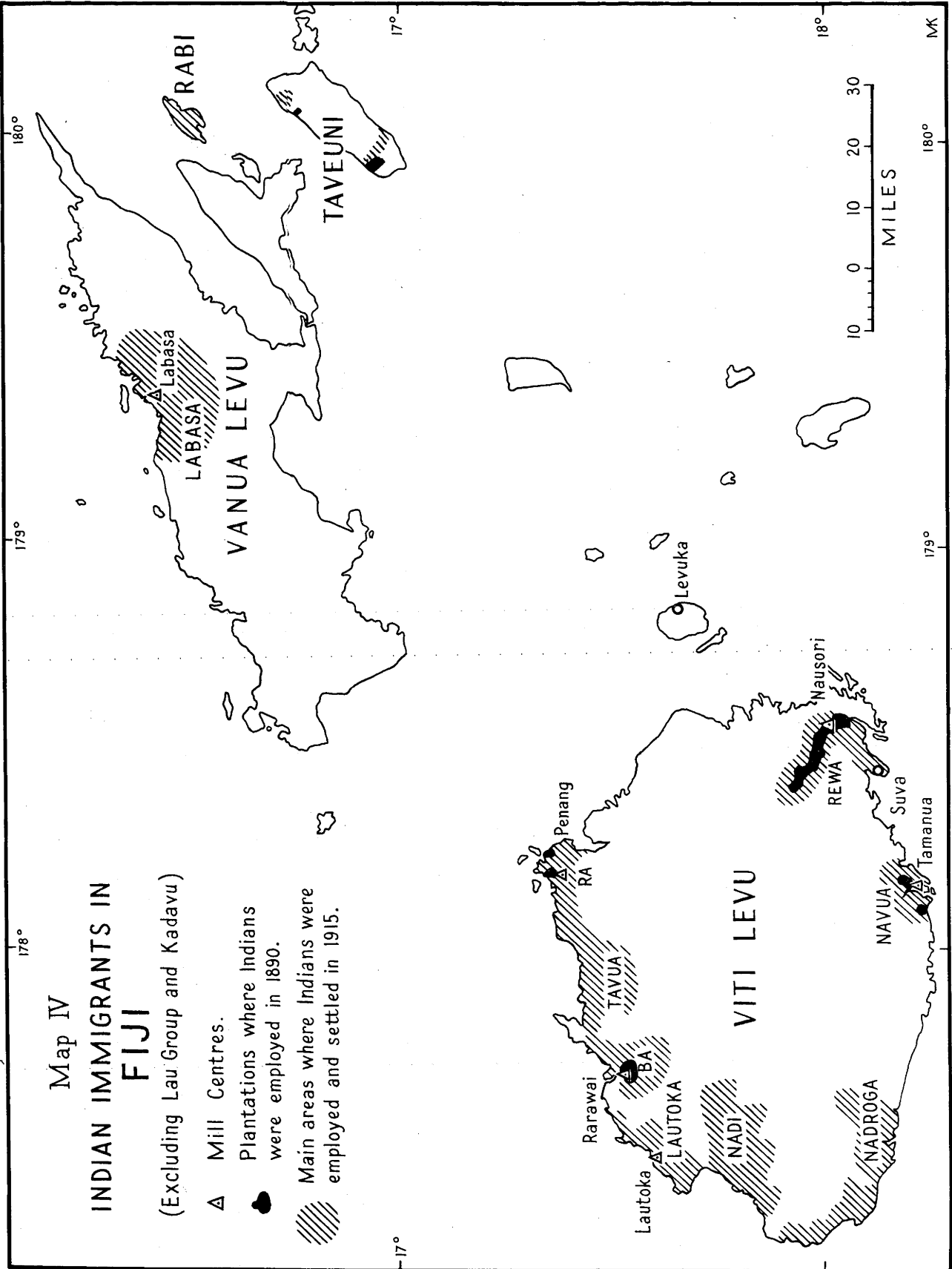
¹

Lubbock, Coolie Ships and Oil Sailers, 112.

Map IV
**INDIAN IMMIGRANTS IN
 FIJI**

(Excluding Lau Group and Kadavu)

- ▲ Mill Centres.
- Plantations where Indians were employed in 1890.
- ▨ Main areas where Indians were employed and settled in 1915.



Chapter VI

INDIAN IMMIGRATION IN ITS SETTING

Sir Arthur Gordon was on leave when the ill-fated Leonidas arrived in Fiji, but he returned while the immigrants were still on Yanuca Lailai. On his second day in Levuka he went to see them. He spoke to them, and, characteristically, "set their minds at rest on questions on pay, hours of work etc." He thought them "a splendid set of men"¹. Nevertheless, the arrival of the pest-stricken ship only strengthened the planters' opposition to Indian immigration. They were determined not to apply for the new arrivals, lest Gordon repeat what they considered to be a foolish experiment.² Their indignation was backed by a ready supply of Island labour which was now flowing freely into the country again. The Government had 464 Indian immigrants to dispose of. Only one planter, Captain J. Hill, of Rabi Island, took them for field work - 106 of them. Twenty-two went to Levuka as house servants

¹ Gordon to Lady Gordon, 15 Sep. 1879, Records of Private and of Public Life, IV.

² Fiji Times, 16 Aug. 1879.



and one commuted. The rest were allotted to the Public Works Department and Police at Suva, which Gordon had decided to make the capital of the colony, in place of Levuka. Then, in November 1879, the Government took over the Great Amalgam Estate, Rewa, on which coffee leaf disease had broken out. A total of 225 immigrants were transferred there from the Public Works Department and employed in unsuccessful efforts to eradicate the disease which was to spell the ruin of Fiji's promising coffee trade. After this, four planters who had seen them at work were encouraged to apply for Indians, and, although the Press maintained its opposition, the planters' boycott was broken.¹

A more important development was at hand. In 1880 the products of Fiji were exhibited at the International Exhibition at Melbourne. Thurston visited Australia to solicit investments in Fiji, and secured several large promises. A period of rapid economic expansion ensued. In May 1880 it was announced that he had persuaded the directors of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company of Sydney to extend their operations to Fiji. Previous attempts had been made

¹

First report on Indian Immigration into Fiji, 31 Dec. 1881, India E.P. Apr. 1882, A.90-95.

to establish profitable sugar mills in Fiji, but they had been unsuccessful for want of capital. Efforts had also been made to induce overseas firms to invest in Fiji, but these had been hampered by a lack of confidence in the commercial prospects of the group. The C.S.R. Company had both the capital and the confidence, and was influenced by the fact that for several years a very large proportion of cane had been destroyed by bad frosts in New South Wales, especially in the Clarence River District, and also by the view that sooner or later Fiji would produce sugar in competition with the Company anyway.¹ The Company agreed to build a mill on the Rewa River which would be capable of producing 500 tons of sugar a month, in time for the crushing season of 1882, and the Government agreed to sell to it 1000 acres of land on the Rewa with the option of buying another 1000 acres elsewhere. Gordon justified these concessions by the colony's urgent need for sugar mills; the experience and capital possessed by the C.S.R. Company; the rival attractions offered to it by Queensland and South Australia; and by the facilities and promise of greater stability offered by this wealthy concern.

1

Fairgrieve (C.S.R. Inspector) to C.S., 31 Oct. 1882, C.S.O. 2506/82; Lowndes (ed.), South Pacific Enterprise, 31.

It would, he predicted, bring about a great increase of wealth, revenue, prosperity and contentment among all inhabitants of the colony.¹ The planters and the Press welcomed the agreement. The Fiji Argus wrote: "The foundation stone of future wealth to this Colony has been laid by Mr. Thurston and the Colonial Company."² It was expected that the Company would help the planters by providing them with loans and buying their cane; there was no intention that they should be displaced. The only criticism was expressed by the Colonial Office, which pointed out that the agreement was a significant exception to Gordon's policy of preventing the alienation of Fijian land.³ The Company bought 928 acres of land at Nausori, Nakadi and Viria and leased more at Navuso. It did not get all its own way by any means. The Government had difficulty in persuading the Fijians to sell the Nausori land and they did not part with all the Company wanted.⁴ Other proposals by the Company concerning land were declined by

¹ Gordon to C.O., no.60, 25 May 1880.

² Fiji Argus, 28 May 1880.

³ C.O. to Gordon, no.28, 16 Aug. 1880.

⁴ C.S. to C.S.R./G.M., 16 Aug. 1880, C.S.O. Outward 1169/81; C.S. to C.S.R./Fiji, 30 Mar. 1881, C.S.O. Outward 412/81.

the Government.¹ Although pressure was certainly put on the Fijians to induce them to part with land,² their interests were still regarded as paramount, even where such an important acquisition to the colony as the C.S.R. Company was concerned.³ The concessions given to the Company, although substantial, were no more than the minimum necessary to persuade it to start in the colony.⁴

The C.S.R. Company launched operations in Fiji with great rapidity. An army of mechanics from Australia began building the large mill at Mausori with materials and equipment brought in the Company's own ships. As a pre-condition of the Company's starting in Fiji, contracts had been negotiated with planters for the supply of cane to the mill. The Company intended most of the cane to be grown by European planters, and by the Fijians under the taxation scheme, but it also proposed to grow some on its own plantations as well, for experimental purposes, to make up the amount required to operate the mill economically,

¹ C.S.O. 2506/82.

² MacGregor to Gordon, 25 Feb. 1882, Stanmore Papers, B.M. 49203.

³ Another large undertaking at this time was that of Stanlake Lee and Company at Navua (later the Fiji Sugar Company), and here, too the Government refused to allow it more land than the Fijians could spare.

⁴ Thurston to Gordon, 12 Aug. 1883, Stanmore Papers, B.M. 49218.

and to provide employment in the off season for the labour required for the crushing season.¹ In 1881, the Company took over the Indians indentured to the Public Works Department. It also began to recruit Fijians, but this was discouraged by the Government, because it was thought it would have had adverse effects on Fijian society.² The Company also chartered ships to bring in Island labourers, to make up the supply of labour, although the Board and General Manager of the Company (Edward Knox) would have preferred to have had nothing to do with the "disagreeable" traffic.³ The Islanders were put to work, clearing, digging and draining the new ground. The result was disastrous, for of 587 Island immigrants indentured within the last six months of 1881, over 220 were dead by 14 September 1882. The Government thereupon prohibited the allotment of Island immigrants to the C.S.R. Company's Rewa Estates.⁴ The Company's directors in Sydney were

¹ C.S.R./G.M. (Knox) to W.F. Parr, 17 Nov. 1881, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book I, 296; C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 25 Jun. 1885, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book II, 652.

² C.S.O. 318/82.

³ C.S.R. Notes on General Manager's Trip to Fiji, 1881, 15-16; C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 21 Oct. 1881, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book I, 252.

⁴ C.S.O. 2185/82; C.S.O. 2455/82.

shocked when they were told of the great mortality and decided never to employ Island labourers again.¹ They were thus placed early in a position of dependence on Indian labour, and they had already applied for 250 Indians for 1882.

In any case, the supply of Island labour would have been inadequate. In 1879 and 1880 there had been enough to meet the requirements of planters, but in 1881 there was a sharp change in the situation. It was revealed that Charles Mitchell, the former Agent-General of Immigration, through a serious error of judgment, had chartered ships only for the number of Islanders ordered by planters by the proper date, not allowing for the great expansion of agricultural activity which was taking place as a result of the influx of overseas capital. He had not reported the possibility of a deficiency of labour, and when this was discovered a shortage of shipping in the Austral-²asian colonies made remedial action impossible. In June 1881 a deputation of planters waited on Governor Des Voeux to represent to him the urgent necessity of obtaining

¹

Fairgrieve (C.S.R. Inspector) to C.S. 31 Oct. 1882, C.S.O. 2506/82; Knox to MacGregor, 22 Aug. 1882, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book II, 38-39.

²

Des Voeux to C.O., no.109, 18 Jun. 1881.

extra labour, in particular by relaxing the restrictions on the engagement of Fijians.¹ On this point, however, Des Voeux was as adamant as Gordon. Only Indians were left and these the planters reluctantly and belatedly ordered. A total of 1200 were requisitioned by 1882. But they were still regarded with great disfavour by the older school of planters, who thought them to be troublesome, litigious, deficient in stamina, above all costly and "a very inferior substitute"² for Islanders. Although the cost of the latter was increasing, due to Government regulations, competition, especially from Queensland, and depopulation, the margin was still in its favour. But many planters found it difficult to meet the initial expense of introducing either. The Indians introduced by the Leonidas had been paid for by instalments spread over five years. In 1880, Gordon, at the request of the planters, had made a similar proposal in respect of Islanders, under which a system of deferred payments would have been financed through a loan floated by the Government. This had been disallowed by the Imperial Government.³ Now,

¹ Fiji Times, 22 Jun. 1881.

² Fiji Argus, 6 Jan. 1882; Fiji Times, 30 Jul. 1881.

³ Gordon to C.O., no.93, 16 Aug. 1880; C.O. to Gordon, no.36, 19 Feb. 1881.

in 1881, Des Voeux submitted a scheme for financing the renewed Indian immigration through a loan to provide for payment by instalment, with the Government to pay about half the total cost of introduction. In advocacy of his proposal, he first pointed to the increased prosperity and revenue which would probably result from the expansion of sugar cultivation and the introduction of Indian labour. Then, echoing his predecessor, he urged it on the grounds that it was in the interests of the Fijians:

Though the expenses of the Colony are of course also growing, they are not doing thus far at a proportionate rate and in any case there is scarcely any object for the application of our funds so important as the provision of an adequate supply of labour. For besides the potent financial reasons which exist elsewhere for the attainment of this end we have here an additional one, that if imported labour cannot be obtained in sufficient quantity, the pressure for "encouragement" to the migration of Fijians to the plantations will become even greater and more difficult to resist than it already is; and what is still more important, the inducement will grow stronger to bribe the native chiefs for the enforced engagement of their people, the probable result being all the evils which have in the past been so graphically, and I believe so truly, described in the despatches of my predecessor.

I have on several occasions expressed my full concurrence with Sir Arthur Gordon in the opinion that the continuance of the present native policy, as carrying with it the only chance of preserving the native race, is essential for any future of the Colony which would be creditable to our rule. As I believe further that to the success of that policy, a supply of imported labour is absolutely necessary, I should earnestly desire the means of securing it

for this reason alone, even if there were not, as there are, strong financial reasons pointing in the same direction.¹

Finally, he pointed to the increasing difficulties of recruiting in the Islands. The Colonial Office considered this proposal to be "effrontery", because of the financial difficulties involved.² Des Voeux was told that, although there was no objection to a resumption of Indian immigration, the general revenue was not to be charged with more than one-third of the cost, and even this proportion had to be defrayed from general revenue without recourse to a loan. Applicants for Indian labour were to pay two-thirds of the cost immediately they were allotted.³ An earlier proposal of Des Voeux's for a loan of £100,000 for medical services and industrial training for the Fijians had already been rejected.⁴ Des Voeux was persistent in his efforts to induce the British Government to agree to ambitious financial schemes but it was just as firm in refusing them.

¹ Des Voeux to C.O., no.109, 18 Jun. 1881.

² Minutes on above on C.O. 384/133.

³ C.O. to Des Voeux, 29 Sep. 1881.

⁴ Des Voeux to C.O., no.25, 15 Feb. 1881, C.O. 83/25; Des Voeux, My Colonial Service, II, 21-23.

This decision of the Colonial Office regarding the renewed Indian immigration was to have important repercussions in Fiji. Many of those smaller planters who had applied for Indians under the anticipated system of deferred payments immediately withdrew their applications. But a deputation representing the largest applicants informed the Governor that they were prepared to pay two-thirds on allotment, as they had already invested so much in their plantations that they stood to lose heavily if labour could not be obtained. The C.S.R. representative even offered to increase the Company's requisition if the Government would telegraph for Indians at once. ¹ Although there was no significant decrease in the numbers requisitioned, the number of applicants fell from thirty to nine. The Planters' Association, the Chamber of Commerce and the Press deplored the British Government's decision. The Government was accused of assisting the capitalist and wealthy planter with subsidised Indian labour at the expense of the smaller planter, who had to be content with unsubsidised and mismanaged Island labour, of which only a quarter of that required for 1881 was introduced. ² More

¹ Fiji Times, 9 Nov. 1881.

² Fiji Argus, 11 Nov. 1881, Fiji Times, 24 and 31 Dec. 1881, 7, 14 and 25 Jan. 1882.

was to come. The Governor announced in December 1881 that the Government could assume no further responsibility for introducing Island labourers. The trade had become too speculative and private firms would not tender to introduce them at a fixed rate. Planters were told that they should get together and charter ships at their own risk, which many could not afford to do.¹ The small planter was thus deprived not only of Indian labour but of Island labour as well.

Throughout these years 1881-85 the labour shortage continued. It was, of course, aggravated by the large influx of capital to the sugar industry. In January 1882 Des Voeux tried to discourage the introduction of further capital because the supply of labour was insufficient for existing enterprises.² The Levuka correspondent of the Australasian wrote in September 1883: "Throughout Fiji the all-absorbing topic of conversation is 'labour supply'."³ Other sources were suggested, including South India, China, Malaya, Java - even Germany and Ireland. The Press and smaller planters continued their strong advocacy of

¹ Fiji Times, 24 Dec. 1881; C.S.O. 2974/82.

² Des Voeux to C.O., no.2, 6 Jan. 1882.

³ Fiji Times, 10 Nov. 1885.

relaxation of the restrictions on Fijian labour and prophesized that the planters would be ruined if this were not done. But, instead, the Government, in response to resolutions of the Council of Chiefs, tightened the restrictions by the Native Labour Ordinance of 1883.¹ For two years this was administered most strictly and cut off the supply of Fijian labour.² Des Voeux was even stricter in his policy towards Fijian labour than Gordon had been. There was still another difficulty for the planters. The cost of Island labourers could not now be estimated in advance, since it depended on the cost of each individual shipment. Sometimes it was as high as £40 or £50 a head, and in one case it reached £100. In 1883 the average was probably about £25, which was less than the cost of Indian labourers.³ Moreover, the islanders who were obtained were of lower physical standard and stamina than those introduced in earlier years. All this meant that the smaller planters could afford neither Indians nor islanders, unless they were allowed to pay for them by instalments. In the three years 1882-84, only

¹ C.P. 1/83 (Fiji Royal Gazette 1883, 1).

² Fiji Times, 12 Aug. 1885; MacGregor to Gordon, 21 Jul. 1884, Stanmore Papers, B.M. 49203.

³ Indian Immigration Report for 1883. (India E.P. Jun. 1885, A.17-19.)

ten planters took Indian immigrants and of these, two - the C.S.R. Company and Stanlake Lee and Company - took over half.¹ Even then the C.S.R. Company did not get the numbers they wanted, since the emigration agent in India was unable to complete his requisitions in the years 1883 and 1884. In February 1883, Fairgrieve, the Company's Inspector, wrote this alarming letter to the Government:

As Your Excellency is aware my Company do not again intend to make further importations of Polynesian immigrants as it is satisfied that, owing to the very inferior stamina of the Island labourers recruited it is almost folly to do so. It has therefore made application to you for a large number of immigrants from India, some 600, and unless they, as also those applied for by others, arrive in good time, say by the end of April or the beginning of May, my Company along with other employers shall be placed in such a position that the question whether the industry in which we are now engaged be worth carrying on much longer without some assured labour supply will have to occupy our attention. Indeed, I may say at once, that unless this very important question can be answered in some satisfactory manner

1

Of 3995 Indian immigrants employed in 1884, 1723 were on C.S.R. Company plantations, 636 with Stanlake Lee and Company, 294 with the Deuba Estate Sugar Company, 275 with Sharpe, Fletcher and Company, and 187 with the Rewa Sugar Company. The smallest number on any sugar plantation was 74. All were employed on sugar plantations, except 109 who were on the Rabi Plantation Company's copra plantation, 43 on the Mago Island Company's coffee plantation, 12 who were domestic servants, 16 who worked for the Government in the police, gaol and lighthouses and 1 who was a store servant. (Indian Immigration Report for 1884 - India E.P. Sep. 1886, A.13-14.)

I shall advise my Company to transfer all its interests to some more favourable quarter.¹

In the same letter he suggested that Chinese or South Indians be introduced also. The Government was not willing to agree to a system of penal sanctions for Chinese labourers² and the Chinese Government forbade them to leave.³ The proposal to introduce South Indians received some support in the colony, particularly from those with experience of them in Ceylon,⁴ and an attempt was made to secure some in 1883. The Mauritius Agent in Madras, to whom the enquiry was directed, could not obtain even the numbers required for his own colony.⁵ It was fortunate, then, that the shortage of recruits in North India came to an end in 1885, when the Calcutta Agent made up the deficiency of previous years. Because of favourable recruiting conditions, the labour problem of the larger planters and companies was solved for many years to come.

¹ Fairgrieve to C.S., 15 Feb. 1883, enc. to Des Voeux to C.O., no.24, 5 Mar. 1883.

² C.S.O. 1572/83; C.S.O. Outward 1060/83.

³ C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 18 Jul. 1888, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book IV, 387.

⁴ C.S.O. 538/84.

⁵ C.O. to Des Voeux, 9 Apr. 1883.

By 1885, however, the fate of the smaller planters was sealed. Des Voeux had made several attempts to help them, by proposing loans to assist Indian and Island immigration under a system of deferred payments. He pointed out to the Colonial Office the advantages in the retention of the class of small planters, who, unlike the richer, absentee proprietors, had more than "a purely moneymaking interest in the Colony."¹ But although the Colonial Office was sympathetic to this argument, it rejected all Des Voeux's plans on financial grounds. Finally, in 1885, on the pleading of Thurston, who was then in England, it reluctantly approved a scheme for the financing of a scheme of deferred payments for 500 Indians from general revenue, with a maximum of thirty for each applicant. It was expected that the whole 500 would be allotted, especially to the copra planters. But the assistance came too late to save them. At the end of 1884, the great world depression reached Fiji, and credit restrictions hit many planters who had for years been living on money borrowed at 10%. They were caught between the fall in prices and the accumulation of interest and, consequently, were unable

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Des Voeux to C.O., no.12, 12 Feb. 1883.

to take advantage of the scheme of deferred payments. Of the 500 Indians introduced, only 20 or 30 were allotted to the small planters; the rest were taken by the companies. It was a disappointment to Des Voeux and Thurston.¹ Indian labourers were, it seemed, to be the preserve of the sugar producers.

The price of sugar fell too in 1884, and there was severe competition from European beet-sugar transported to Australia in state-subsidised steamers. Sharpe, Fletcher and Company at Navua, which employed 518 immigrants, collapsed. There was serious danger that the other sugar companies would have to withdraw from Fiji, if prices fell much lower. By 1885, the C.S.R. Company had invested over £500,000 in Fiji, had advanced large sums to planters and, although sugar exports had increased greatly, was making little or no profit on its operations there.² It could buy sugar cheaper from Java than it could grow it in Fiji, and it could grow it cheaper in Queensland than in Fiji.³ MacGregor wrote to Gordon in January, 1886:

¹ Thurston to C.O., no.166, 23 Oct. 1885.

² MacGregor to C.O., no.61, 17 Apr. 1885.

³ Knox to Parr, 5 Aug. 1886, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book III, 277; Knox to Tucker and Orr, 15 May 1886, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book III, 218.

"Were the affairs of the Colonial Sugar Company to become crooked, the Colony would utterly collapse. The position is very serious."¹ It was fortunate, therefore, that the Company, under the able direction of Edward Knox and his managers in Fiji, with modern methods, a large-scale organisation spread over a wide variety of undertakings, and ample financial backing, survived the fall of prices. Moreover, it continued to acquire land on leasehold, and to expand the area of cane grown on its own plantations. The European planters had been unable to fulfil their promises to keep the mill supplied, because of inexperience, because they paid high rentals and had borrowed money at high rates of interest, and because the price paid for cane (ten shillings a ton) was unremunerative. (Even the Company could not grow it at that price in 1884.)² Knox explained in a report:

It is daily becoming more evident that to grow cane successfully in Fiji requires more money than the smaller planter can, as a rule, command, the cost of introducing labor, clearing and draining the land, and purchasing horses, requiring a large outlay before any return can be received; and the margin between the cost of cultivation and the price paid

¹ MacGregor to Gordon, 21 Jan. 1886, Stanmore Papers, B.M. 49203.

² Except at Navuso, the cost far exceeded 12/6 a ton. (C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 12 Jun. 1885, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book II, 639.)

by us not being sufficient to permit of the necessary capital being borrowed at a high rate of interest.¹

The Company had other objects too in acquiring the leasehold of more Fijian land: to eliminate the possibility of competition from any other mill on the Rewa, and to provide employment all the year round for the labour it needed for the crushing season.²

The Nausori mill had commenced crushing in 1882.³ A second mill was begun in 1883 at Rarawai (Ba) as a joint venture with the New Zealand Sugar Company, in which the C.S.R. Company and the associated Victoria Sugar Company had a controlling interest.⁴ The Ba enterprise was more successful than the Rewa one, because the drier climate was better for sugar growing. In 1888, it was absorbed by the C.S.R. Company. By the end of the decade, the C.S.R. Company grew the bulk of its sugar on its own plantations, using Indian labour, and the independent European sugar planter was no longer an important factor

¹ C.S.R. Notes on General Manager's Trip to Fiji, 1884, 17.

² Knox to Parr, 17 Nov. 1881, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book I, 296; C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 4 Feb. 1886, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book III, 118-20.

³ An ancillary mill was operated at Viria for about ten years.

⁴ Lowndes (ed.), South Pacific Enterprise, 27.

in sugar production in Fiji. There had been several other smaller sugar mills in Fiji, but the only ones which survived the collapse of sugar prices in 1884 were those at Tamanua, Navua (owned by the Fiji Sugar Company and started in 1883), at Penang, Ra (started by the Chalmers Brothers in 1878 and later transferred to Frazer and Company), and at Holmshurst, Taveuni (owned by the Bank of New Zealand Estates Company).

Thus, within twelve years from cession, the pattern of agriculture and the structure of the European community in Fiji had changed radically. Many of the older settlers had left the colony, while the sugar companies had brought in artisans, overseers and clerks. These changes were not consciously intended by Gordon and Des Voeux; they were products of economic circumstances beyond their control. As Des Voeux explained later: "Subsequent experience, however, convinced me that want of capital and the market conditions would have precluded success on the part of most of the planters, even if all the available labour in the Colony had been exploited for their benefit, in utter disregard of the native welfare."¹ This result was not welcomed by Gordon, Des Voeux and the Colonial Office, for

¹ Des Voeux, My Colonial Service, I, 348.

although the planters were opponents of the Government's Fijian policy, the more substantial of them were regarded as a more desirable class to have in the colony than the absentee capitalist concerns with their economic power and impersonal ruthlessness. But it was the latter which could provide the revenue the Government so badly needed, while dispensing with Fijian and Island labour. It was the small planters who made the greatest demands upon the Government for financial assistance and for important changes in the Fijian policy. That class of independent planters with ample means and experience which Gordon and Des Voeux would have liked did not exist. The choice was between the solid companies and the small planters who needed assistance or were a nuisance to the Government. In a field bounded by drastic economy and fiscal caution imposed by the Treasury in London, on the one side, and Gordon's Fijian policy on the other, the victory went to those who provided the most and asked the least. It is true that the companies were given assistance with respect to Indian immigration which, unlike Island immigration, was subsidised by the Government. But there were advantages in this for the colony, because the Indian would stay for a nominal ten years and the Islander only for three. Moreover, Indian immigration was considered almost as a

humanitarian measure, and Island immigration as an evil. Nevertheless, Gordon and Des Voeux had tried to help the smaller planters to bring in both, Islanders and Indians, under the system of deferred payments, a concession which the large planters and companies did not require. Thurston, too, tried to introduce a system of deferred payments for Islanders, but the mercantile houses refused to become security for the planters, and the Government would not accept land as security.¹ Thus, financial factors were decisive both in London and in Fiji. Indian immigration had been a pre-condition of large-scale capital investment in Fiji, and in turn more Indian immigration resulted from that investment. It quickly brought about profound and unintended changes in the economic structure of the colony. These changes were to affect the conditions of employment and the lives of the Indian immigrants, and the whole course of the history of the Indian community in Fiji.

However, economic expansion and Indian immigration were only adjuncts of what were to the Government more important policies. Gordon's main object - the preservation of Fijian society - was, despite his fears, successfully

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Thurston to C.O., no.24, 29 Feb. 1892.

achieved. His successors, Sir William Des Voeux (1880-1885), Sir Charles Mitchell (1887-1888) and Sir John Thurston (1888-1897) were in accord with his policy and it was substantially unchanged during their time. It did not, however, escape the financial stringency imposed by the British Government and by economic depression. Only the negative side was emphasised. Control of land alienation and preservation of traditional social structure and customs did not involve the Government in expense, and the taxation scheme raised substantial sums in revenue. But medical services and industrial training - that growth of civilization which Gordon had anticipated - had to be sacrificed. Des Voeux did not accept this gracefully. If he was vain, sensitive, arrogant, vacillating and unwell, he was also intelligent and humane, and sound on the important questions of Fijian and land policy. The errors made during his term were errors of omission rather than commission. The same was true of Thurston's term.¹ He took office at a time when retrenchment was imperative and when there was great danger that the sugar industry would collapse. The late eighties were years of great

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Sir Charles Mitchell was Governor for a short time only. He agreed with the Fijian policy and made no changes of importance.

stringency and Thurston managed the finances of the colony to the satisfaction of the Colonial Office. The Fijian policy which he had helped to create and to preserve under other Governors, he now maintained intact and jealously guarded against modification. Thurston was a strong, hard, and practical man with a great knowledge of the Fijians and respect for their customs. In his period the privileges of the chiefs were maintained (and abused by some) but the villages decayed. Admittedly, he could not have afforded expensive health measures, but the fact remains that he was more static in his conception of Fijian welfare than either Gordon or Des Voeux or his successor O'Brien. If Gordon could have remained in Fiji, his Fijian policy might have retained its positive character.

The most disturbing fact of all was a sustained decline in the numbers of the Fijians. The reasons for this still remain debatable. One important cause may have been the changes in the demographic structure of the population brought about by the measles epidemic of 1875. Others included the changes in Fijian society occasioned by the cessation of warfare and "club law" and the introduction of new diseases, the spread of which was assisted by the poor sanitation of villages. The decline mystified and worried Thurston and his successors. Gordon had

preserved Fijian society in an attempt to prevent depopulation, but the Fijians were still decreasing as fast as if he had done the opposite. A Commission was appointed in 1893 to study the question, and it produced a long list of causes and remedies. It was apparent, however, that, while Thurston was Governor, no changes in the Fijian policy would be made. By the time of his death, that policy had come under considerable criticism in the Colonial Office and there was a feeling that the communal system had outlived its usefulness. From the point of view of Indian immigration, this continued decline of the Fijians was important, because it led to a growing advocacy and encouragement of the Indian as a permanent settler. In the last decade of the century, Indian immigration and settlement came to be increasingly accepted and regarded as a positive benefit by the Europeans (with the exception of the small storekeeper class which already by 1887 had begun to feel the pinch of competition from Indian hawkers).¹

The Fijians were, however, more critical. There are few recorded references to their views on Indian immigration and none of these are favourable to it.² There were in

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C.S.O. 3227/87.

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The question of Fijian-Indian relations on the individual and local level will be considered in Chapter XI.

this period two political expressions of Fijian opposition to Indian settlement. The first was a most significant debate held at the Great Council of Chiefs in May 1888, where opposition was expressed by several speakers to Indian settlement in Fiji and especially to Indians wandering into and living in Fijian villages. The debate was introduced by a commoner who complained that the Indians "in course of time will bring about a change in the manners and customs of our land" and "will stamp us out". Another asserted: "We shall be blotted out by the number of these people who keep coming. Let them go back to their country when they have finished their work." One Roko said, significantly: "It is said that they are brought here because we do not allow our men to go to work," to which a colleague replied: "Very well. Let us allow our men to go to work." Finally a resolution was passed which complained of the activities of ex-indentured Indians and asked the Government to explain the future position of the Indians in Fiji. In his reply, Thurston justified Indian immigration on the grounds that there was surplus land and insufficient labour in Fiji, stated that the Indians were unlikely to increase rapidly even if they settled in any numbers, that they would be useful neighbours to the Fijians, and that they would settle in communities under

the control of the Government, with their own headmen.¹
(Thurston's expectations were not entirely achieved, for the Indians did increase rapidly, and no headmen were appointed.) There is no record whether the Fijian chiefs were satisfied with this explanation. The matter rested until 1902 when another Great Council of Chiefs was discussing the question of taxing Pacific Islanders resident in Fiji. One Roko remarked that "the Indians should go back to India when they have finished their engagement", and, significantly, no mention of Indians was made in the resolution asking the Government to impose taxation on Islanders resident in Fiji.² It is evident that Indian settlement was never accepted as desirable by the representatives of the Fijians.

By 1890, the colony was over the worst of the depression, although produce prices and revenues remained low. In that year, the C.S.R. Company extended its operations to Vanua Levu. One of its Australian mills was dismantled because of poor yields, and re-erected at Labasa. Fiji was selected because of the political opposition

1

Proceedings of Council of Chiefs, May 1888. The full texts of the Resolution and Reply are reproduced in Appendix H.

2

Proceedings of Council of Chiefs, July 1902.

in Queensland to coloured labour.¹ But following the drop in corn prices brought about by American exports, there was a great increase in European beet sugar production, stimulated by bounties, and sugar prices fell again.² Fiji was affected. In 1896 Frazer and Company at Penang and the Rewa Sugar Company at Koronivia both passed into the hands of liquidators who, however, continued to operate the plantations.³ The mill at Penang was operated throughout the rest of the indenture period by the Melbourne Trust Company. In 1896, the Taveuni Sugar Company finally closed its mill at Holmshurst and its indentured labourers were transferred elsewhere.⁴ The Fiji Sugar Company at Navua, the second largest enterprise, had never paid a dividend by 1896, and was able to continue only by buying cane from small Indian contractors.⁵ Its investments

¹ C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 29 Feb. and 14 Mar. 1888, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book, IV, 206-8 and 233.

² Geerligs, The World's Cane Sugar Industry - Past and Present, 26.

³ At Koronivia the City of Melbourne Bank, and at Penang the Melbourne Trust Company (C.S.O. 3329/96.

⁴ C.S.O. 4190/95.

⁵ Murray (Manager, Fiji Sugar Company) to Commission on the Practice of Indentured Labourers Working on Other than their Own Plantations, 2 Jan. 1897, C.S.O. 337/97.

totalled £120,000 by the end of the century. But the C.S.R. Company was by far the strongest in the field: by 1900, it had invested at least £1,117,726 in Fiji and produced about 82% of the total export of sugar.¹ But even this company, which had extensive interests in Australia also, threatened in 1895 that it might collapse unless a better class of Indian labourer were introduced and no burdensome restrictions placed on their employment.² In the absence of published, separate figures of profits, it is impossible to know how seriously to take such pessimistic statements, which were intended to influence Government policy. It was stated in 1898 that it had paid an annual dividend of 10% for several years, but it is unlikely that much of this profit was derived from Fiji. Sugar production was much less profitable in this decade than it was to be in the following one.

Indian immigration averaged about one thousand a year in the 1890's and the bulk of these went to the C.S.R. Company. Pacific Islanders were still being introduced by private arrangement between planters and shipowners and were employed by the smaller planters, growing fruit,

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O'Brien to C.O., no.62, 15 Aug. 1900.

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C.S.R./Fiji to C.S., 15 Oct. 1895, C.P. 15/96.

coconuts and sugar cane. By 1899 there were only 103 of them under indenture. Few Fijians were employed. "The Fijian is scarcely to be reckoned with as a factor in the labour market," wrote the Fiji Times.¹ For all purposes connected with sugar cultivation, except possibly the preliminary clearing of the ground, the superiority of the Indian had been recognised.² The Indian was hardier, could be obtained in unlimited numbers and was more profitable in the long run. But it was not a full acceptance by any means. The smaller planter preferred the Islander because of his "submissiveness to authority" and "gentler nature", and because he required a lower capital outlay, could be allotted in smaller numbers and would mix with the Fijians.³ One of the principal objections to the Indian was the inclusion of the relatively unproductive women.⁴ The C.S.R. Company did not regard the Indian as wholly satisfactory. It preferred the Fijian, for cane cutting especially, but could not get sufficient of them.

¹ Fiji Times, 28 Apr. 1894.

² O'Brien to C.O., no.92, 30 Sep. 1897.

³ Fiji Times, 18 Jan. 1896 and 13 Nov. 1901.

⁴ C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 3 Aug. 1887, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book IV, 62.

It repeatedly complained of the poor physique and laziness of many of the Indians introduced. The Government had no objection to employers bringing in other labourers under private contract (except Pacific Islanders, who were subject to control), provided there were guarantees of repatriation and no penal sanctions (for the making of the contracts could not be supervised as in India). Knox now rejected the idea of bringing in Chinese, because they had not worked well in Queensland, except under contract and then they were expensive.¹ But in April 1894 the Company introduced 305 Japanese labourers as an experiment. They were under private agreement and had their own headmen. The Government had no control over their treatment, and the agreements were not enforceable in the courts. Significantly, they were to cost more than the Indians, for it was anticipated that they would be better workers. The Fiji Times spoke of the "gradual cessation of Indian immigration" should the Japanese prove satisfactory.² Fifty of the newcomers were sent to the Rewa, 50 to Ba and the rest to Wailevu, Labasa. The result was disastrous. Sickness and

¹ C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 18 Jul. 1888, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book, IV, 387.

² Fiji Times, 28 Apr. 1894.

death decimated them. Eighty-seven died in nine months (69) of beriberi). They were repatriated in February 1895 and 38 more died on the return voyage.¹ Moreover, they had given less satisfaction as workers than the Indians.² Thus, like the sugar producers in other British colonies, the Company remained dependent on Indian labour. The planters in Hawaii introduced Chinese, Japanese and Portuguese (but were denied Indians by the Government of India), leading to the creation of a more diverse society than in Fiji. Except for the disaster with the Japanese, Fiji might have had a similar experience.

There were two important developments in sugar production in Fiji in this decade. The first was the decision of the C.S.R. Company in 1892 to lease certain of its developed plantations to Europeans, especially its former overseers, on very reasonable terms. By the end of 1894 six plantations in the Rewa and Ba districts had been transferred. The second development was the emergence of the Indian cane farmer selling his cane to the sugar companies. In 1891, Knox suggested that the Company should

¹ Indian Immigration Report for 1894 (C.P. 24/95).

² C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Rarawai, 17 and 23 Aug. 1894, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book, Rarawai 1893-5, 316 and 318.

lease land to ex-indentured Indians for growing cane. The Company's officers in Fiji opposed this plan as impracticable, but Knox pointed out the advantages to be derived from leasing out the Company's lands:

By doing this we divide our risk with others, reduce the quantity of capital we have to invest, and settle a population on the land who would always be available for work in or about the mill and on the plantation. A few years ago I would have argued as you have done, but now see plainly that it is a mistake to endeavour to concentrate all the work and all the risks in our own hands, and I am therefore disposed to go back to the system on which we originally started in New South Wales, and which has here, and to a certain extent in Queensland, been made an established success. There will no doubt be considerable difficulties in arranging for the settlement of coolies on the plantations, but these will be got over in time, and we can surely take for granted that we are as capable of surmounting them as are the Mauritius planters, who have adopted this method to a very large extent.¹

By 1894, 300 acres of cane were being grown on the Rewa by Indians, on land leased from the C.S.R. Company or from the Fijians.² There was a bigger development at Navua. In 1893, disease caused a failure of the banana crops there, and the Fiji Sugar Company entered into contracts with European and Indian farmers for the supply of cane.

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C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 23 Dec. 1891, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book I, 92-3. The Company's officers were well informed about conditions in other sugar-producing areas, such as British Guiana, Hawaii, Java and Mauritius.

2

C.S.O. 3839/93.

By 1897 there were on the Navua 1250 acres under cane cultivation by Indians, 750 acres by Europeans and 1000 acres by the Fiji Sugar Company itself.¹ This was a pointer to the future in Fiji, although for the present the C.S.R. Company continued to grow most of its cane itself or buy it from European planters rather than from Indian farmers.

In the last years of the century there were signs of a close to the long period of stagnation. World trade was expanding rapidly and prices were rising. The advent of Joseph Chamberlain at the Colonial Office in 1895 saw the initiation of a policy of active imperial development in tune with the economic conditions of the time. In Fiji, the death of Thurston and the arrival of his able and vigorous successor, Sir George O'Brien, marked a turning point. O'Brien was instructed to devote particular attention to the inter-related questions of economic development and the decline of the Fijians. As funds became available through the increase in the value of exports, vigorous efforts were made to improve the Fijian housing, sanitation and water supplies and to provide medical facilities, including three provincial hospitals. The Fijian Regulations

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C.S.O. 337/93. This question is considered further in Chapter VIII.

were revised, mainly with a view to stimulating the commoners to greater individual effort. The aim of O'Brien's policy was formulated in the same terms as Gordon's - the preservation of the Fijian race¹ - but he had more financial means at his disposal, because of the wealth brought to the colony by the export of sugar which in the nineties contributed 94% of the value of the exports of Fiji. The sugar industry was not only the mainstay of the colony in those difficult years but also the means for the positive measures taken by O'Brien to arrest the decline of the Fijians. Without the extensive investments of the Australian sugar companies, particularly the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, and without Indian immigrant labour, those measures could not have been taken.

At the turn of the century, the C.S.R. Company prepared to extend its operations in Fiji. A new sugar mill, the largest in the Southern Hemisphere, was built at Lautoka. The opening of the Lautoka land commenced in 1900. By 1903 the Company's investments in Fiji exceeded £1,400,000. An increased supply of Indian labour was necessary and in 1901 the Company sent Thomas Hughes to India to investigate the prospect of this. Following his recommendations, an

¹

O'Brien to C.O., no.62, 15 Aug. 1900.

additional agency was opened in Madras by the Fiji Government. In 1903, the bounties on beet sugar came to an end by international agreement, and sugar prices rose greatly in the following years. Although the Company did not open any more mills, its output soared. Most of the sugar was exported to refineries in Australia and New Zealand. New areas were opened up to cane growing, especially on the western side of Viti Levu - at Nadi and Nadroga - to serve the mill at Lautoka. The Company continued to divest itself of the actual growing, by leasing out its plantations to Europeans, mostly former overseers, who would work the land and labour to better advantage when they had a personal interest in the plantations. Moreover, in this way the Company faced less risk of loss or political attack, and needed a lower capital outlay. The Government welcomed the change, not only because immigrants worked more contentedly and with less friction on the plantations of the private planters, but also because of the decentralisation of power which would result. By the end of the decade, the typical sugar-cane plantation in Fiji was no longer the large estate, divided into separate plantations in the charge of overseers; it was a plantation, generally of about 600 to 1000 acres, owned or leased by a private European planter, with considerable experience

of sugar-cane cultivation, and employing 60-100 Indian immigrants. He sent his cane to the Company's mill on the Company's railway system and the Company still exercised some control over him; some planters were in debt to the Company. In addition, the C.S.R. Company bought cane from a large number of Indian farmers, who cultivated one acre to 200 acres. A few of these employed Indian, Fijian or Island labour, and three or four had Indian immigrants indentured to them. Where the Company leased land to Indians, this was done gradually, and the areas leased were outside blocks which could be detached from the rest of the land under cultivation without inconvenience. Knox did not want to interfere with the plantation system until the tenant farmer system had proved itself.¹ Although both European and Indian farmers expressed their dissatisfaction at the price the Company paid for cane, particularly the planters on the Rewa where the yields were lower, most were prosperous in this period.² This

¹ C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Lautoka, 20 Nov. 1901, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book, Lautoka 1901-2, 8.

² Even the Company did not make more than an average profit of 4% on the Rewa in the previous ten years. In fact, despite the complaints in the Press, some planters did extremely well; others were not so successful. (C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 29 Jul. 1912, C.S.R./Fiji Private Letter Books, Head Office to Nausori, 1912.)

prosperity rested on a basis of cheap Indian labour, although it should be remembered that Fiji sugar was competing with sugar from Java, where the costs of production were even lower.

In 1905, the Fiji Sugar Company at Navua was acquired by a syndicate, headed by B.T. Rogers of Vancouver, and a new company, the Vancouver-Fiji Sugar Company, was formed. A new mill was opened at Tamanua, which was more efficient and had a much greater capacity than the one it replaced. The Company reversed the previous policy of encouraging the small Indian grower (of whom there were 600 to 700 in 1905) and set out to grow as much of its own cane as possible. Several new estates were opened up and large numbers of immigrants were introduced. The Indian settlers on the Navua were now in a much less favourable position than were those on the Rewa, for the terms offered for the purchase of cane, and for assistance in ploughing, draining and cutting were not as good as they had been previously. In 1908, most of the Indian settlers on the Navua were not making any money at all from their cane and were in debt to storekeepers. The Company's policy was a hard one.

In this period, there was a diversification in the employment of Indian immigrants.¹ In 1898, all Indian

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There were 6 employers in 1891, 24 in 1903, 50 in 1907, and 64 in 1908.

immigrants had been employed on sugar-cane plantations, apart from 14 on a tobacco plantation at Nadroga, but in the following year the copra planters asked the Government to introduce Indians suitable for work on their plantations.¹ A beginning was made in 1901 when a copra planter took some semi-aboriginal Indians.² The price of copra almost doubled in the decade before the First World War, and this, combined with the lower cost of introduction made possible by the transport of immigrants by steamer, enabled other planters to employ Indians. A large number of new planters started up. In 1904, the Planters' Association of Fiji and the Suva Chamber of Commerce asked the Government to agree to a system of deferred payments for immigrants. Although similar proposals had been rejected twenty years before, the finances of the colony had improved since then, and a scheme was adopted in 1905. Thirty was to be the maximum number of immigrants allowed to each applicant under the scheme, and they were to be paid for in five annual instalments.³ It was a great

¹ C.S.O. 4088/99.

² Indian Immigration Report for 1901 (C.P. 20/02).

³ C.P. 1/05; Indian Immigration Report for 1905 (C.P. 24/06).

help to the employers, particularly to the copra planters, because of the time it took for coconut trees to bear.

In addition to work on sugar-cane and copra plantations, immigrants were employed in the cultivation of tea, rubber and tobacco, in dairy-farming and in a wide variety of other occupations, including domestic service, gardening and even clerical and police work. There was thus more scope for immigrants with special qualifications. By 1916 only two-thirds of the Indians under indenture were on sugar-cane plantations.

The increasing demand for Indian labour from the smaller planters was due also to the scarcity of Fijian and Island labour. The continued decline in the numbers of the Fijians until 1905, and their increasing income from the rents of land leased to Europeans and Indians made it increasingly difficult to induce them to engage for service.¹ It was becoming harder, too, to obtain Island labour.² This was still recruited by private agency, with a Government licence, and a Government agent to accompany the vessel. In 1905, in order to give assistance to the smaller planters, a system of deferred payment was introduced.

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Major to C.O., no.62, 19 Apr. 1909, Cd. 5194 (1910), 60.

²

C.P. 1/05.

From 1912 recruiting in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate was prohibited, and the introduction of Islanders into Fiji came to an end. This event was regretted both by the Government and planters.¹ It resulted in a further increase in the employment of Indian immigrants, particularly on coconut plantations in the Lau, Savu Savu and Cakaudrove districts.²

The Indian was not regarded as an ideal labourer by any means. Many of the new employers found difficulty in managing him, because of language difficulties and inexperience of his customs and temperament. This problem was accentuated with the arrival of the South Indians. The first immigrants from Madras in 1903 gave great dissatisfaction to the planters. The overseers made no attempt to learn their languages; instead, the Madrasis had to learn Hindustani or at least the version of it spoken by the overseers. (With the employment of multi-lingual sirdars, the difficulties decreased.) Their physique and performance in the field were also below the average North Indian's. One reason was the fact that, because of their late arrival, they were put on to cane cutting immediately

¹ C.P. 30/13.

² Indian Immigration Report for 1914 (C.P. 20/15).

on arrival; after a year or so, the overseers spoke more favourably of them. The Company had to recruit in Madras again in 1905, and, had Madrasis not been available, it would have turned to the Solomons and New Hebrides. Most of the employers in Fiji preferred the North Indians for the reasons given above, although the South Indians were considered more docile and adaptable. But when, in 1912, the Calcutta agent suggested that emigration to Fiji should be confined to Madras in future, the proposal was emphatically declined.

By the First World War the continuance of Indian immigration had become a matter of great importance not only for the sugar planters, as it had always been, but for others as well. The economy was adjusted to a regular influx of indentured Indian labour. But the Indian was wanted by the planters as a labourer only, and was little appreciated as a settler. To the planter, the unindentured Indian was, at best, a nuisance, and, at worst, a competitor, who picked the eyes out of the land available for leasing and, with his frugality and industry, was a potential threat to cane prices. As early as 1903, there was unrest among planters who believed that the C.S.R. Company intended to replace the European planter with the small Indian farmer, who could accept a lower price for

cane. Some planters wanted a law passed to forbid Indians to produce cane except as paid labour.¹ Actually, the companies were not, at this stage, pursuing a policy of replacing the European cane planters. The organisation of sugar growing was adjusted to the experienced European planter and indentured Indian labour; in the absence of comprehensive arrangements for supervision (as were developed later), the small Indian farmer was not as efficient.

The European country store-keepers felt Indian competition even more than the cane planters did, and there were complaints for many years in the Press about the competition offered by Indian store-keepers and hawkers who travelled up the rivers in boats. In 1903, the matter was discussed by the Suva Chamber of Commerce, but this body refused to take any action, on the grounds that it would be difficult to prohibit such trading, that a restriction of Indian rights would damage the colony's recruiting prospects, and that the harm done thereby to the general trading and planting interests in the colony would far outweigh that to individual retail traders.² In fact, the larger European trading firms benefited from the

¹ Fiji Times, 11 Feb., 4 Apr. and 23 May 1903.

² Fiji Times, 8 Apr. 1903.

activities of the Indian store-keepers and hawkers, and could afford to adopt such a statesmanlike attitude, at the expense of the small European store-keepers. In 1905, some of the candidates for election to the Legislative Council referred to Indian competition, and several urged the imposition of restrictions against Indians, a proposal which Governor Im Thurn publicly deplored, because of the overall benefit to the colony of the Indians.¹ But, within a few years, most of the European country store-keepers had been driven out of business.²

In this period, the Government felt that the worth of the unindentured Indian was not adequately appreciated in the colony. About 1912, however, there was a marked change in the situation. This was brought about mainly by the alarming accounts brought back from India by Thomas Hughes, who reported a decrease in the supply of recruits, growing agitation against the indentured labour system, and increasing official obstruction and opposition. The C.S.R. Company devoted more attention to retaining time-expired Indians in the country, and employing them as labourers or settling them on the land. In 1912, as an

¹ C.P. 1/05.

² Fiji Times, 18 Apr. 1912.

experiment, it divided Vucimaca plantation, in the Rewa District, into small holdings of about four acres of improved cane land, for leasing to Indians to grow cane. The holdings were rapidly taken up.¹ At the same time, the Company offered more employment to unindentured Indians, although in the past it had made no effort to encourage them by offering high wages, because this would have had an unsettling effect on the indentured labourers,² and because it considered them to be unreliable workers.² The Vancouver-Fiji Sugar Company also began to settle Indians on 6 acre plots in 1912.³ In 1914, the C.S.R. Company complained to the Government that too many people were returning to India, and urged that it was of the utmost importance to stem that drain on the country's resources. Although it fought hard for the retention of the indentured labour system, because it stood to lose financially, the Company had, nevertheless, a reserve course of action - to lease out its lands to Indian settlers

¹ Indian Immigration Report for 1912 (C.P. 29/13).

² Hughes, Labour for Fiji, (report) enc. to C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 28 Mar. 1911, C.S.R./Fiji Private Letter Books, H.O. to Nausori, 1906-11.

³ C.S.R./Fiji to C.S.R./G.M. 29 Jul. 1912. C.S.R./Fiji Private Letter Books, Nausori to H.O., 1912.

and buy cane from them. Its interests were not so vitally bound up with the system as were those of the private planters. To the latter, imported labour was an absolute necessity, since there was not enough other labour in the country. There was talk about the possibility of introducing labour from China or Japan. The C.S.R. Company did not associate itself with this move, because it considered that it would be impolitic to disregard the political opposition to coloured labour in Australia and New Zealand. For the same reason, it was unlikely that the British Government would agree, at least while Indian labour was obtainable, and certainly not to penal sanctions.¹

In the first two decades of the century, economic development, with its accompanying issues of land and labour, dominated the history of Fiji. Although Gordon, Des Voeux and, above all, Thurston had wanted development, they had believed that there was a conflict between development, with its demands for land and labour, and the welfare of the Fijians. The conflict with respect to labour had been solved by Indian immigration, and enough land had been available in a period of depression. Now,

¹

C.S.R./Fiji to C.S.R./G.M. 26 Aug. and 13 Sep. 1911, C.S.R./Fiji Private Letter Books, H.O. to Nausori, 1906-11.

under the stimulus of rising prices and economic expansion, Indian immigration assumed a momentum independent of Fijian interests. With an enormous expansion of agricultural production of all kinds, there grew an increased demand for land. To meet this, and to open up the country for settlement by Indians, Governor Im Thurn made extensive changes in 1905 in the laws governing the acquisition of land. The sale of so-called "waste lands" was permitted to non-Fijians, and the term of leases was raised from 21 to 99 years. But, following the exposure of abuses and criticism by Lord Stanmore (Sir Arthur Gordon), in the House of Lords, the provision for sales was abolished in 1909. In this period, too, the inroads into the communal system, started by O'Brien, were continued, without much permanent result. They had no significant effect on the Indians or on the policy towards Indian immigration or settlement. But the marked decline in the numbers of the Fijians until 1905, and their growing detachment from the economic life of the country as labourers or producers, had an effect on the prevailing attitude of the Europeans towards the Indians. People talked of the inevitable extinction of the Fijians, while the Indians came to be thought of as the future coloured race of Fiji. This was not regarded as a blessing by any means; it was accepted

as inevitable if the country were to be opened up to enterprise, commerce, and "progress". References to a possible "Indian problem" were made by contemporary writers and correspondents to the newspapers. Some of this was associated with the agitation against Indian competition to the European store-keepers or planters; some of it was inspired by the high rates of crime and litigation among the Indians in Fiji. There was, however, no expression of the view that the Indians were a threat to the interests of the Fijians, or to European control of Fiji, for the Indians were largely illiterate and lacked leaders.

Chapter VII

THE ADMINISTRATION OF INDIAN IMMIGRATION I: IDEALISM, 1879-1887

Under the indentured labour system, the labourer was bound to a particular employer for the period of his indentured service, and thus deprived of the opportunity to sell his labour elsewhere should he be dissatisfied with the conditions of his employment. Nor could he legally withhold his labour from that employer, for, if he did not perform a statutory amount of work, he could be prosecuted and, if convicted, fined or imprisoned. With so much power in the hands of the employer, there was great responsibility on the Government to ensure that the laws were adequate to protect the labourer from ill-treatment and see that they were enforced. Given the assumptions and administrative machinery of the time, how far was this responsibility discharged in the case of indentured labour in Fiji and how far could it have been?

The Fiji Government was not the only body concerned in the control of indentured labour in Fiji. Because the indentured labour system existed in other colonies

also, involved other offices and governments, and had been in the past the subject of much Parliamentary and public criticism, the Colonial Office kept a close watch on its working in Fiji. Until 1896, it was the province, not of the Geographical Department responsible for Fiji (the North American and Australian Department), but of the Emigration Department, under a separate Assistant Under-Secretary (Edward Wingfield). Ready comparison was possible of the working of the indentured labour system in all colonies in which it was in force. The India Office in London, the Government of India, the Government of Bengal and, after 1903, the Government of Madras shared in the responsibility of regulating the system of indentured labour in Fiji, since the welfare of Her Majesty's Indian subjects was involved; the most important of these was the Emigration Branch of the Department of Revenue, Agriculture and Commerce of the Government of India (after 1905, the Department of Commerce and Industry). All correspondence between the Indian and Fiji Governments was channelled through the India Office and the Colonial Office. In general, the only information possessed by the officials in London and Calcutta was that supplied to them by the Governor of Fiji, viz., the annual Report on Indian Immigration, the various ordinances affecting

Indian immigrants and explanations of changes in them, and reports on exceptional events. Apart from the annual report, which was sent direct from Fiji, the authorities in India received only what was transmitted to them by the Colonial Office, which was not everything received from Fiji. Of the annual reports, the Chief Secretary of the Government of Madras wrote in 1914: "They are mainly statistical, and nothing much can be gained from them as to the way the immigrants are treated."¹ (Some earlier reports were better, however.) In these circumstances, the heaviest responsibility of all lay on the Fiji Government, for it alone had access to all the important facts. From the beginning, supervision of Indian immigration in Fiji was entrusted to a special Immigration Department, under an officer designated the Agent-General of Immigration, whose duties were defined as "to act as agent for employers and immigrant labourers and as Protector of Immigrants"². The Agent-General was responsible to the Colonial Secretary and the Governor, to whom all but routine matters were submitted for decision. He was assisted by a small staff of clerks and inspectors of immigrants.

¹ Madras G.O. 178/14.

² C.S.O. 748/88.

The first Agent-General was Charles Mitchell, who had worked under Gordon in Trinidad. In spite of his great experience in Indian immigration matters, he was not a great success in that role in Fiji.¹ Until 1882, there had been only one shipload of Indian immigrants and the main task of the Immigration Department lay in the regulation of the treatment of Fijian and Island labour. Nevertheless, there were several disputes involving Indian labour with which the Department was concerned. In 1881, the Indians employed by H.T. Baillie at Serua were, at his request, transferred to another employer. He felt that the local stipendiary magistrate had unfairly supported them against him and so demoralised them.² There was trouble also at C.L. Sahl's plantation at Vunicibicibi on the Rewa. In July 1881, the manager was beaten up by a group of his Indian labourers, 31 of the 66 Indians on the plantations were committed to the Supreme Court for trial and 10 of these were gaoled. The incident was the first of many such cases which were to occur in Fiji. Conditions on the plantations were very bad, especially in regard to the food and the extent of the tasks.³ The

¹ Des Voeux to C.O., Confidential, 13 Aug. 1883, C.O. 83/33.

² C.S.O. 958/81.

³ C.S.O. 1354/81.

action taken by the Government against this employer was significantly more vigorous than that taken on any subsequent occasion. William Seed, the Acting Agent-General, suggested that Counsel be provided for the immigrants who were charged. Thurston, the Colonial Secretary, opposed this, because it would constitute a precedent, but Des Voeux ordered that a list of questions be prepared by the Immigration Department so that the Indians could bring out facts favourable to themselves.¹ Furthermore, after the trial, all the Indian immigrants were removed from the plantation, until the manager was dismissed, when they were returned.² It was rude medicine for the employer. Following this incident, Des Voeux ordered that inspection be made more thorough and that prosecutions be instituted against other employers.³ The main difficulty was that, with only one inspector on the staff at that time, many plantations were visited only once a year.⁴ In 1882, to remedy this defect without adding to the expense of the immigration establishment, the stipendiary magistrates

1

C.S.O. 1300/81.

2

First Report on Indian Immigration into Fiji, 31 Dec. 1881 (India E.P. Apr. 1882, A.90-3).

3

C.S.O. Outward, 1178/81; C.S.O. 2171/81.

4

C.S.O. 1839/81.

were ordered to visit each plantation every six months¹ and prosecute where breaches of the law had occurred. The Government of Fiji thus showed itself, at the beginning, to be zealous in efforts to protect the Indian labourers. One reason for this was the humanitarian impetus imparted by Gordon and Des Voeux, both of whom had seen injustice to Indian labourers elsewhere (in Mauritius and in British Guiana respectively). Another was the desire to please the authorities in India. The first report on the Indian immigrants in Fiji was not submitted until the end of 1881 and not before a reminder had been sent from the Government of India that it was overdue. It had been discussed and amended extensively by MacGregor, Thurston and Des Voeux himself, who wrote: "Over 100 copies have to be sent to India for distribution among Indian officials, so it will be very generally criticised."² In fact, there is no evidence that the 110 (or later 54) copies of the reports sent to India were ever read by the many officers, including registering officers, among whom they were distributed, apart from the copies considered in the secretariats. The first report was but briefly studied

¹ C.S.O. 996/82; 1728/82.

² C.S.O. 2159/81.

in the Revenue and Agriculture Department, considered "generally interesting" and the comment made that "on the whole the coolies appear to be well off".¹ Similar opinions were expressed in the India Office and Colonial Office.

From 1882, when regular shiploads of Indian immigrants began to arrive, the Immigration Department was entrusted to Henry Anson, aged about thirty, an Oxford graduate in Modern History and an English gentleman with private means, who had been appointed a stipendiary magistrate by Sir Arthur Gordon, in which capacity he had shown "fearless-²ness and determination". He soon demonstrated the same qualities in the Immigration Department. He showed himself extremely zealous in the protection of Indian immigrants and other labourers but, lacking tact and discretion in pressing minor matters, appears to have been a difficult person for others to get along with. He became highly unpopular with employers. In 1882, the staff of the Immigration Department consisted of the agent, a sub-agent and four inspectors (three of whom were appointed in that year).

¹ India E.P. Apr. 1882, A.90-3.

² Des Voeux to C.O., no.16, 1 Feb. 1882.

During the eighties, several legislative changes and other questions affecting Indian immigration were submitted to the Colonial Office and Government of India. There was no serious difference of opinion. The most important of these matters concerned commutation and exemption from service on arrival (which were suspended); the right of an immigrant to return at his own expense after five years' indentured service (established); commutation of return passage rights (temporarily established, but inoperative in practice);¹ and the regular six-monthly classification of immigrants able to perform only a half or three-quarters task (established).²

The first serious problem in the regulation of Indian immigration into Fiji was that of task work. Under the Immigration Ordinance, both time and task work were provided for; when employed at time work, immigrants were to be worked for nine hours, and, when employed by task, a task was defined as the amount of work which an ordinary able-bodied adult immigrant could do in six hours' steady work (a woman's task being three-fourths of a man's task).

1

These questions are considered in more detail in subsequent chapters.

2

Ordinance XVII, 1887.

At first, immigrants were employed on time work but it was found that most did only a small amount of work and some none at all.¹ The C.S.R. Company abandoned it after a month's trial.² By the end of 1882, time work had given way to task work on nearly all plantations.³ This gave rise to great dissatisfaction among the Indian immigrants, who objected to task work because no mention of it had been made in the agreements they signed in India, and because some of them were over-tasked. They felt advantage was being taken of them, and were in a semi-mutinous condition. On Alpha Estate, on Taveuni, only four were working in March 1882, and 58 were in gaol. Much worry, disappointment and loss were being suffered by the planters. Des Voeux doubted if the tasks were fair, but recognised that the problem of how to make lazy immigrants work was a difficult one.⁴ However, by the end of 1882, immigrants had settled down to task work. In June 1883, the Government of India referred in a despatch to the dissatisfaction caused by task work (which had been mentioned in

1

Thurston to C.O., no.2, 9 Jan. 1884.

2

First Report on Indian Immigration, 31 Dec. 1881 (India E.P. Apr. 1882, A.90-3).

3

Indian Immigration Report for 1882 (India E.P. Jul. 1883, A.39-41).

4

C.S.O. 945/82.

the second report on Indian immigration) and asked why the majority of Indian immigrants did not in fact earn 1s. a day, the day's wages for time work and the sum paid for each task.¹ Thurston, the Acting Governor, replied that task work had now been accepted by immigrants and that the figures of average wages given in the report were misleading, as they did not take account of those who were in hospital, absent from work or who had commuted portion of their service. Future immigrants were to be informed in India that task work could be imposed at the option of the employer.² This reply satisfied the Government of India. An official wrote: "It seems unnecessary to continue the discussion, and we probably have done some good by having thus shown the Colonial Governments that we watch the condition of the emigrants and examine the annual reports."³ In the Colonial Office, the explanation was considered satisfactory, but following next year's report, which reported cases of overtasking, the Governor was addressed by the Secretary of State, on Wingfield's initiative, and it was suggested that task work should not

¹ Govt. India to I.O., 30 Jun. 1883, India E.P. Jul. 1883, A.39-41.

² Thurston to C.O., no.2, 9 Jan. 1884.

³ India E.P. Jul. 1884, A.7-8.

be imposed without the consent of the immigrant.¹ The Government of Fiji rejected this advice, and task work continued to be the rule.

Another important question brought to the attention of the Fiji Government was that of high mortality. The initiative this time came from the India Office, which in 1886 complained about the rate in 1884 (5%) and the late submission of the report.² In Fiji, the Acting Agent-General of Immigration, Dr Corney, explained that the causes of the deaths were the wet soil, immigrants not being acclimatised, stinting to save money, selling of rations, indebtedness, shortage of milk for children, and a particularly unhealthy season. This explanation was sent to London.³ In reply, the Colonial Office instructed the Governor to take steps to stop immigrants selling their rations and to remedy the deficient supply of milk.⁴

Meanwhile, in Fiji, the problems of task work and discipline on plantations began to assume serious proportions. The 1884 immigration report referred to the

¹ C.O. to Acting Governor, 24 Jun. 1885, C.O. 384/154.

² I.O. to C.O., 5 Oct. 1886, India E.P. Jun. 1887, A.3.

³ Enc. to Mitchell to C.O., no.9, 18 Jan. 1887.

⁴ C.O. to Mitchell, 5 Apr. 1887.

loss of the "entente cordiale" between the employers and labourers.¹ Thurston returned from England in 1885 to assume the administration of the colony after Des Voeux's departure. He wrote subsequently:

I found the Indian immigrant population in an in-subordinate, and I feel justified in saying, dangerous temper. The Magistrate at Rewa, the chief centre of Indian population, was nearly exhausted with the incessant strain of his duties. Absences from work, insubordination and intimidation, were offences of frequent occurrence. As mentioned in my previous despatch, immigrants with knives, axes, hoes and sticks had begun to march in crowds from Rewa to Suva in order to prefer complaints in a way which, if tolerated, would soon have ended in tumult to which the disturbance in Trinidad during the year 1880 would have been comparatively trifling.²

In February 1886 there was a serious strike on the C.S.R. Company's Navuso Estate. Three hundred Indian labourers downed tools, complaining of being overtasked. The leaders were gaoled by Carew, the stipendiary magistrate on the Rewa, who felt, nevertheless, that the employers were systematically overtasking the immigrants.³ In May 1886, 130 immigrants from the Rewa Sugar Company's Koronivia plantation stopped work and marched to Suva, to protest against the raising of the shovel-ploughing

¹ Indian Immigration Report for 1884 (India E.P. Sep.1886, A.13-14).

² Thurston to C.O., no.114, 18 Dec. 1888.

³ C.S.O. 511/86.

task from 7 to 10 chains and, although Carew fined the ringleaders, he ordered the task put back to the original scale.¹ The Indians were by no means unorganised. On the Rewa, they had formed a fund out of which fines were paid.² Some employers expressed the fear that there would be a massacre of Europeans on the occasion of the Moharram celebration. Carew and the C.S.R. manager gave no credence to this, but it was indicative of the feeling at the time.³ The planters complained that the Indians were not working properly and that the law was being interpreted too much in their favour by inspectors and magistrates. Two employers suggested that flogging be introduced for labour offences, but this was, of course, out of the question.⁴ The situation was undoubtedly a delicate one.

In August 1886, while Anson was on leave, Thurston⁵ intervened on the side of the planters with an Ordinance called by the Fiji Times "an enactment positively unique

¹ C.S.O. 443/87.

² C.S.O. 3481/87.

³ C.S.O. 1800/86; C.S.R. Notes on General Manager's Trip to Fiji, 1886, 22-3.

⁴ C.S.O. 3481/87.

⁵ Ordinance XIV, 1886.

in the history of Fiji (i.e.) an Ordinance framed in the interest of the employers".¹ Penalties were greatly increased for inefficient work and it was made illegal for bodies of immigrants numbering more than five to make complaints or for immigrants to carry working implements when doing so. However, the Colonial Office did not allow the law to stand in its original form. Wingfield wrote: "This is a very Draconian law"; and the Governor was instructed to amend certain clauses.² When Anson returned from leave and expressed doubts about the necessity for the Ordinance, Thurston explained curtly:

The necessity for introducing the amendments of Indian Immigration Ordinance referred to may briefly be described as owing -

To growing turbulence and insubordination among Indian immigrants.

To idleness - and a prospect of increasing idleness - perfectly ruinous to planters and demoralizing to the immigrant.

To a positive threatened danger to the Colony.³

In 1887, when Thurston was away from Fiji, Anson submitted a report on Indian immigration for 1886, which gave an exceptionally frank account of conditions on estates in Fiji. He pointed to excessive transfers, high

¹ Fiji Times, 18 Aug. 1886.

² C.O. to Thurston, 2 Dec. 1886, C.O. 384/159.

³ C.S.O. Outward, 714/87.

mortality, the imprisonment of immigrants physically incapable of performing the statutory task and needing hospital treatment as soon as they were admitted to gaol, a tendency to establish a scale of tasks based on the capabilities of picked workmen, the bad effects of recent retrenchment in the Immigration Department, and a percentage of prosecutions "apparently without a parallel in any Colony concerning which we possess information".¹

The reactions to this report were significant. It passed almost without comment in Calcutta, where officials noted the high mortality but considered it a matter for the authorities in Fiji.² The Colonial Office took a much sterner view, and criticised the "frightful" mortality, "want of effective supervision", "monstrous" scale of tasking, and number of prosecutions. This indignation reflected real concern for the interests of the immigrants, not just apprehension as to what the Indian authorities might think.³ The Governor was told in a despatch that no application should be received for further immigrants from any plantation where the mortality in the previous

¹ Indian Immigration Report for 1886 (C.P. 38/87).

² India E.P. Feb. 1888, A.1-2.

³ Minutes on Fiji to C.O., no.170, 29 Dec. 1887, C.O. 384/164.

year exceeded 6%, unless the total number of indentured immigrants on that plantation was less than 20. The despatch included the following passage: "The general impression conveyed by this Report is that the condition of the coolie immigrants in Fiji is not satisfactory and unless some improvement takes place it can scarcely be expected that the Government of India will allow Indian immigration to Fiji to continue."¹ When a copy of this despatch reached Calcutta, the report to which it referred was brought out again and studied more carefully. The Secretary of the Revenue and Agriculture Department commented: "The Report is satisfactory from one point of view, viz: that it shows that great care is taken to show facts as they really are. Our difficulty in the French Colonies is to get at the facts."² The Government of India then sent a despatch to London, drawing attention to two more matters in the report, and asking that the Government of Fiji be thanked for the very full information given.³ Without the zeal shown in the Colonial Office, however, the abuses described in the report would have

¹ C.O. to Thurston, 21 Apr. 1888.

² India E.P. Jul. 1888, B.3-4.

³ Govt. India to I.O., 14 Jul. 1888, India E.P. Jul.1888, B.3-4.

escaped comment from the Government of India, which apparently acted upon the assumption that the interests of Indian immigrants in Fiji were safe in the hands of the British officials there. Perhaps the very enormity of India's problems - the ever-present misery and poverty and recurrent plague and famine - with which the officials in Calcutta had to deal produced a certain obtuseness towards the problems of a few Indian labourers in a distant British colony. The mortality statistics of Indian indentured labourers in the colonies would have appeared less forbidding to those accustomed to conditions in India, than to those whose experience and homes were in London. Although they passed through the hands of several of the most able and distinguished British administrators in India, the reports from Fiji were examined in India in a much less critical spirit than they were in the Colonial Office. It was not that the Secretariat in Calcutta had insufficient time or staff, for the reports were read, and the statistics in them summarised even. Rather, it was a question of pedantic regulation, failure to interpret the reports in terms of people, and disinclination to act. On the other hand, the officials in the Colonial Office did not merely note the statistics; they interpreted them in human terms, and showed more

initiative in asking for the redress of abuses. Much of this was due to Edward Wingfield, but he was backed by able and zealous assistants who were encouraged to criticise and express their opinions freely. By contrast, in the India Office there was only one assistant to note the reports for the information of the Judicial and Public Committee of the Council of India; he displayed a much less enquiring spirit than did his counterparts in the Colonial Office.

In Fiji, friction between Thurston and Anson continued in 1887. In minute after minute, Anson showed himself more sympathetic to the Indian labourers than to the employers, and Thurston the reverse. The stricter penalties Thurston had introduced in 1886 resulted in much more work being done by immigrants, fewer prosecutions and fewer admissions to gaol. Nevertheless, in April 1887, 130 Indians marched in a body from Nausori to Suva to complain of being overworked and underpaid.¹ Anson received them and formed the opinion that they had good reason to complain.² They were quiet and orderly but, since they had committed an offence under the 1886

¹ Fiji Times, 9 Apr. 1887.

² C.S.O. 1383/87.

Ordinance, they were prosecuted. Anson was instructed that he was not to negotiate in future in such cases. In other matters, he showed himself zealous in efforts to protect Indian immigrants. He successfully opposed the introduction of a system of registration for Indians living in towns.¹ He unsuccessfully advocated a system of workmen's compensation,² government assistance to Indians in drawing up wills³ and the establishment of a fund for the relief of destitute Indians, to be defrayed by a capitation charge on employers. He assisted destitute Indians without authority and even talked of opening a private subscription list among his friends in England.⁴ The spirit which animated the Immigration Department under Anson was described in a private letter from MacGregor to Gordon, in July 1887:

I am much grieved by the rabid spirit that inspires the immigration office. The ruling idea is that the employer of a black or brown man is a cheat or a conspirator. Anson cannot see that men are under a contract and that there are reciprocal obligations. Men are prosecuted, worried by enquiries,

¹ C.S.O. 1388/87.

² C.S.O. 1591/87.

³ C.S.O. 1473/87.

⁴ C.S.O. 1839/87.

irritated by interference, and that too all over mere trifles. A genuine case of bad treatment is far from common here. I would not myself be a manager, overseer or planter in this Colony for any inducement. I have said that the condition is a morbid one, this being carried out in a moribund Colony.

The General Manager of the Col. Sugar Refining Co. has been fined £3 because he does not daily sign the Ration Book. It is utterly impossible that he can be every night at Nausori to sign the book. I do not know what his Directors will think of such a law. I should consider it very foolish and very unjust. These proceedings annoy me so at times that I wish I could go and leave the country for ever. I have taken a stand against them, and I have seen that H.E. will soon see that he must recognise that the employer is also entitled to justice. Could you not offer Anson something that would tempt him to Ceylon before he bursts up Fiji.¹

It is significant, however, that MacGregor was considered by the C.S.R. Company to be very sympathetic to its interests (much more so than Thurston, in regard to the acquisition of Fijian land for instance).² That Anson's general line (if not all his specific actions) was not without justification is shown by a private letter to MacGregor himself from Carew, the stipendiary magistrate on the Rewa:

The men are entirely at the mercy of the sardars and overseers in the matter of task work and it is perfectly useless for an immigrant to bring a

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MacGregor to Gordon, 17 Jul. 1887, Stanmore Papers, B.M. 49203.

2

C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 7 Feb. 1884 and 11 Jun. 1886, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Books II, 212-18, and III, 236-40.

charge of overtasking. I believe they are being pushed too hard and think a proper man should pass the greater part of his time on the river and go about constantly and examine all tasks and assist the Indians in prosecuting the employers.¹

If, before Thurston's legislation, some of the immigrants had been idle or insubordinate, now the situation had gone to the other extreme.

The period was one of great financial difficulty both for the sugar companies and for the Government. The former were anxious to get the maximum work out of their labourers at a minimum cost, while the latter, worried that the companies might collapse, were reluctant to throw too many difficulties in their way. Moreover, financial retrenchment affected the immigration establishment. In September 1887, Anson, in prophetic words, objected to minor cuts in the Immigration Department's inspection vote:

Inspection will not cease, but from what I have seen of the working of immigration matters in this Colony, I do not think it is right to allow Indians, or any other race of people, to be employed under a law which enforces work and admits of pay upon a standard to be adjudged by the employer, and criminal process in default of such scale of work being performed; unless the countervailing influence of a disinterested party be present. Labour under indenture, without inspection, is the nearest approach to slavery we can well imagine, and is divested of some of

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Carew to MacGregor, 3 Sep. 1886, C.S.O. 1800/86.

the principal advantages offered by the latter condition of service.

.....

To do away with inspection will be to inaugurate a condition of things of which the following will be the most salient features. Oppression, productive of attacks on overseers etc., culminating in proceedings before the Supreme Court, in which the employed must always be at a disadvantage owing to the necessity for vindicating discipline, and the impossibility of bringing an equal force to bear against vested interests without the risk of ruinous consequences.¹

Anson's fears were already being realised: in 1886, Knox reported that the Indians, incensed by the ending of the regime under which they were "petted and spoiled", were venting their spleen by making murderous attacks on overseers.²

In March 1888, Thurston, who had now become Governor, rid himself of Anson by amalgamating the posts of Agent-General of Immigration and Receiver-General. Anson refused the offer of the British Consulate in Samoa and returned to England.³ Thurston wrote retrospectively of his term of office.

I do not desire to trouble Your Lordship at length with my views as to the causes which in the past chiefly brought about the state of things described

¹ C.S.O. 1775/87.

² C.S.R. Notes on General Manager's Trip to Fiji, 1886, 22.

³ C.S.O. 748/88.

in the Agent-General's report for 1886, but may very briefly say that I attribute it to facilities, closely approximating encouragement, afforded immigrants by the Agent-General's Department for laying complaints against their employers and for approaching the Department with every petty grievance, real and fabricated, while at the same time there existed upon its part an almost total abstention from rendering any assistance to employers complaining of their labourers, for the avowed reason 'that employers were quite able to take care of themselves'.¹

But Edward Wingfield had the last word on Anson:

A tendency to be more anxious to protect the immigrants than the rights of the employer is a fault on the right side in a Protector of Immigrants.²

Anson was a man in the tradition of Gordon, and, as with Gordon himself, his departure was not regretted by the settlers of Fiji. But never again were the Indian immigrants in Fiji to show such faith in the Immigration Department as they had under Anson. In different times, or under a different Governor, he would, with his zeal, independence and sympathy, have been more effectual and better appreciated, but in a depression, when the sugar industry was in jeopardy and needed to extract more than its pound of flesh from each Indian labourer, he was an embarrassment. Thurston wanted a more pliable Agent-General.

1

Thurston to C.O., no.114, 18 Dec. 1888.

2

Minute on above on C.O. 384/168.

Chapter VIII

THE ADMINISTRATION OF INDIAN IMMIGRATION II: REALISM, 1888-1902

The Colonial Office received with dismay the news of Thurston's retrenchment in the Immigration Department. It had directed him to cut down expenditure, but had not expected anything so drastic as the elimination of the separate post of Agent-General. Wingfield proposed that Indian immigration into Fiji be stopped at once. The Geographical Department responsible for Fiji opposed this on the ground that "it would complete the ruin of the place". But Thurston was told that, unless adequate measures were taken to prevent abuses, Indian immigration ¹ would be stopped. He replied that he intended to increase, not reduce, the frequency of inspections, and submitted a plan for the appointment of resident inspectors for those districts where immigrants were employed. At the same time, he was able to point to lower figures of mortality and imprisonment for labour offences in 1887. ²

¹ Minutes on Thurston to C.O., no.21, 10 Mar. 1888; C.O. to Fiji, no.52, 23 Aug. 1888, C.O. 83/48.

² Thurston to C.O., no.114, 18 Dec. 1888; no.130, 31 Dec. 1888.

The Colonial Office was mollified for the time being.

Conditions on plantations steadily deteriorated, although, with the exception of another mass strike at Koronivia in February 1888, there was no further trouble.¹ But Thurston's legislation was suppressing protest, without remedying its causes, while the resident inspectors could not, for financial reasons, be appointed for another ten years. In July 1888, one inspector, Hamilton Hunter, reported on the Rewa plantations:

The complaints made to me by the Indian immigrants on nearly all the estates were with one exception restricted to the tasks allotted to them by managers and overseers. The universal complaint was 'we are over-tasked', and in many instances I am inclined to agree with the immigrants.

.....

The practice, though not universal, is to increase the tasks of immigrants who finish their tasks early. For example, say that a task of shovel ploughing is given of ten chains, an immigrant commencing to work at 6 or 7 a.m. should be able to complete it by 12 or 1, if he works steadily, but if he does so finish, the task in the following week would probably be increased to twelve chains, thus undoing all the benefit he may derive by commencing early and working steadily for six hours.

.....

With regard to the estates belonging to the large companies, each one is under a manager who is responsible for the results of the plantation under

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his control. This leads to rivalry as to which plantation can produce the largest amount of crop, at the lowest cost, or in other words, who can get the maximum amount of work done for the minimum amount of pay.

With reference to those who are bound under contract to supply a certain acreage of cane for a given number of years, I do not know whether it is that they originally overestimated the yield per acre, or that the land is failing for want of manure, but the fact remains, that the present returns per acre at the rates paid for cane are not remunerative, and the employer in self-defence is obliged to get as much work as possible out of his immigrants at the lowest cost.

The natural result of this rivalry between the Company's managers and the small returns obtained by those growing cane, is, that a pressure is brought to bear upon the immigrant in the shape of large tasks, that in my opinion is hardly in accordance with the definition of a 'task' as laid down by law.¹

The C.S.R. Company's managers were under pressure from Sydney to lower expenses, and comparisons with costs in Australia were constantly being made, to the detriment of Fiji. The number of men employed per acre was greater than in Australia, and the managers were told to reduce it.² In 1886, Knox reported "...there can be no question that

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C.S.O. 2315/88.

2

C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 25 Jun. 1885, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book II, 652; C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Rarawai, 25 May 1893, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book, Rarawai 1891-3, 470. Knox considered 5 acres of cane per man a fair allowance.

the 'tasks' in Fiji are heavier than the West Indies, and I do not see any prospect of being able to get more work per day out of the labour than at present."¹ (He added that Thurston's ordinance would reduce the percentage of idlers.) But the continuous pressure from Sydney had its effect on the plantations, while the private planters had an even greater incentive to increase the tasks.

The nominal head of the Immigration Department was now Horace Emberson, the Receiver-General and Acting Agent-General of Immigration, but its real working head was the Sub-Agent, John Forster, who had come from India and had served in the police before joining the Immigration Department. He was capable, conscientious and sympathetic, without Anson's temperamental defects. Of Hamilton Hunter's report, he wrote:

To go on as we are going on now may or may not mean the ruin of the sugar estates (of which I cannot pretend to an opinion) but it will certainly involve injustice to the labourers by whose labour only can the ruin be averted and (so to speak) the Queen's Government be carried on. And when labourers are described as 'sullen and morose' on one plantation and as generally complaining with justice of over work and short pay over the most important district in Fiji, it becomes a question how long the endurance of these people will continue.²

1

C.S.R. Notes on General Manager's Trip to Fiji, 1886, 14.

2

C.S.O. 2315/88.

Hunter had proposed to increase the legal task to seven hours, to bring it closer to the practice. Forster successfully opposed this and suggested, instead, that the law be enforced against the employers. Governor Thurston merely wrote on this paper: "Thank Mr Hunter for his Report which the Governor has read with great interest."¹ It was apparent that he was not going to take action against the sugar companies while they were in such financial straits. The information in Hunter's report did not leave Fiji. If it had reached the Colonial Office, or the India Office, or the Government of India, in the form in which it was written, immigration might well have been stopped.

Nevertheless, one statement in the 1890 report was noticed by Arthur Hobhouse, the assistant in the Judicial and Public Department of the India Office, and referred to the Colonial Office for elucidation: it was to the effect that the majority of immigrants at Nausori were being paid hardly enough to buy their food - 5d. per day.² When this was passed to Fiji, the C.S.R. Company's local

1

Ibid.

2

I.O. to C.O. 24 Feb. 1892, India E.P. Jun. 1892, A.12;
I.O./J. & P. 195/1892.

manager, whose relations with Forster were so bad that the latter never visited Nausori in person, told Thurston that Forster had inserted the passage out of personal animus. He claimed that the figures given were misleading,¹ and the inspector, A.R. Coates, concurred in this opinion. Although Thurston was dissatisfied with the situation, there was no hint of this in his reply to London. He explained that the statement in the report had been misleading; the average wages were low because many immigrants were not working, particularly the "considerable proportion" of "idle and incapable persons among the immigrants introduced into the Colony" and the women, whom the Company had all but ceased prosecuting. Moreover, the Company had reduced its supervising staff during the depression and immigrants did less work and earned less money than before.² This explanation was accepted in London and Calcutta, and Allen Stewart, the Fiji Government Emigration Agent in Calcutta, was asked for an explanation of the large number of idle and incapable emigrants sent to Fiji.

Stewart had already noticed the 1890 report and written to Fiji:

1

C.S.O. 684/93.

2

Thurston to C.O., no.56, 16 Jun. 1892; no.35, 6 Apr.1894.

My Dear Emberson,

I have just received your Annual Report for 1890, and am sorry to find that it is not more satisfactory.

The wages seem to me to be altogether too low - so low that I do not see how the majority of people can thrive. I do hope you will succeed in screwing up the planters further - they need it all the world over. I am afraid that you have not got enough supervision. I fancy with a new country like Fiji that every estate should be visited at least once a month to give the people confidence in the department, and to look after the employers properly.

It struck me also that it was possible the tasks were too heavy. I believe in task work myself especially for natives of India, but if they cannot finish their tasks in 9 hours easily it is certainly too heavy - they ought to be able to do it in 6-7 hours.

We have got a new Lieut-Governor here - Sir Charles Elliot - and emigration matters are being gone into very closely so that I only hope that when your report gets to him, he may not make a row about wages.¹

Stewart, who had once been a Sub-Agent of Immigration in British Guiana, was very critical of the working of Indian immigration into Fiji. His interest went beyond his official duties. He told Wingfield that repatriates from Fiji had expressed dissatisfaction with their treatment there,² and he gave the opinion to the Secretary of

1

Stewart to Emberson, 19 Nov. 1891, C.S.O. 2494/92.

2

Minute on Thurston to C.O., no.56, 16 Jun. 1892, C.O. 384/183.

the General Department of the Bengal Government that immigrants were treated worse in Fiji than anywhere else.¹ There was no love lost on either side. Stewart was subjected to strong criticism, originating with the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, for the standard of emigrants he sent. In turn, he blamed the deaths and breakdowns on conditions in Fiji, an opinion shared by Forster, who attributed them to insufficient food and excessive work.² The latter view was probably correct, poor sanitation being an important factor also.

In 1895, the Government of India referred to the high mortality and non-provision of ghi disclosed in the 1893 report, but observed at the same time that "both points have received the careful consideration of the Fiji Immigration Office".³ The 1894 Immigration Report attributed the sickness and deaths to the poor physique of immigrants sent to the colony and to the climate in the Rewa and Navua districts.⁴ But the criticism of the selection of emigrants did not pass unchallenged. Stewart

¹ Bengal E.P. Mar. 1899, A.28-40.

² C.S.O. 2777/95.

³ Govt. India to I.O., 6 Mar. 1895, India E.P. Mar. 1895, A.1-2.

⁴ C.P. 24/95.

wrote a despatch, supported by medical authority, in which he established that the emigrants sent to Fiji were not inferior to those sent to the other colonies.¹ It was devastating and conclusive. Apprehension was expressed in the Fiji Government that it might spell an end to Indian immigration into Fiji.² In London, Wingfield wrote:

This is a very conclusive answer to the frequent allegations or insinuations of the Fiji authorities that due care is not taken in the selection and examination of coolies sent to the Colony. Indian immigration to Fiji has never since the first few years when they had a properly trained Agent-Genl. of Immigration been satisfactory - and I have often wondered that the Indian Govt. have not threatened to stop it. The fault does not lie in the legislation for the Ordinances have been revised over and over again but in the Administration - the office of Agent-Genl. has been combined with some other office - Colonial Secretary or Receiver-Genl. and I feel sure that its duties have been practically neglected. The staff of Inspectors has been utterly insufficient and the planters have been allowed to have their own way. We have continually called attention to the unsatisfactory state of things especially as to health of the coolies and their very small earnings. Various excuses have been put forward but it was evident that the supervision was necessarily inadequate because the Colony could not afford to pay for a qualified Head of the Department or an adequate staff.³

A long despatch was sent to Thurston which rebuked him for the 1894 report, suggested that the indenturing of

1

E.A. to C.S., 18 Sep. 1896, C.P. 15/96.

2

C.S.O. 3915/95.

3

Minute on E.A. to C.S. 18 Sep. 1896, C.O. 83/64.

immigrants to Rewa and Navua be stopped, pointed to the low wages and asked for more frequent inspections.¹ Significantly, a copy of this despatch was not sent to the India Office and therefore it did not reach the authorities in India who remained silent about the management of immigration in Fiji - this at a time when over a quarter of the immigrants were dying or being repatriated as incapables within their terms of service.²

The next report, for 1895, contained references to increased mortality. They were simply noted in the India Office, but not in the Colonial Office, where one assistant wrote: "In spite of Sir H. Berkeley's gush this Report is worse than the last. The mortality is ghastly. The Queensland Kanaka mortality is not a patch on it. 5.28% or one in 19, cannot go on." Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of State, agreed,³ and the new Governor, Sir

¹ C.O. to Thurston, 13 Nov. 1896.

² Percentage Dead or Repatriated within Five years of Introduction

	Male Adults	Female Adults	Children	Total
Immigrants of 1891	26.83	22.22	36.61	26.72
1892	29.23	27.25	48.73	30.76
1893	27.31	26.92	49.21	28.95
1894	26.27	31.71	45.79	29.58
1895	16.33	20.40	36.16	19.75

(Indian Immigration Report for 1900 (C.P. 28/01).)

³ Minutes on Berkeley to C.O., no.68, 6 Jul. 1897, C.O. 83/66.

George O'Brien, was told:

I regret to observe that this Report is even less satisfactory than those of former years: and I shall be glad if you will give the whole question of Indian immigration your serious attention at an early date. I notice especially the serious increase of the mortality among the immigrants employed in Rewa, Taviuni, and above all Navua; and unless measures can be devised by which the percentage of death among the immigrants generally can be diminished I fear that H.M.G. will have to consider seriously whether they ought to take the responsibility of allowing the importation of indentured coolies to continue.¹

This threat did not have to be implemented. The mortality was reduced, through improvements in medical care, water supply, sanitation and the physical standard of emigrants despatched from India.² The sugar companies realised, through Government warnings, that they might be deprived of their labour supply, unless the death-rate was reduced.³ As early as 1890, Knox had expressed regret at the great amount of sickness among the Indians, and had written to Nausori: "Altogether the time seems to have come for us to do something more for the comfort and health of the colored labour staff."⁴ But, at the same time, the local

¹ C.O. to O'Brien, no.67, 18 Aug. 1897.

² C.S.O. 7/97.

³ C.S.O. 2253/95; 2877/96.

⁴ C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 11 Dec. 1890, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book VII.

managers, under pressure to exercise economy, were slow to act where trouble and immediately unproductive expenditure were involved. They had previously given little co-operation to the Immigration Department in matters such as rations, sanitation, drinking water, and fresh milk for children.¹ Now there was an improvement. Inspection arrangements were also improved. A second inspector, stationed at headquarters in Suva, was appointed in 1895. (Thurston had proposed the appointment of two, but the Colonial Office considered that the colony could afford only one.) In October 1897, Emberson retired and Forster became Agent-General, ending an unsatisfactory situation. Resident inspectors were appointed at Rarawai and Labasa in 1898, and later an additional one in the new immigration district of Lautoka. Now that Fiji's finances were on a sound basis, the Immigration Department was adequately staffed at last. From 1897, following the improvement in the statistics, serious complaints about conditions in Fiji from London or Calcutta ceased.

The question of excessive prosecutions was the last matter raised by the Government of India on its own initiative until near the end of the indenture system.²

¹

C.S.O. 2567/96.

²

The subject of prosecutions will be considered further in chapters nine and ten.

In 1898, a proposal of the Fiji Government for the payment by immigrants of a portion of the cost of their return passages was referred to the Government of India. The latter sent it first to the Government of Bengal, drawing attention to the fact that, unlike other colonies, Fiji had not been inspected by an official of the Government of India and also to the difficulties Indian immigrants had in acquiring land there. It concluded: "The constant prosecutions to which the indentured labourer in Fiji is subjected do not indicate a very satisfactory state of affairs."¹ The Fiji Government's proposal was opposed by the Bengal Government's officials. The real (but not the ostensible) reason was given in a minute by F. Lyall, the officiating Under-Secretary of the General Department: "We are, I think, perhaps bound to get our emigrants the best terms we can. We also, I think, wish to get as many to emigrate as possible, and if the Colonies look after their interests, we may look after ours."² It will be recalled that the Bengal Government was almost alone among the Indian Governments in positively favouring Indian emigration as a means of relieving population pressure.

¹

Govt. India to Govt. Bengal, 17 Aug. 1898, India E.P. Aug. 1898, A.6-7.

²

Bengal E.P. Mar. 1899, A.28-40.

In its letter to the Government of India, the Bengal Government mentioned the high percentage of prosecutions and the large proportion of emigrants who returned from Fiji with little or no savings.¹ In its reply to London, the Government of India mentioned the difficulties immigrants had in acquiring land in Fiji, and, referring to the 1895 Fiji report, declared: "A perusal of that report leads us to believe that the relations between the employers and the immigrants are not as satisfactory as they are in the West Indies."² It rejected the proposal that immigrants pay a portion of the cost of their return passages. The Colonial Office did not demur. "Fiji is no doubt rather worse than Mauritius and British Guiana," wrote one assistant.³ The incident demonstrated that the Indian authorities, while not disposed to take any drastic action on their own initiative against abuses of the kind mentioned, were, nevertheless, not prepared to give the colonies their own way if any specific request were placed before them. The officials in India were better

1

Govt. Bengal to Govt. India, 23 Mar. 1899, India E.P. Apr. 1899, A.16-17.

2

Govt. India to I.O., 20 Apr. 1899, India E.P. Apr. 1899, A.16-17.

3

Minute on above, C.O. 83/70.

at refusing than at taking the initiative. Of course, the sanctions available to them were, in fact, very few. The return passage provision was regarded by them as their "most, if not only efficient security against ill-treatment of emigrants", for, if emigrants did not like the colonies, they could return to India (after their period of service)¹. Their other weapon was prohibition of emigration, but they were prepared to do this only in extreme cases.² Nevertheless, even with the scanty information at their disposal - the statistics were bad enough - the Indian authorities could have been much more diligent than they were in investigating abuses in Indian immigration into Fiji. Despite their impression that all was not right, they did not suggest that Fiji be visited by an official from India, as the West Indies and Mauritius had been visited.³

In fact, many serious problems were dealt with in Fiji alone. Two of the most important of these were the

¹ Telegram, Govt. India to I.O. 17 Mar. 1898, India E.P. Apr. 1898, A.1-6.

² Emigration was stopped to the French West Indies in 1888 and to Reunion in 1892 because of abuses.

³ The Colonial Office considered this in 1892, but rejected it as "inexpedient". (Minute of 21 Nov. 1892 on E.A. to C.S., no.1075/745, C.O. 384/185.)

questions of transferring immigrants to other plantations, and employing them off their plantation of domicile.

Naturally, employers wanted freedom to move their labour about in accordance with agricultural needs: on one plantation the cane could be ruined for want of labour, while on an adjoining plantation there might be a surplus. But the Immigration Department objected to labourers being moved about like chattels at the whim of employers who, while enforcing their own rights to the limit, and providing no more in the way of welfare facilities than the law provided, sought, on the plea of imperative economic necessity, to whittle down the rights of the immigrants.¹

Forster explained his objections:

If anything could add to the demoralizing effect of the penal system under which these men live it would be this liability to nomadic state of life. This, I am quite aware, may from one point of view be regarded as mere sentiment - I do not so regard it. It appears to me that fatal and disastrous as the conditions of plantation life now are as shown by hard facts they cannot but be rendered worse by the mental and material harrassment to which large extensions of the limits of his sphere of labour will expose the labourer.²

Nevertheless, the tendency of the legislation on this subject over the years was to favour the employers.

¹ C.S.O. 1689/96.

² C.S.O. 1245/94.

Changes were made by successive Governors in response to the representations of the sugar companies. There was no difficulty when the immigrant agreed to be transferred. But, except between 1892 and 1896, his consent was not required. Before 1892 an immigrant could, without his consent, be transferred to another plantation of the same employer for a period of twelve months. These temporary transfers were prohibited in 1892; instead, permanent transfers were provided for, but only with the consent of the immigrant.¹ This did not last long. In 1895, when the Holmshurst Sugar Estate on Taveuni went into liquidation, most of the immigrants were to be transferred to the C.S.R. Company's Labasa plantations. But the mere fact of asking their consent seemed to them suspicious and they objected.² At the behest of the companies and Acting Agent-General Emberson, the Acting-Governor, Sir Henry Berkeley, put through an Ordinance to legalize compulsory transfers. Sub-Agent Forster opposed the move, arguing that employers should use persuasion and not the force of the law. His suggestion that they call for volunteers, was dismissed by the C.S.R. Company on the ground

¹ Ordinance IV, 1892.

² C.S.O. 2213/96.

that no immigrants would volunteer, because they did not wish to leave their shipmates.¹ When Thurston returned from leave he admitted the necessity of legislation to deal with special cases such as the Holmshurst one, but took strong exception to the wide terms of the Ordinance, which he thought put too much power into employers' hands to harrass a man.² Much the same view was expressed in the Secretariat in Calcutta, where an official wrote: "It tends to make the labourer into a chattel" but added later, characteristically (it would not be unfair to remark): "I think we need not object perhaps."³ The new Governor, O'Brien, also recorded his objection to trafficking in immigrants without their consent.⁴ Nevertheless, the Ordinance stood and thereafter transfers of immigrants were frequent, almost automatic and without much hardship to immigrants. Often the transfer of a troublemaker or of a paramour, or the splitting of a gang, prevented violence. In another respect, too, it was beneficial. Because poor work, low wages, sickness and death prevailed

¹ C.S.O. 156/96.

² C.S.O. 2169/96.

³ India E.P. Dec. 1896, A.1.

⁴ C.S.O. 2333/97.

on plantations being opened up with newly arrived immigrants, the Government and the C.S.R. Company decided that these should not be sent to such plantations. This necessitated¹ the transfer of experienced and acclimatised immigrants. Many were so transferred when the C.S.R. Company started at Lautoka.

At first an immigrant could not be worked off his plantation of domicile. When the immigrants who arrived on the Boyne and Bruce in 1886 were allotted generally to the C.S.R. Company's plantations on the Rewa, the Colonial Office objected to this practice and, although it was of great advantage to the Company,² it was never repeated. The Immigration Department felt that the Company should use unindentured labour in emergencies, such as occurred during the planting or crushing seasons. At first, when indentured labourers were used, they were employed on time-work and the penal clauses did not apply.³ This situation was not satisfactory to the Company, which owned many plantations, because the supply of unindentured labour

¹ Indian Immigration Report for 1893 (C.P. 28/94); C.S.O. 1183/95.

² C.O. to Thurston, 21 Apr. 1888; Thurston to C.O., no.62, 31 Jul. 1888; C.S.R. Notes on General Manager's Trip to Fiji, 1886, 25.

³ C.S.O. 2345/96.

was much smaller in Fiji than in other sugar-producing colonies. Finally, in response to the Company's representations, a "block system" was introduced in 1894, under which an immigrant was indentured to a group of plantations. There were safeguards: his place of domicile was still fixed; it did not apply to women; and two miles was the maximum distance an immigrant could be made to walk to work.¹ The "block system" did not in practice involve hardship for immigrants. It was applied first to the Ba plantations in 1894, but only to newly-arrived immigrants, and later extended to Labasa and Lautoka. It became the regular way of allotting immigrants and was of great assistance in the opening of Lautoka. The system was discontinued after 1904.

This system enabled the working of immigrants on another plantation of the same employer. The principle of hiring out indentured labourers to another employer was one to which the Immigration Department took strong exception, as did Thurston. In 1895, one of the C.S.R. Company's new lessees was refused permission to work his labourers on the Company's estates as well as his own. Thurston wrote: "I have gone as far as it is my intention

1

Indian Immigration Report for 1894 (C.P. 24/95); C.S.O. 1245/94.



to go with the Colonial Sugar Refining Coy. and will not entertain any proposals which will unquestionably lead to entanglement and annoyance which it would be folly to encourage." Later, he added: "No man can serve two masters."¹ It would appear that even Thurston, normally mindful of business interests, had reached the limit of concession. He probably did not take seriously the Company's threat that it was on the point of collapse. There were many more important matters on which he could have taken a stand, but on those positive action to enforce reforms would have been necessary, not just the refusal of requests. The matter of transfers rested until 1906, except for the special case of the Fiji Sugar Company at Navua. From 1893 onwards large numbers of small Indian farmers contracted to supply cane to the mill. The Company gave them advice and supervision, loaned them horses and ploughs, and, in the crushing season, sent out its indentured labourers by the day, to lay tram lines and cut and load cane. The last was, of course, illegal, the manager was told so by the Government, and a Commission was appointed to investigate the practice. The evidence presented showed that, without the cane grown by these

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C.S.O. 3503/95.

Indian contractors, the Company would probably have collapsed; that extra labour was required by them during the crushing season but was not available except from the Company; that jealousy and bickering frustrated attempts at combination for cane cutting; that the Company made no extra profit out of the transaction; that the indentured labourers did not object and were under the control of the Company's officers; and that the system was of benefit to hundreds of independent Indian farmers. Although a majority report recommended that the practice be made dependent upon the consent of the immigrant, the system was legalised in 1898, and there were no further complications.¹

Another serious problem dealt with by the Immigration Department was that of assaults upon immigrants and upon overseers and sirdars. The Department was handicapped by the fact that it could not take arbitrary action against particular overseers and sirdars. Only the most flagrant cases of serious assault or torture resulted in dismissals

¹

C.S.O. 1689/96; 337/97; Ordinance VII, 1898. It is interesting to note that the same problem was successfully solved by the C.S.R. Company after the abolition of the indentured labour system through the device of the harvesting agreement and organised cane gang.

and only after convictions; after all, a man was entitled to a fair trial. A significant example of this occurred under the Fiji Sugar Company at their large estate at Tamanua, Navua. In 1893, a case came under the notice of the Immigration Department, where an assault had been followed by intimidation of witnesses. Forster described it as: "only another instance that has come to light of the methods adopted on this estate of enforcing discipline by terror and illegal violence rather than resort to the law". Thurston was not swayed: "I must be sure of my ground.... The reports of existing terror on this estate are by no means new but nothing tangible has ever been laid before the Executive."¹ The files show that two years later the situation was unchanged and was well known to the Department.² If it had been known in London or Calcutta, some remedial action would have certainly been taken, just as it would have been taken in Fiji in later years.

When overseers or sirdars were convicted of serious or aggravated assaults the Department would request that the man be dismissed. Employers were reluctant to dismiss

¹ C.S.O. 2555/93.

² C.S.O. 489/95.

a convicted overseer or sirdar if he were otherwise efficient in his work, and normally did not do so unless requested by the Governor. The Immigration Department was not happy at the amount of co-operation it received from employers in this respect. Sometimes the man was simply transferred to another plantation.¹ In rare cases employers were threatened that unless a particular man were removed from a position of authority over immigrants, the supply of immigrants to that plantation would be stopped. In addition to this action in specific cases, the Government made several generalised efforts to check the practice. In 1897 stipendiary magistrates were instructed to submit regular reports on assault cases.² Although only a very small percentage of assaults were ever brought to Court, the situation was such that nearly every overseer of the C.S.R. Company in 1899 had been convicted of assault at one time or another.³ Moreover, because of intimidation, it was often some time before abuses were exposed on a plantation, and when they were it came as a shock to the managements of the companies, as well as to

¹ C.S.O. 4412/02.

² C.S.O. 4137/97.

³ C.S.O. 5064/99.

the Immigration Department, for overseers were reluctant to report one of their own number.

There were different attitudes among the Europeans in Fiji towards the problem of violence on plantations. The majority of overseers and stipendiary magistrates tended to think in terms of stereotypes. They stressed the necessity of maintaining strict discipline and not showing weakness, lest the labourers take advantage of them. They emphasised the often very considerable provocation offered by immigrants and the low regard for human life held by some of the criminals among them who were not discouraged by the prospect of an easy gaol life. The Stipendiary Magistrate at Labasa belonged to this school of thought. He wrote in 1902 about the local Immigration Inspector's role in an assault case:

I say emphatically that since Mr Harper came here, these troubles have begun. A coolie needs very little encouragement or perhaps sympathy from an official to do anything irregular.

.....

The R.I. should remember that Europeans equally with Indians are entitled to protection - but all his bias seems to be on the one side. Having himself been an overseer, mill manager, etc., he ought to know better - or at any rate as well as any man - what the coolie is.¹

¹

C.S.O. 4411/02.

But others, including men like Anson and Forster and some inspectors of immigrants, thought in terms of universal human traits and individual immigrants, rather than stereotypes. Forster wrote many minutes pointing to excessive tasking, assaults by overseers and sirdars and differential treatment by some magistrates of Europeans and Indians, as the real causes of the frequent assaults by immigrants. This is one:

I have no doubt that rightly or wrongly the offenders in the majority of cases do act under a 'sense of injustice' and I think it worthy of note that such offences are almost invariably I think committed under circumstances which preclude the possibility of the perpetrators escaping the legal consequences. There is no firing through windows or shooting from behind a hedge or blowing up, and they are committed in broad daylight with generally available witnesses of them. Under any ordinary rules as to human conduct or motives these circumstances would be held to indicate a sense of injustice as the probable moving impulse - whether such feelings were logically based on facts or utterly unreasonable.¹

For a time Labasa was the worst centre. Until 1903 there was almost a state of civil war there. Immigrants were assaulted with great regularity, and, in turn, many

¹

C.S.O. 3121/93. The lack of such complicated technical means as those mentioned here need not be taken too seriously. Knifing in the back at night was also rare.

overseers and sirdars were assaulted by immigrants.¹ Some overseers carried revolvers for their protection. These conditions were probably due to the bad local management of the Company and to the light sentences inflicted, especially on overseers, by the local stipendiary magistrate. A serious warning was given to the Company by Governor O'Brien, and the magistrate was asked in 1900 to inflict more severe sentences in future.² In 1902, after Forster made a special visit to Labasa, an overseer was convicted and heavily fined, and thereafter conditions improved. While the situation lasted it had given the Government and the directors of the C.S.R. Company great concern, and possibly shortened the life of Forster, who was subjected to great strain before his death in 1902.³

1

In 1900, there were 32 charges of assault in Labasa against those in charge of labour, and 11 convictions. In 1901 there were 21 charges and 15 convictions. In 1902, 53 charges of assault were laid against overseers and sirdars in Fiji (25 of them in Labasa) and there were 26 convictions; 35 Indians were charged (24 of them in Labasa), and 28 convicted. In addition in 1902, 17 Indians were tried and convicted in the Supreme Court for assault with intent, or attempted murder (most of these for combined assaults on overseers or sirdars).

2

C.S.O. 3958/00.

3

Jackson to C.O., no.111, 16 Dec. 1902.

One of the most important elements in the redress of abuse was lacking in the case of Indian immigration into Fiji in this period. There was no public criticism. The public had no information and no complaints to consider. The Press in Fiji supported the planters' interests and was silent on the question of abuses. The Aborigines' Protection Society and other English humanitarian forces were busy in Africa. Indian public opinion was hostile to emigration but inarticulate. There were no missionaries to the Indians in Fiji and no Indian leaders there. The only protest came from the labourers themselves and this was more often than not an illegal protest. Not until the next decade, when missionaries in Fiji and nationalists in India came on to the scene, was there any unofficial criticism and any drastic official action. The misery and death on the plantations in Fiji were reduced to statistics for the routine perusal of officials in London and Calcutta. Even the Colonial Office, which was more conscientious than the India Office and the Government of India in the detection and remedying of abuses, approved and recommended inadequate inspection facilities, on financial grounds, although it comprehended the dangers involved, and did not enquire too closely into subsequent events until the situation got out of hand.

Delays in the preparation and printing of reports, and in communication, meant that there was a considerable time lag in dealing with abuses, unless they were picked up on the spot. The Immigration Department in Fiji did what it could, but, although Anson and Forster were zealous and sympathetic to the Indian immigrants, they were frustrated by insufficient staff; by inadequate co-operation by employers who were themselves hard pressed by adverse market conditions;¹ by inherent deficiencies in the law which, in the absence of resident inspectors, left such matters as the definition of a task, in the hands of employers - for years there was not a single prosecution for over-tasking; and by the disinclination of Thurston to take action against the sugar companies which were the life-blood of the colony. But the officials, whether in London, Calcutta or Suva, displayed, on the whole, little sympathy for the planters and companies; what sympathy they had and expressed was for the labourers. It was a case, rather, of "he who pays the piper calls the tune".

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As Thurston wrote in 1896 when the breakdown of immigrants was being considered in the Secretariat: "I fear though that the present low price of sugar and the stringent economy and the need of getting as much out of the coolie as possible is accountable for much of the trouble under discussion." (C.S.O. 3915/95.)

If Indian immigrants had been spread over a larger number of smaller employers, sanctions, such as the prohibition of the allotment of further immigrants, could have been taken against a few, as examples to the rest; but such action, if taken against the large sugar companies, would have ruined the colony. The redressing of abuses became a matter for negotiation rather than for enforcement, and in the absence of outside criticism, the local managers could procrastinate and thus dictate the conditions of employment of Indian immigrants. That is why the situation demanded public criticism, a more enquiring attitude in Calcutta, or a Governor prepared to place humanity above all other considerations - as Gordon would probably have done.

Chapter IX

THE ADMINISTRATION OF INDIAN IMMIGRATION III: REFORM AND CRITICISM, 1903-13.

In 1903, A.R. Coates became Agent-General of Immigration and held the position until his retirement in 1914. He had first joined the Immigration Department in 1889. He was competent and meticulous and endeavoured to enforce the Immigration Ordinances and to bring about improvements, but he lacked the sympathetic qualities of an Anson or Forster. He was assisted by a staff of four inspectors of immigrants, and in 1913 a fifth was added. Two of them were located at Suva (to cover immigrants employed in Suva, Rewa and Navua, and Lau, Lomaiviti, Taveuni and Cakaudrove), and the others were at Labasa (Labasa), Rarawai (Ba, Ra and Tavua), Lautoka (Lautoka, Nadi, Nadroga and Colo West). The main problems with which the Department had to deal were different and more subtle ones than in the earlier period. Immigrants no longer staged strikes about task-work, their mortality rates were tolerable for the day (except in Navua where hookworm was very prevalent and except for children),¹

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Mortality among indentured immigrants in 1902: adults 9.6, children 112.2, average 23.3 per thousand.

and they usually earned their shilling a day. Instead, the Department had to try to reduce the numbers of assaults, prosecutions, wife-murders and suicides which were, to some extent, a product of the system or of social factors which could not be remedied by administrative action within the framework of the system.

Assaults on immigrants continued to be a main concern of the Immigration Department in this period, and, as before, they did not arouse comment from outside the colony. In 1907, penalties for assaults on immigrants were specifically provided in an amending immigration ordinance. Previous attempts by Coates to have such a provision had been rejected, but Governor Im Thurn was now convinced of the necessity of the move. The Immigration Department now had the authority to prosecute in such cases, which previously had been the prerogative of the police or the immigrant himself. In 1908, a circular was sent to all employers by the Immigration Department:

In view of the frequent complaints made to the Inspectors of this Department by indentured Indian immigrants of assaults committed upon them by overseers or sirdars, it would appear that the practice of striking or 'cuffing' indentured immigrants by persons in authority is of frequent occurrence upon some plantations.

I am directed to point out for the careful consideration of employers that the practice above referred to is from all points of view undesirable and is strongly disapproved by the Government of this Colony.

The circular added that offenders would be prosecuted, and in the last years a large percentage of them were. Assaults on labourers greatly decreased in number, although as late as 1912, the infliction of corporal punishment was still a common practice, and the Government felt that employers, particularly the companies, although not countenancing or encouraging such treatment of immigrants, nevertheless did not exercise a sufficiently close control over their subordinates' behaviour and did not co-operate fully and frankly when outrages occurred. The C.S.R. Company's manager in Fiji complained to Sydney that he was not always informed of the full facts by overseers.¹ On the other hand, the Company was anxious to protect its rights and reputation, and those of its employees, and did not always accept the official view of events. Overseers were not dismissed unless convictions were obtained and only after a specific request from the Government in each case. Navua was the worst centre, and there were some very bad cases on outlying plantations there, particularly on Batinikia. In 1912 a stiff warning was given to the Vancouver-Fiji Sugar Company. In 1913, an

¹ C.S.R./Fiji to C.S.R./G.M., 25 Oct. 1910, C.S.R./Fiji Private Letter Books, Nausori to H.O., 1906-10.

overseer at Navua was removed from the control of immigrants, on the insistence of the Colonial Secretary, Eyre Hutson, in spite of the fact that Agent-General Coates had recommended that a warning only be given because of the previous record of the overseer - 20 years service without any previous conviction for assault. The Government was thus much sterner than it had been in previous years, in efforts to check assaults. The employers, too, were more careful. The C.S.R. Company's plantations were leased to individual planters, often ex-overseers, who treated their labour better on the whole than they had done as paid overseers. Finally, employers came to realise that, with increasing publicity about the conditions of indentured labour in Fiji, a continuance of abuses of the kind might lead to the ending of immigration.

Assaults upon overseers and sirdars were numerous in this period. Although isolated instances occurred in all areas, Labasa was, for a time, the worst centre. These occurrences gave the other planters and overseers considerable anxiety and in 1908 Europeans generally, in Fiji, were reported as being very uneasy.¹ In that year, the Planters' Association passed a resolution which urged

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Australian Methodist Missionary Review, Oct. 1908, 14.

the Government to take steps to suppress "murderous outrages" by indentured labourers,¹ and the Government was asked in the Legislative Council to appoint a Commission to enquire into recent cases. The Government, mindful that such an enquiry might have outside repercussions,² replied that the time was not opportune. The opinion of the police was that such assaults were often due to interference with Indian women, and it was realised in the Immigration Department that many were intended as retaliation of some sort. The difficulty in obtaining redress through the courts was an important cause.³ In 1908, the murder of one overseer was followed by the execution of five Indians and, thereafter, murderous assaults practically ceased. Coates believed that this was a result of the example made of the five, but this seems improbable. The better treatment of labourers in later years was a more likely reason.

The excessive prosecution of immigrants gave the Government much concern. The indentured labourers could be prosecuted and, upon conviction by a

¹ Fiji Times, 12 Sep. 1908.

² Legislative Council Debates, 9 Oct. 1908.

³ This question is considered in more detail in Chapter X.

magistrate, fined or imprisoned for a wide variety of labour offences, including desertion, unlawful absence from work, and failure to show ordinary diligence or to complete a task. Offences against discipline, such as using insulting language or disobedience, were also covered. The employer had no other lawful way of enforcing plantation discipline and work, for he could not fine or dismiss a lazy worker nor return him to the Government as unsuitable. In prosecuting, he lost not only the time of the migrant but of the overseer as well. The C.S.R. Company would have preferred a system like the "double-cut" (the automatic docking of two days' wages for each day's absence), but this was unacceptable to the Government because it had led to abuse in Mauritius.¹ The question of penal sanctions had been discussed in 1877, when Charles Mitchell negotiated the terms under which Indian immigration into Fiji was to be permitted. The Government of India had objected to a section providing for extensions of service, not only for the period of absence from work, but for the term of imprisonment as well. Mitchell replied:

¹

C.S.O. 3426/01.

This is one of the most important provisions in the draft Ordinance for Stipendiary Magistrates will be instructed to abstain from inflicting the penalties under this section in all cases except where the immigrant is a frequent offender.

The practical effect of which will be that the immigrant in most cases on conviction instead of being fined or imprisoned will be returned to his employer with an order for any days during which he may have absented himself or refused to work recorded against him.¹

On this understanding the Government of India waived its objections. In fact, however, it was overlooked in Fiji or regarded as impracticable.² In 1901, for instance, there were 2468 charges against immigrants under the labour law, 2202 of which resulted in conviction; in only 63 of these cases were immigrants cautioned with extensions granted against them. The rest were fined or imprisoned as well (imprisonment being imposed in default of payment of the fine or on the fourth offence). Forster commented in the Immigration Report for that year: "It would be of advantage if the original intention were more frequently carried out."³ The Government thought that,

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A.G.I. to Govt. India, 27 Dec. 1877 (Fiji Royal Gazette, 23 Mar. 1878).

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Forster wrote: "The very mild system described by Mr. Mitchell has certainly not been in force here and in fact is impracticable in dealing with coolies." (C.S.O. 752/99.)

3

Indian Immigration Report for 1901 (C.P. 20/02).

although the law was necessary to deal with idlers, prosecution should be resorted to sparingly, for immigrants should not lightly be treated as criminals.

The Government was particularly concerned about the prosecutions on the plantations of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. In 1904, the percentage of prosecutions to the indentured population on the Company's Ba, Lautoka and Labasa estates ranged from 25% to 42% for men and from 22% to 33% for women. On the smaller plantations, prosecutions were much fewer. In the Rewa district, where the C.S.R. Company managed only two out of eighteen plantations employing Indians under indenture, the figures were 10% for men and 13% for women. The paid overseers had little latitude and prosecuted more automatically since the Company wanted extensions, while the smaller planters, on the whole, took more interest in their labourers and, in any case, often could not afford to take the time off to appear in Court. With the extension of the Company's policy of leasing out its plantations, there was, correspondingly, a reduction in the number of prosecutions. On plantations where they were excessive, the Immigration Department intervened, and in one case an overseer was dismissed as a result. Nevertheless, they were still too frequent. It was outside

intervention which was finally decisive in reducing them. In 1910, following the Sanderson Committee Report, which referred to the excessive number of prosecutions in Fiji,¹ the Secretary of State drew the attention of Governor Im Thurn to the question. The Immigration Department considered that the magistrates were partly to blame because, in many cases, they did nothing to discourage excessive prosecution or imposed improper and excessive penalties for minor breaches of the Immigration Ordinance. As a result, a circular was sent to magistrates about this. In 1911, the Secretary of State directed that the law be amended to permit of imprisonment or extensions of service (limited to a total of six months) only for the more serious offences, such as repeated desertion, refusal to return to work, or unlawful absence from work (on the fourth offence), and a system of payment of fines by instalments deductible from wages. This was done in 1912.² Since employers could not obtain extensions of service for minor labour offences, they now had less incentive to prosecute, and by 1913 the percentage had been greatly reduced. Employers showed themselves

¹ Cd. 5192 (1910), 88.

² Ordinance II, 1912.

able to manage with very few prosecutions, with no decrease in the work done. They had thought the penal sanctions indispensable and had used the courthouse and gaol as a substitute for the cultivation of good labour relations. Less coercion of anonymous "coolies" and more understanding of individual Indian immigrants would have produced the same or better results with much less unhappiness.

Suicides and crimes of violence among Indian immigrants in Fiji had been dwarfed in earlier years by other more obvious problems, such as the high rates of mortality and breakdown and the low wages, but in this period more attention was devoted to them. In 1904, the Secretary of State drew the notice of the Fiji Government to the large number of suicides among Indian immigrants in 1902 (3% of all deaths). The Immigration Department found it difficult to account for the high rate. The reasons given in reply to London included: the unattractive and monotonous life on plantations, the disproportion of the sexes, which made quarrels frequent and violent, and the proneness of the Indian immigrant to suicide for what appeared to be most inadequate reasons. The last reason can be dismissed here: suicide is particularly rare in India, especially among Hindus, whose religious objections

to it are very strong, since it involves the breaking of ahimsa (non-violence) and the destruction of life. The first reason was probably the most important. The second reason had already been given as a cause for suicide and violent crime in a note, attached to the 1902 Immigration Report,¹ by J.W. Davidson, the Eurasian clerk of the Immigration Department and, in this later period, its only member with any extensive knowledge of Indian life, based on experience in India. In 1912, there were many suicides, particularly among the Madrasis. When the Colonial Office sent the report for that year to the India Office, it asked what the suicide rates were in India. The India Office replied that the rates in Fiji were more than ten times the rates in the United Provinces and Madras, and asked for an explanation. The Fiji Government explained that Madrasis were particularly prone to depression, home-sickness and suicide, when placed among North Indians, with their different customs and language. The planters were asked to watch Madrasis for the first two months. Nevertheless, it was considered in the Secretariat in Madras that it was "absurd"² to say that Madrasis had a particular proneness to suicide. The Secretary

¹ C.P. 20/03.

² Madras G.O. 1642/14.

of State drew the attention of the Fiji Government to the high rate of suicide in 1913, too. The large numbers of suicides in Fiji were to be among the most important arguments used against the indentured labour system. Suicide was promoted by the system, with its drudgery, lack of freedom, disproportion of the sexes and breakup of traditional social institutions and controls, and this was not a matter on which the Immigration Department could take effective action. The same was true of crimes of violence, particularly murders of women, and this was appreciated in the Immigration Department. Nevertheless, requests from the Indian community that the death penalty be not inflicted for murders in the category of crimes passionelles were declined by the Government.

The Immigration Department had to deal in this period with several questions which arose out of changes in the number and organisation of the plantations. The first of these was the old question of whether immigrants should be worked off their plantation or domicile. In 1906, the C.S.R. Company again made representations on the subject. With the general extension of the Company's policy of leasing its plantations out to individual planters, the "block system" was no longer appropriate and repeated transfers of immigrants were necessary from planter to

planter and to the Company. Coates recommended that the proposal be refused again, because it was objectionable in principle and might lead to an increase of that discontent among the labourers which was already reflected in the many serious attacks on overseers and sirdars. He thought permission should be given only in exceptional cases. He was overruled by Governor Im Thurn, and from 1907 temporary employment on other plantations and temporary transfers were legalised.¹ There were safeguards: immigrants had to be returned nightly to their lines; only males were affected (although temporary permission to work women off the plantation but within a two-mile radius was later given); the general permission of the Agent-General and the specific permission of the resident inspector were necessary in each case; if the immigrants had to walk more than two miles, the task was to be reduced proportionately. The practical effect of these provisions was to enable the Company and the planters associated with it to work their immigrants where they liked, for the permission was given almost automatically. There is no evidence that discontent resulted. Immigrants accepted as a matter of course that they should work where their employer ordered.

¹ Ordinance VI, 1907.

The other main innovation was the introduction in 1908 of detailed regulations concerning the accommodation of immigrants, the provision of kitchens and nurseries, sanitation and water supply.¹ The number of plantations and employers of Indian immigrants had increased so greatly since the beginning of the century that the Government thought these matters should be laid down in detail. The legislation was also intended to bring the practice in Fiji nearer to that in other colonies. The innovations were the provisions for verandahs and spouting on the lines, kitchens and improved latrines and water supply. Strong objection was raised by the planters, in the Legislative Council² and in a petition, to the regulations, particularly the one about kitchens. Although the Government said that they would not be enforced with undue rigour, it would not rescind them, as the planters wanted.³ It was in a much stronger position to deal with employers in this period, because they were receiving high prices for their products and could afford the improvements, and because it was dealing with a much larger number of

¹ Fiji Royal Gazette, 1908, 184.

² Legislative Council Debates, 8 May 1908.

³ Fiji Times, 10 Oct. 1908.

planters, as well as the companies. Although Im Thurn was extremely sympathetic to business interests, and had already overruled Coates on the questions of temporary employment of immigrants off their plantation and the provision of central hospitals, his Colonial Secretary, Eyre Hutson, tended to be more critical and more than backed up Coates, in the face of the considerable opposition from employers over the erection of kitchens. The C.S.R. Company built six kitchens at Nausori but, because they were open and exposed, the labour would not use them. Nevertheless, the Government was firm, and eventually new kitchens were built by the Company, which were a model to other employers. In 1913, the C.S.R. Company asked to have the regulations requiring spouting relaxed, and although Governor Sweet-Escott was in favour, Agent-General Coates and the Chief Medical Officer were so opposed that no relaxation was permitted.

The Immigration Department had to deal with only one serious disturbance during this period. In April 1907, 56 Punjabis and Pathans at Labasa, who had arrived in 1906-7, struck work, complaining of low pay, insufficient food and the nature of the work. They alleged that in India they had been promised work with the Government, probably as policemen. The police fired on a threatening

mob of them (by mistake and without orders to do so) and three of the immigrants were wounded. The group was brought to Suva, broken up and distributed among other plantations. They were not given field work and there was no further trouble from them.¹ The C.S.R. Company asked the Government to tell the agent not to send Punjabis, discharged soldiers or high-caste people who could read and write English, as these tended to give trouble or make others dissatisfied also, and suggested that immigrants manifestly unsuitable as field labourers should be put aside on arrival and returned to India, for which the Company would be willing to pay its share of the cost. The Government decided that discretion should be left to the agent, that most high-caste people gave no trouble and that it would be too difficult to sort the immigrants out in the short time they spent in depot. However, the emigration agent in Calcutta was asked to send no more Punjabis, although some did slip through. In 1913, five Pathans from Afghanistan refused to work. They said that they had been promised work as policemen and, professing not to know what a shovel was, used the handle to dig with.

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Indian Immigration Report for 1907 (C.P. 21/08); Fiji Times, 27 Apr. and 11 May 1907; C.S.R./Fiji to C.S.R./G.M., 12 Jul. 1907, C.S.R./Fiji Private Letter Books, Nausori to H.O. 1906-10.

One assaulted an overseer. Four of them were transferred to mill work. The Emigration Agent was asked once again not to send Punjabis to Fiji.

In 1908, Governor Im Thurn reported to London that there was a certain element of unrest at Indian centres in Fiji, and requested that care be taken in selecting interpreters for service in the colony that they were not connected with political agitation in India. Probably the recent murders of overseers, the religious trouble at Labasa, the activities of certain members of the Arya Samaj and the circulation of seditious pamphlets from India were responsible for the despatch.¹ The problem was not serious, however.

In the decade before 1910, there was practically no criticism of Indian immigration in Fiji. The immigration reports of other colonies were read in the Secretariat in Suva and comparisons made which were not unfavourable to Fiji. But the Department dealt with its problems alone. This period came to an end in 1910, with the publication in London of the Reverend J.W. Burton's book, The Fiji of Today. Burton, an Australian, had been a Methodist

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These matters are considered further in chapters XII and XVI.

missionary to the Indians in Fiji from 1901 to 1910, and had spent most of his time in the Rewa district. Not confining his work to evangelisation and education, he had enquired into the lives of the Indians in Fiji and had tried to alleviate particular cases of distress, where these came to his notice, by making representations to the Government or employer. He came to the conclusion that the indentured labour system was inherently evil and should be abolished. He first published a small pamphlet, Our Indian Work in Fiji for sale in Australia and New Zealand, mainly to Church members. In this, he was extremely critical of the conditions under which indentured labourers lived and worked, but gave credit to the Immigration Department for the way it administered a system which was "open to reflection of the gravest sort". Burton was friendly with many Indians, and his view of the indentured labour system was probably influenced by his discussions with them, particularly with Totaram Sanadhya. A small discussion group used to meet in Suva, and, on occasion, it received advice from Burton. He left the colony before The Fiji of Today appeared. It was a most significant work. C.F. Andrews wrote to Burton several years later:

I do feel very strongly indeed that your book ('The Fiji of Today') was the pioneer and did the pioneer

work, and it is due to that book perhaps more than to any other single cause in the past that the whole indenture system was shown up in its proper light.¹

Most of the book was devoted to the Fijians, but the section on the Indians contained probably the most vivid and damning words ever penned about the indentured labour system. Burton's main conclusions were that the system was a barbarous one, because the best supervision could not eliminate cruelty and injustice, and that it was dehumanising and degrading. Naturally, the book roused a storm of protest in Fiji. It was also mentioned in the Australian Parliament.² The Fiji Government protested to the Methodist Mission about it, but the latter refused to take any responsibility whatever for the author's views. Governor May wrote a long and detailed memorandum in refutation of the book, in which he concluded that its author was "a careless, prejudiced and untrustworthy critic."³ But, while some of the statements in the book were incorrect, there can be no doubt that the overall picture it gave of the indentured labour system in Fiji was a true one.

¹ Australian Methodist Missionary Review, Sep. 1916, 10.

² Fiji Times, 10 Oct. 1911.

³ Memorandum of 19 Jul. 1911, enc. to C.S. to Methodist Mission, 9 Aug. 1911, Methodist Mission Papers, Sydney, vol.108.

Meanwhile, in London, the general question of Indian emigration to the colonies had been under consideration again for the first time for over thirty years. The exclusion of Indians from the self-governing parts of the Empire had led to resentment in India, and prompted the idea in London that a solution might be found by fostering their migration to the colonies.¹ In 1908, the Government of India, on being asked about the possibility of its encouraging emigration, replied that its purely neutral attitude should be maintained, because of the impression it would make upon the popular mind if it should lend its support to the activities of the recruiters. It added that there were two new developments which must tend to the restriction of emigration: the emergence of self-governing territories like Natal, with racial problems, and the shortage of labour in India itself, which was leading to complaints against emigration from nearly all sections of industry.² In 1909, the British Government appointed a Committee to consider the general question of emigration from India to the Crown colonies, the particular colonies to which it should be encouraged, and the advantages to

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The Times, 5 Mar. 1909.

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Govt. India to I.O., 10 Dec. 1908, Cd. 5192 (1910), 11-12.

be derived by India and each particular colony. Lord Sanderson was the Chairman of the Committee, and its members were mainly officials (not politicians. Some members of the new Liberal Government in the United Kingdom were opposed to the indentured labour system, but this was not reflected in the composition of the Committee.). It made a thorough study of documents and interviewed many expert witnesses, including (with relevance to Fiji) such authorities as Lord Stanmore, Sir Everard Im Thurn, Dr Corney (the former Chief Medical Officer in Fiji), Colonel Pitcher, and the Emigration Agents. Among the evidence was a despatch from the Fiji Government, written after consultation with the planters, which asked for the continuance of indentured labour immigration, but said that there was no demand in the colony for free immigrants.¹ The Sanderson Committee produced a voluminous report which dealt with the history of indentured emigration from India, its character, and its effect on each recipient colony.

The main conclusions were:

First - That subject to certain recommendations which we shall have to make in regard to individual Colonies, the system of indentured immigration as actually worked is not open to serious objection in the interests of the immigrant labourer.

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Major to C.O., no.62, 19 Apr. 1909, Cd. 5194 (1910), 60.

Second.- That Indian immigration is of the greatest assistance in developing the resources of some of our tropical Colonies, and in increasing their prosperity.

Third.- That in the present condition of India, indentured immigration is the only practicable form of emigration to distant Colonies on any considerable scale.¹

It considered that the indenture system was justified by the need to reimburse employers for the cost of introducing immigrants and by the helplessness of the latter on arrival, but only if the opportunity and land for subsequent permanent settlement were available. In the Committee's view, the only serious blot on the system was the large number of convictions under the labour laws. About Fiji, the Committee wrote:

Without the help of the Indian coolie the Colony must have remained in a state of comparative stagnation. The system appears to have worked well, to have been productive of excellent results, and the local conditions all seem to point to the expediency of its continuance.²

Some of the recommendations concerned the recruiting system, some all colonies generally and some had reference only to specific colonies. There was a recommendation that the Colonial Emigration Agencies at Calcutta be combined, that a depot be established at Banaras and that

¹ Cd. 5192 (1910), 24.

² Ibid., 21.

recruiting be restricted to certain areas. Others were that provisions for re-indentures should be abolished, and that measures should be undertaken for the education of the children of immigrants. In the case of Fiji, more tact should be used in the treatment of immigrants, there should be fewer prosecutions, and immigrants should pay a proportion of the cost of their return passages.

The best feature of the report was its analysis of how the emigration system worked in India. This was substantially correct, if somewhat over-sanguine about the prospects for reform and for securing a different class of emigrant. But the report ignored Indian opinion and the social and moral evils inherent in life under the indentured labour system. The Committee was conscientious and tried to get at the truth, but, with no Indian witnesses or critics from Fiji, it was inevitable that it should come to conclusions favourable to the system. The report appeared before The Fiji of Today. It reflected a pre-occupation with material considerations and the more obvious forms of ill-treatment, to the exclusion of any analysis of Indian society, Indian opinion or the lives the immigrants were actually leading.

The Government of India welcomed the publication of the Sanderson Committee's Report, because the indentured

labour system was under fire in India, and the report might help to allay opposition.¹ The restrictions imposed upon the unindentured Indians in Natal, and Mahatma Gandhi's resistance to them, had aroused great interest among educated people in India. Although the indentured labourers in Natal were apparently more prosperous than elsewhere in the Empire, an act was passed by the Imperial Legislative Council in 1910, empowering the Government of India to prohibit emigration to any country, not only on specified grounds as previously, but whenever it considered there was sufficient reason for so doing. This was intended as a weapon against Natal, and when the latter did not relent, emigration to that territory was prohibited in 1911. The resolution in the Imperial Legislative Council in 1910 was moved, with the encouragement of the Government, by Gopal Krishna Gokhale, a great national leader. Wider powers of discussion in the Council had been granted under the Morley-Minto Reforms in 1909 and now the Indian members had the opportunity to bring out their latent opposition to emigration and the indentured labour system. Gokhale declared that the system should be abolished everywhere, and from 1910, the Press, particularly the

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Govt. India to I.O., 25 May 1911, Madras G.O. 1472/12.

Modern Review of Calcutta, joined the attack. Immigration restrictions in Canada and the United States added to the ammunition.

Soon after the appearance of the Sanderson Committee's Report, the Colonial Office started to put its recommendations into effect. Several suggestions were made to the Fiji Government, including the introduction of a system of commutation after a certain sum had been earned, the reduction of prosecutions and extensions of service, the abolition of re-indentures, and the provision of facilities for education. The first of these was dropped because employers would pay unindentured labour to do non-agricultural work, rather than employ indentured people if they were to lose their services through commutation, and indentured immigrants would thus lose rather than gain by the change. The others were incorporated in an Amending Ordinance passed in 1912.¹ This eliminated the penalty of imprisonment and extension of service, except for serious offences, and enabled the Governor in Council to issue at any time regulations concerning the provision of education on plantations. The Ordinance also laid down that, in assigning a task, the employer must take into

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Ordinance II, 1912.

consideration the experience of the immigrant to whom it was assigned. The last did not arise out of the Sanderson Committee's Report, but was the result of acquittals by magistrates in two glaring cases of over-tasking in 1910.¹ The Government thought that these tasks, set to newly-arrived immigrants, were "unjust and inhuman and contrary to the guarantee which the Government of the Colony gave to the Government of India when indentured labour was first introduced" (that the wages would be at the rate of one shilling for a task taking six hours to perform).² The Planters' Association and the Chamber of Commerce fought the amendments strenuously, arguing that the elimination of the penal clauses was an incitement to desert, that malingerers would be paid as much as good workers, and that it was not the responsibility of the planters to provide schools, but of the Government.³ But the planters were warned by the Government privately that the indentured labour system was not viewed with favour by "the non-conformist party" in England, that its existence

¹ Memo. by Governor May, 16 Jan. 1912, Fiji Times, 27 Jan. 1912.

² C.S. to Planters' Association, 14 Feb. 1912, Fiji Times, 15 Feb. 1912.

³ Fiji Times, 14 Oct. 1911, 4, 6, 20 and 27 Jan. and 6 and 15 Feb. 1912.

was only tolerated under stringent safeguards such as the recent amendments, and that further agitation would only draw attention to the colony and might result in the curtailment or abolition of the system.¹ Similar warnings² were given to the planters by the C.S.R. Company. The Ordinance stood, and, as a result, there was a great reduction in the numbers of prosecutions and extensions of service. Governor Im Thurn reminded the Colonial Office of the Sanderson Committee's recommendation that immigrants into Fiji pay a proportion of the cost of their return passages, but this was rejected in London, with the concurrence of the Government of India. The changes made were to be to the advantage of the immigrants. The report of the Sanderson Committee was the beginning of serious outside pressure upon the Fiji Government.

About this time, there was a change in the prevailing opinion in London about Indian indentured labour, which may be attributed to the current of reform, the accession to office of the Liberal Party in 1906, and the increase

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C.S. to Planters' Association, 16 Feb. 1912, enc. to C.S.R./Fiji to C.S.R./G.M., 24 Apr. 1912, C.S.R./Fiji Private Letter Books, Nausori to H.O., 1912.

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C.S.R./Fiji to C.S.R./G.M., 7 May 1912, C.S.R./Fiji Private Letter Books, Nausori to H.O., 1912.

in strength of labour movements in England and Western Europe before the First World War. The changed attitude is illustrated by correspondence concerning a proposal of the Fiji Government in 1911 to introduce thirty more Indian indentured labourers for the Central Road Board. At first, the Secretary of State declined to approve, on the grounds:

As you are already aware, I am opposed to extending the system of Indian indentured labour to places and conditions where it does not already exist, and I am not prepared to approve of any Department of the Colonial Government employing such labour.¹

The Governor replied that he was not aware that the Secretary of State was opposed to the extension of the system, that he could not trace any instructions on the subject, and that there were already 88 Indians indentured to the Government. He concluded:

The introduction of Indian indentured labour into Fiji has been, and continues to be, an inestimable boon to this country, and a great benefit to a large number of the population of India; and I cannot understand what objection there can be to the Government sharing in a system which is permitted to private employers, which is jealously supervised by an efficient Department of the Government armed with a stringent law, and which will bear investigation by any sober-minded, unprejudiced person.²

¹ C.O. to May, no.243, 16 Nov. 1911, C.P. 132/13.

² May to C.O., no.36, 22 Jan. 1912, C.P. 132/13.

There was thus a considerable difference in the attitudes in London and in Suva. Nevertheless, the Secretary of State agreed to the limited and temporary employment of indentured labourers by the Government. And, despite a resolution of the Legislative Council and another despatch from Fiji, saying that, without such labour, a comprehensive road building programme could not be carried out, he would not agree to any more than this. He added that no indentured labour was employed on public works in Trinidad or British Guiana.¹ Thus, within a few years, Indian indentured labour had lost its place in the proper order of things, and had been relegated to the category of a necessary evil. Even in Fiji, a newspaper could write that the system was "ethically wrong" and "a matter of business simply".²

In London, the publication of the report of the Sanderson Committee revived the interest of humanitarian and philanthropic circles in Indian emigration, which had lain dormant for forty years. In a letter to the Secretary of State for India, the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society urged the prohibition of the recruitment

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C.O. to May, no.67, 22 Mar. 1912; Sweet-Escott to C.O., no.337, 4 Dec. 1912, C.O. to Sweet-Escott, no.248, 23 Jul. 1913 (C.P. 132/13).

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Fiji Times, 28 Oct. 1911.

of unmarried women and the appointment of Indian officials as Protectors of Emigrants in the colonies, and asked for more information about the recruiting system in India, particularly the character, methods and mode of payment of the recruiters.¹ The first proposal was rejected because, if only "married" women were recruited, there would merely be an increase in the number of "depot marriages". The second proposal would have involved administrative difficulties and a division of responsibility for the protection of Indian immigrants in the colonies; instead, the old proposal for periodic visits by officials from India was revived, although the Government of India denied the necessity for recurring inspections at the expense of the Indian taxpayer, as it was not likely to be left long in the dark if there were abuses in the colonies. However, the India Office thought it better to forestall criticism by regular visits of inspection, and it was arranged that the first should take place shortly. It was considered that the question of recruiting methods was already covered in sufficient detail in the Committee's report. That left only the question of payment by commission. The Government of India thought that this was indispensable

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A.S. and A.P. Society to I.O., 9 Nov. 1910, Madras C.O. 1472/12.

to the system of recruitment by private agency, as this was the only incentive that the agencies could offer the recruiters, but this commercial element was regarded in London as one of the most indefensible aspects of the indentured labour system.¹ A question was asked about it in the House of Commons in March 1911. After much correspondence, in which the weight of opinion from India was overwhelming that payment by commission was necessary to the continuance of the system, the matter was deferred and then apparently allowed to drop. The same happened to the recommendation of the Sanderson Committee that recruiting areas be limited. It was hoped that the greater supervision over the activities of the recruiters which was expected to result from the amalgamation of the Emigration Agencies and the establishment of the depot at Banaras,² would bring about a reduction of abuses.

There was to be no respite in which the reforms could be tested. In March 1912, Gokhale moved a resolution in the Imperial Legislative Council for the total abolition of the indentured labour system. In a classic speech, he analysed the system in detail and concluded that it was

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Govt. India to I.O., 25 May 1911; I.O. to C.O., 28 Oct. 1911. (Madras G.O. 1472/12.)

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Madras G.O. 1472/12.

inequitable because it was based on fraud and maintained by force, that the safeguards were illusory, that it was accompanied by frightful immorality and was degrading to the national dignity of the people of India.¹ All the Indian members of the Council supported this motion. The commercial members laid stress on the labour shortage in India itself. Government speakers admitted the existence of abuses, said that these could be remedied, emphasised the advantage to the individual labourer of having the opportunity to better himself through emigration, and advocated the continuance of the system. The resolution was lost by the vote of the official majority. The attitude displayed by the Government of India on this occasion was consistent with its conviction that emigration was beneficial to the individual migrants and perhaps mildly so for India as a whole. There is no reason to suppose that it was consciously supporting Imperial as against Indian interests. But after Gokhale's motion in 1912, it began to take serious account of Indian opinion. It realised that the indentured labour system was regarded by many intelligent Indians as an affront to the dignity of their country. It was clear that the issue would be revived.

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Speeches of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, 616-18.

One of the main features of the system attacked by Indian speakers in the Council was the existence of penal sanctions, which were, in their view, tantamount to slavery, and, since they were not mentioned in the agreements the emigrants signed in India, to fraud as well. To meet this criticism, the Government of India proposed that the wording of the agreements be widened to include reference to the sanctions, and sought the opinion of the provincial governments. The Governments of Bihar and Orissa and Madras readily assented. The Government of the United Provinces agreed, too, and proposed to take immediate action to compel the agencies to publish the existence of the penal clauses, but was told to wait by the Government of India. The Government of Bengal referred the question to the Colonial Emigration Agent at Calcutta, who became greatly alarmed and told the colonies that the position was "extremely critical". He explained to the Government of Bengal that recruits were already timid, uncertain and suspicious and that Indian registering officers lost no opportunity of dissuading them; if they were, in addition, warned of the penalties, not 5% would emigrate. He urged that the measure be delayed while the colonial governments considered the possibility of removing the penal clauses from their immigration ordinances. Dr Banks, the Protector

of Emigrants, agreed that the colonies should be consulted first, and wrote, in opposition to the proposal:

Should the intending emigrants be informed of the penal liabilities they incurred in entering into their contract, most of them would turn unwilling to emigrate, not because of anything particularly severe or repugnant in the penal clauses, but because the very idea of undergoing any punishment whatever in the Colonies at the outset would scare them away, and to assure them that they would have nothing to fear if they behaved properly or that the law was generally humanely administered in the Colonies or persuasion of any kind would not have the slightest effect on their mind.

While the Government of Bengal agreed generally with Dr. Banks that the discouragement, and even stoppage, of emigration would result from the publication of the penal clauses, it considered that the objections to the existing practice were so serious that this result had to be faced. At the same time, it did not want to do anything which would stop emigration abruptly, without first considering the effect of this on the districts which provided emigrants. It concluded that the colonial governments should first be given the opportunity to modify the penal clauses.

The Colonial Office pointed out to the Government of India that it would be unfair to employers if the liabilities of the immigrant only were stated in the agreements, and proposed that the matter be held over until the visit

to the colonies of the Commission of Enquiry from India. But questions were asked in the House of Commons about the proposal, which was now public knowledge, and premature congratulations on the move were given by the Aborigines' Protection Society.¹ The Government of India pointed out the strength of both official and unofficial opinion in India, and made it clear that, after a time sufficient for the colonies to amend their labour laws, it would frame a rule under the Indian Emigration Act, requiring the attachment to the agreements of a summary of the labour laws, in the vernacular. In Fiji, the Planters' Association, which had opposed strenuously the amendments of the Immigration Ordinance already made in 1912, now realised the gravity of the situation, and asked the Government to take immediate steps to meet it, if necessary by repealing the remaining penal clauses.² This request was cabled to the Secretary of State, who replied that no action was necessary at present.³

The Colonial Sugar Refining Company was, with the Government, responsible for awakening the planters to

¹ Madras G.O. 1160/13.

² Fiji Times, 31 Oct. and 5 Nov. 1912.

³ Fiji Times, 5 Dec. 1912.

the danger before them. Thomas Hughes had been associated with Indian immigration matters in the Company since about 1885, and the General Manager, Edward Knox, since the taking over of the Company's first Indian immigrants. They had longer experience of the question than any planter or any Government official in Fiji. Hughes, able and extroverted, visited India six or seven times, and on each of these occasions he reported on the prospects of the labour supply. His reports became more and more pessimistic. He pointed to the increasing difficulties in recruiting, mounting public agitation against the indenture system, growing obstruction by provincial officials, and a change in the tone of the senior officials. The Company was more alive to the danger ahead than either the Government or the planters, and did all it could to avoid it, by making representations in India and later in London, and by making improvements in the system intended to allay criticism. Through the visits of Thomas Hughes, the Company was better informed on the course of events than the Fiji Government, which had to rely on the scanty information supplied by the Emigration Agents and on that given to it by the Company. Unbeknown to the Government, the Emigration Agent was reporting directly to the Company. In fact, Knox and Hughes virtually took over

from the Government the main negotiations about the continuance of the system.

In 1911, 1912 and 1913, Hughes visited India, without official introductions (which he thought were embarrassments), to make enquiries and to state the case for the indentured labour system to the British officials there. He laid great stress on the economic advantages afforded to immigrants, to Fiji and to the Empire, through Indian immigration. But the officials told him on several occasions that they could not take into consideration the economic position of the colonies, since their first concern must be for the interests of the people of India. The question of penal sanctions gave them the greatest concern, for, as long as immigrants could be fined or imprisoned for not working properly, the system had about it the taint of slavery. From 1913 the penal sanctions had been abolished in Assam, Cachar and Sylhet, and it was anomalous that employers in the colonies should be allowed privileges denied to those in India. The first Indian Factories Act had been passed in 1911. Above all, the officials were concerned about public opinion in India. They were not encouraging to Hughes, and the Company was thoroughly worried. Hughes visited Mauritius also in 1913, to investigate the labour position there,

and formed the opinion that, if Indian immigration were stopped in Fiji, as it had been stopped in Mauritius, a rapid increase of wages would follow and the sugar industry could not be sustained. Knox was not as pessimistic; with the settlement of Indians on the land leased from the Company, the industry might survive but could not expand. In either case, it spelt loss for the Company.

In September, 1913, the commissioners from India arrived in Fiji, as arranged after the Sanderson Committee's report. They were the Hon. James McNeill, I.C.S., and Lala Chimmanlal, an influential landowner in the United Provinces. Every effort was made by the Government and Company to impress upon them the benefits the indentured labour system gave to Fiji and to the immigrants. The commissioners were impressed indeed, especially Chimmanlal, who was most surprised at seeing the prosperous condition of the Indian settlers in Fiji. He returned with enthusiasm for a system which had enabled Indian emigrants of the poor classes to develop into prosperous colonists.¹ The commissioners stayed four weeks in the colony, as the guests of the Government, and saw little of the real

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D.O. Meerut to Govt. United Provinces, 13 Mar. 1915, enc. to Govt. India to I.O., 15 Oct. 1915. (British Guiana Court of Policy no.860/16.)

conditions on plantations. McNeill was the stronger member and the report was presumably his work. In a preliminary memorandum to the Fiji Government, he outlined the conclusions he had come to and the recommendations he intended to make. He was, on the whole, pleased with conditions in Fiji, but thought that the wages were too low, that the proportion of females to males should be raised to 50%, that commutation of the service of a limited number of immigrants should be permitted, that settlement on the land should be given more encouragement, and that better medical facilities should be provided for un-indentured Indian settlers. (These recommendations were incorporated in the published report.) He also had discussions with Knox and Hughes, of the C.S.R. Company, who expressed their willingness to meet his wishes. There was, however, difference of opinion about two matters pertaining to recruitment: the statement of the existence of the penal clauses in the agreements signed in India, and the abolition of the system of payment by commission. Knox and Hughes explained to McNeill their view that if these changes were recommended and adopted, there would be a stoppage of emigration from India. They formed the opinion that the situation was "grave and dangerous", because they believed that the Government of India intended

to do precisely that, and that McNeill's report would not hinder it. However, in the report, as published, McNeill made only the first of these recommendations. Whether he dropped the second because of the representations of the C.S.R. Company is not clear; the latter certainly thought so. The report could not now be used as a basis for ending the indentured labour system. Indeed, McNeill and Chimmanlal praised the system:

Its advantages have far outweighed its disadvantages. The great majority of emigrants exchanged grinding poverty with practically no hope of betterment for a condition varying from simple but secure comfort to solid prosperity.¹

In its details, the report was accurate on the whole, but incomplete in that it did not examine the social and moral conditions in which the immigrants lived.

The strength of opposition in India was such that the report had virtually no effect upon Indian opinion; it only provided the critics with statistical ammunition. And as long as Indian opinion was so hostile, the officials were unlikely to look kindly upon the system either. Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy, who had always felt "an irreconcilable prejudice" against the indentured labour system and had been greatly impressed by the intensity of

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Cd. 7745 (1914), 322.

feeling shown since Gokhale's motions in 1910 and 1912, was disappointed that the report had not meant the "death blow" of the system.¹ By 1914 the Government of India had virtually decided upon the ending of the indentured labour system. From then onwards, provided pressure from Indian opinion was maintained, it was a question of tactics, and in those, Fiji was to play a crucial part, for by this time, Fiji took more emigrants and depended on the indentured labour system more than any other colony,² and it was upon Fiji that the brunt of the attack was to fall.

¹ Speech to Imperial Legislative Council, 20 Mar. 1916. (Indian Emigrant, Mar. 1916.)

² For the five years 1909-13, Fiji took 16,976 emigrants from India, Trinidad 12,233, British Guiana 9,728, and Jamaica 4,112. (Calcutta Emigration Reports.)

Chapter X

PLANTATION LABOUR

All Indian immigrant ships, except the first, went to the port of Suva, where the immigrants were transferred to barges and towed by steam launch or tug to the islet of Nukulau, which served as reception centre and quarantine station. Most of them remained there for about a fortnight, unless sickness on board the ship made a longer period of quarantine advisable. They were inspected by the Agent-General of Immigration and medically examined. The unfit were set aside for return to India or detained in the depot for medical treatment. The balance were classified into those capable of performing full task, three-quarter task or half-task.¹ Those who declared that they were husband and wife were registered as such. Finally they were allotted to employers. Care was taken not to split families nor, say, to allot a Madrasi to a plantation where there were no others of his kind. There was an equitable distribution of the women and children

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About 8-10% were classified for less than full task (fewer in the first years of the classification system).

and workers not capable of performing a full task. It was the employer's responsibility to collect the immigrants and this was usually done through an agent in Suva. They were taken away by barge and steamer.

The agreements which the immigrants signed in India at the time of registration stipulated that they would be employed as plantation labourers. The great majority were. Most served as field labourers and many worked for part of the year in the mills. There were exceptions: some became sirdars, domestic servants, stablemen, hospital staff, watchmen, water carriers, gardeners and even policemen. These positions were coveted, for although the hours were long, the work was light and the pay better than that for field work. The penal provisions of the Immigration Ordinance were not normally enforced against immigrants employed at such work, but the threat of being sent to the field was an even more effective deterrent.

The majority of the immigrants served on sugar plantations; most of the balance were employed in the cultivation of coffee and coconuts in the first years, tobacco in the nineties, and coconuts, rubber, tea, and other crops in this century. Although there were great variations, conditions on most sugar plantations were better than on most copra plantations, in the same period. They were

better in the later years of the indenture system; they were better in the dry areas (Penang, Labasa, Ba and Lautoka) than in the wet (Rewa and Navua); they were better on plantations leased or owned and managed by individuals than on those owned and operated by companies through paid overseers (although conditions at Penang were consistently good and some individual planters were worse than the overseers who were, to a greater or lesser degree, under centralised control); they were better where there were Inspectors of Immigrants close at hand; and they were better on long-established plantations.

Much depended on the experience and personality of the overseers. Today some old immigrants, in talking of their indenture days, refer to their overseers in terms of affection. Others were hated and feared. Usually the overseers were young Australians. While acquiring experience of plantation life and a colloquial knowledge of Hindustani, they were unduly dependent upon the sirdars, some of whom abused their authority, beat the immigrants, extorted money from them, interfered with their women, or showed gross favouritism. The maintenance of plantation discipline and the sirdar's own safety often depended on his skill in playing factions off against each other and in retaining the support of selected immigrants who, in

return for preferential treatment, acted as bodyguards and executors of punishment. A sirdar could afford few scruples. On a well-run plantation the sirdars were kept well under control and the overseer knew what was going on. Where an experienced overseer was in charge, these conditions were realised. The rest depended on the overseer himself. The perpetrators of atrocities can be dismissed here as accidental misfits who were eventually detected and fined, imprisoned or dismissed, or fled the country. Most, however, were not of this class. They tried to be just according to their lights, but were often coarse and unsympathetic. They dealt with the immigrants roughly, both in speech and action, knew next to nothing of their customs or the subtleties of their language, and took no interest in their private lives. Often, their worst trait was their behaviour towards immigrant women. Other overseers, and many of the private planters, were good employers. They were the wiser ones, but employers generally were slow to consider the economic loss caused by an unhealthy and unhappy labour force.

The day of the immigrants started at 3 or 4 a.m., when they were woken by the sirdars in the lines. They would bathe, cook their breakfast and lunch, and at 4 or 5 a.m. would be mustered with their tools. The

overseers and sirdars would turn out the reluctant ones, often roughly. Those who pleaded sickness were set aside for medical treatment. There were always a few habitual loafers, criminals, gamblers and prostitutes, some of whom actually preferred gaol to work. Others were exhausted, weakened by hookworm, depressed or anxious to work at higher wages in the mill or for Indian settlers in the neighbourhood. The lines were by no means always deserted in the daytime. The employers did not always try to force the women to work, nor were the immigrants always compelled to work during the slack season.

After the muster the immigrants set off for the field. The maximum distance they could legally be made to walk to work, without compensation in the form of a reduced task, was two miles. The women carried their infants and lunch in their arms, sacks on their heads (for the infants to lie on in the field) and hoes over their shoulders. When they arrived at the field at about 5 or 6 a.m., they were, unless, as rarely happened, they were employed on time work, allotted their tasks for the day. The overseers and sirdars carried measuring ropes for this purpose. The immigrants usually worked in gangs under a sirdar, but the tasks were individually assessed. The women worked in a separate gang. On first arrival,

the Madrasis were separated also. On a sugar plantation the work consisted of digging or clearing drains, and planting, weeding, trashing, cutting and loading cane. In earlier years there were shovel-ploughing tasks also, but later horses were used instead.¹ The size of the task depended on the nature of the soil and the state of the cane, and allowance had to be made for inexperienced immigrants. Hence the determination of what constituted a fair task was an expert question to be decided in each case. Even when there were Inspectors of Immigrants, the overseers still had considerable latitude. At various times task work caused great dissatisfaction among the Indians in Fiji.

Were the tasks excessive? It will be recalled that the statutory task was the amount of work an immigrant could do in six hours' steady work. Generally speaking, they could not be completed in this time, except by the strongest workers. In practice, employers made the hours of task work the same as those of time work (nine hours).

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Typical tasks were. Draining: 200-300 cubic feet.
 Holing: 150-200 holes
 Weeding and Trashing: 10-15 chains,
 6 feet wide.
 Cutting: 3 tons per day.
 Loading: 36 cwt of cane.
 Shovel-ploughing: 7-10 chains.
 On a copra plantation, a typical task was cutting 380 lbs.
 of copra. (C.S.O. 211/84; 443/87; 2315/88.)

It is true that some immigrants finished their tasks by noon or 1 p.m. (and even earlier) and then went home; but these were the stronger men. Some of them speak with pride today of the ease with which they finished their tasks. Some of them assisted weaker friends to finish. But most immigrants were not able to leave the field until 3 or 4 p.m. or even later, occasionally after dark. Some, of course, did not work steadily, and took several breaks apart from that allowed for lunch. Others had to spend long periods waiting for trucks to arrive. (These long detentions were prohibited in 1913.)¹ There was a great variation in the size of the tasks according to time and place. In earlier years tasks were apparently not excessive, but after the depression reached Fiji in the eighties there was a trend towards increasing them. This was facilitated by inadequate inspection and by the strict labour legislation of 1886. Tasks in 1906, for instance, were higher than they had been some years before. But the growing prosperity of the sugar industry, the breaking up of the large estates, the presence of resident inspectors, and the public criticism of the indenture system led to a more scrupulous attitude towards the provisions of the Ordinance.

¹ Ordinance IV, 1913.

In the last years, immigrants worked less and received more money (which was, however, offset by increased prices). But over most of the period immigrants of average physique were unable to earn their shilling a day without working longer hours than laid down in the Immigration Ordinance. The work was very hard and it is said in Fiji that the tasks were perhaps twice what a present-day worker would do in a day. Moreover, most immigrants, although of the agricultural classes, had not had previous experience of working such regular hours at work requiring constant muscular effort. They had been accustomed to long hours, at a slow pace, with irregular breaks.

In some ways the organisation of plantation life contributed towards excessive tasking, especially on plantations under the control of paid overseers who were responsible to the estate managers of the large companies. The main test of a good manager or overseer was, obviously, his ability to obtain maximum production at minimum cost. By this criterion, managers and overseers were compared with one another by the companies, and bonuses were given for economical production. This led to rivalry between estate managers, overseers and sirdars anxious to win or retain approval. The immigrants suffered through the resulting "speed-up". The sugar industry was in serious

financial straits until after the end of the century, and often the only way it could reduce costs was by economising on wages. There is every reason to believe that in this period the local managements of the companies and the private planters systematically disregarded the definition of a task. In 1905, by which time the sugar industry was on a much sounder basis, the C.S.R. Company issued a circular to its overseers to the effect that it did not authorise over-tasking. The circular declared: "A discontented and troublesome labour cannot fail to be the result of overtasking, and this is a condition we must seek to avoid, as we are more likely to get good work out of a contented man than out of one who is not so."¹ But these enlightened instructions were not always enforced in the outlying plantations. The incentive to increase tasks was inherent in the overseer system.

Every effort was made to induce immigrants to finish their tasks. Lazy or weak ones were urged on by overseers and sirdars. This was not always a gentle matter. It was frequently accompanied by abuse. Immigrants were often struck, and not infrequently they were beaten up, especially where there was provocation. Of course, all

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C.S.R. Lautoka Circular no.6, 1905.

overseers were at times provoked by immigrants, but there were some who were habitually brutal. In turn, overseers and sirdars were sometimes assaulted and even murdered. Some of the cases were bizarre in their manner of execution and apparent disregard of consequences. Many were combined assaults in broad daylight. Important causes of assaults on and murders of overseers and sirdars were: retaliation for assaults on immigrants, inadequate knowledge of the Indians' language, the frequent interference with immigrant women, excessive tasking, and a feeling that the law must be taken into the immigrants' own hands since it was difficult to secure redress through proper legal process.

This was a serious difficulty. Assaults by immigrants almost invariably resulted in prosecution and conviction, but only a small proportion of those by overseers and sirdars had the same outcome. Some of the difficulties in the way of the immigrant laying charges were outlined in a report by the Sergeant of Police at Labasa to his Superintendent in Suva in 1897:

Sergt. Mason begs to inform the Supt. that it is a usual thing for Indians to come to the Police Station between the hours of 9 and 12 at night to complain of the treatment they get on some of the plantations and when asked why they are so late they say that they have to wait till dark as the Sirdahs watch them and will not let them go. This is when they have been beaten during the day and if the overseers hear that they have

been to Police Station they get their money cut, also get heavy tasks to perform and most likely another thrashing. Directly the overseer hears that the Sirdah has beaten any of the people he at once cautions the one who got the beating and all who saw it that if they go to complain to the S.M. or Sergt. that he will beat them and give them heavy work to do. The consequence is that when any of the people are ill used they cannot get any of those who saw it to go as witness for them because of these threats.¹

While the situation at Labasa in this period was not typical of conditions either in Labasa or in Fiji generally over the period as a whole, the same problem of intimidation was certainly very common. Immigrants were assaulted when no witnesses were present, sometimes by certain selected men who made a speciality of escaping punishment. Witnesses were often too afraid to testify or were bribed not to do so. Sometimes an immigrant who had been sent to hospital, covered with bruises would deny to the police that he had been assaulted, for he had a greater fear of the overseer and sirdar than he had faith in the law. Even if the immigrant took his case to the police and witnesses could be induced to appear in court on his behalf, there were great difficulties before him. This is demonstrated by the low percentage of convictions of overseers. The overseer was usually represented by counsel. He was

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C.S.O. 1315/97.



able to present his case in a more plausible and effective manner than the immigrant who could not exploit the weak points in the employer's case, and often embellished his own evidence with irrelevancies and contradictory statements, or blurted it out at the wrong time. There appears to have been a tendency for some magistrates to disbelieve the evidence of Indians on principle. Even those who had no such bias had to give their verdicts on what was presented in court, not on what they might think the real facts were. Even when convictions against overseers were obtained, the sentences were sometimes very light, and immigrants resented this inequality of treatment. Agent-General Forster wrote in 1902: "I may add again what I have often said that the very different punishments meted out for acts of violence by Europeans or by Indians, respectively, do not escape the knowledge of the latter, and it is in human nature to resent them. They no doubt believe that 'what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander'.¹" But the power lay with the former, and immigrants did not escape retaliation for going to court against their masters. Punishment tasks such as sanitary work or drain digging, beatings, punitive prosecutions,

¹ C.S.O. 4411/02.

and refusal of privileges such as permission to leave the plantation on Sundays were all resorted to. There were examples of overseers publicly refunding fines to sirdars and even of regular systems for this.¹ It is not surprising that immigrants often resorted to the cane stick, knife or hoe instead of to the law.

The same difficulties confronted the immigrant when he was prosecuted for a labour offence. When he appeared before the Bench, sufficient evidence of the offence was usually brought by the employer; the percentage of convictions to charges laid in 1905, for instance, was 86.20%. In about half the cases, the immigrant pleaded illness, but this was seldom substantiated because it was argued that if he had really been ill he could have received medical attention. Other defences were offered, including over-tasking and ill-treatment. But, as in the assault cases, the immigrants were no match for the employers in court. They had no expert evidence to tender whereas the employers could call on that of their overseers and sirdars. Non-performance of task was an offence easily proven, but extenuating circumstances were not. Even when moral justification was apparent, some magistrates

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At Ba (C.S.O. 3291/97) and Labasa (C.S.O. 4215/99).

felt that plantation discipline had to be maintained and that an offence, once committed, had to be punished regardless of provocation. Others were perfunctory or excessively strict on minor offences. Until 1912, immigration inspectors could not defend immigrants in court, although they could act as informants against employers for breaches of the immigration ordinances. Several times it was suggested in the Immigration Department that inspectors be given authority to defend immigrants or intervene in cases where it was obvious that injustice was being done, through error, punitive and misleading prosecutions, extenuating circumstances or imperfect interpretation. It was thought that employers would then be more careful in laying charges. It was not until 1912 that this proposal was adopted, because of the opposition of the judiciary and the opinion that it would detract from the inspectors' independent status.¹

The conviction, with fines or imprisonment, of many thousands of simply lazy or weak immigrants was a great deficiency of the indentured labour system. The cost in loss of self-respect and demoralisation was incalculable. An extension of service was made by the court to cover

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C.S.O. 4629/00; Ordinance II, 1912.

the time lost through absence or non-performance of task,¹
 the day spent in court and the period of imprisonment.
 Before 1912, about 20-25% of immigrants had their time
 extended, but this percentage was halved in subsequent
 years.² The majority of long extensions were for terms
 of imprisonment. Most were disposed of by work or com-
 mutation, although some lingered on interminably.³ In the
 case of incorrigibles the extensions often amounted to
 several years' service. The presence of these lazy, dis-
 heartened or embittered people made for mischief on
 plantations, and in rare cases employers simply released
 them. Governor O'Brien cancelled a number of extensions
 because he thought the continual imprisonment of the same
 immigrants for contracts of such small monetary value was
 unjustifiable.⁴ Immigrants could, if they wished, commute
 for a money payment the period of their extensions, but

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To take an example: an immigrant, classified for full task who earned, say, only 3s. in one week would, if convicted, be fined, say, 1s. to 3s. and his time would be extended for $3\frac{1}{2}$ days (representing the difference between 3s. and 5s. 6d. - $2\frac{1}{2}$ days wages - plus the day in court).

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From the registers of immigrants in the Labour Department, Suva, and Report on Indian Immigration for 1912 (C.P. 29/13).

3

C.S.O. 752/99.

4

Ibid.

after 1912 the employer's consent was made obligatory (in order to reduce the inconvenience to him of not knowing if and when the immigrant would commute).¹ This diminution of the labourer's rights was accompanied, however, by a reiteration of the understanding of 1878 that only incorrigibles would be fined or imprisoned, and in the last years of the system, this understanding was observed.

Not all immigrants served the full term of five years' indentured service. Those who broke down physically were returned to India as "incapables". Others commuted part of their service for a money payment. The provision Gordon had insisted on, which gave all immigrants this right at the end of the third or fourth years, did not last longer than 1883, when its operation was suspended by Des Voeux, who considered it neither expedient in a labour shortage nor fair to employers who would lose their labourers at the time when they were experienced and acclimatised. The Colonial Office did not demur, because the provision had not been requested by the Indian authorities but by Mitchell and Gordon. The same applied to a provision giving immigrants the right to buy exemption

¹ Ordinance II, 1912.

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on their arrival. Thereafter commutation was allowed only with the consent of the Agent-General of Immigration. In many cases this worked very well. Typical cases of commutation included wives of unindentured men, those unfitted for agricultural service, those whose relatives in India paid for their return, those wanted for Government service because of their special qualifications, and those whose continued presence on a plantation would have been a great nuisance. But this law also gave rise to abuse. It gave only to the employer the benefit of ending the contract. He would apply normally only where an immigrant was a bad worker and where he was able by extraordinary means to raise money; a good labourer had as a rule no prospect whatever of securing the employer's consent, but not so a prostitute or a gambler.² Although commutation on excessive terms was refused by the Immigration Department, there were many cases of illegal exemption from work which were never reported to it. Eventually a standard

¹ Proclamation of 23 May 1883 (Fiji Royal Gazette, 1883, 73); Des Voeux to C.O., no.131, 18 Sep. 1882, C.O. 384/138.

² C.S.O. 502/92. In the nineties one large company used to charge prostitutes 5s. to 10s. a month as immunity from prosecution. When this practice was stopped, the women were, by repeated prosecution, forced to commute for sums of up to twice their cost of introduction. (C.S.O. 2632/95.)

rate was fixed - £4.10.0 per annum.

Although most immigrants served their full five years, on the plantation to which they were first indentured, many were transferred in the course of their service, to open up new plantations, or to prevent violence, but close relatives were not separated. Then there were deserters, some of whom were never recaptured.¹ Some went to live with unindentured Indians or with Fijians, who were often glad to have an extra hand. The Madrasis were particularly prone to home-sickness and desertion, and overseers were warned to watch them closely at first. Most deserters were incorrigibles, but others were worried by home-sickness or ill-treatment. There were even instances of groups of men and women setting off across Viti Levu, in attempts to reach India on foot.² Normally, immigrants were not allowed to leave the plantation, except on holidays. They

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<u>Year</u>	<u>Desertions</u>	<u>Recaptured</u>
1907	63	56
1908	79	67
1909	55	48
1910	80	62
1911	110	54
1912	135	88
1913	93	147
	<u>615</u>	<u>522</u>

(Fiji Times, 1 Apr. 1915.)

2

C.S.O. 2547/01.

worked from Monday to Friday and on Saturday morning. Except in certain illegal instances, overtime was with their consent. They were paid on Saturday afternoon. Most of the men earned their shilling a day, and most of the women at least sevenpence.¹ Immigrants on half or three-quarter task received less proportionately. Often new arrivals found it impossible, before they were experienced, to earn the shilling a day that they had been promised in India, and this gave rise to discontent. Moreover, the sirdars could sometimes harrass men they disliked by dishonestly recording the work done. Deductions from wages were resented by immigrants. They were illegal, but were made on some plantations, especially where immigrants had damaged property.² In general, however, employers observed the provisions of the Ordinance in paying for work done. There were exceptions, in earlier years particularly, and prosecutions were taken at Ba and Labasa.³ The C.S.R. Company issued a circular to its

¹ Average wages of indentured immigrants in 1902: males 11.52d. per working day, 12.79d. per day actually worked; females 6.14d. per working day, 7.60d. per day actually worked. In earlier years the earning were less. There was a slight increase (less than 1d.) in the next ten years.

² C.S.O. 489/95; 491/95.

³ C.S.O. 2689/95; 4224/95.

employees warning them against making deductions. It was regarded by the Immigration Department as one of the most serious offences in the book, and, with the appointment of resident inspectors, the practice fell into decline.

There were regular inspections of plantations. The frequency of these varied over the period. In the lean years, until about 1898, they averaged about two a year, but later they were often made at six-weekly intervals to the more accessible plantations. When an inspector made a formal visit, he would, as a matter of courtesy, first notify the planter or manager. He was precluded from accepting hospitality, but this was apparently not enforced, at least so far as drinks and meals were concerned. He would inspect the pay lists, lines, hospital, toilet facilities and water and fuel supplies. The immigrants would be mustered and asked collectively if they had any complaints to make. Resident inspectors also had occasion to visit plantations outside of their regular inspections, and were sometimes seen in their offices by Indians. Any complaints were investigated and advice given to the employer or immigrant, or prosecutions instituted. Every complaint made by an indentured immigrant was supposed to be reported to Suva, either by an entry

in the inspector's diary or by special report. Some immigrants went to Suva to complain; in later years some even sent radio telegrams. After 1898, inspection facilities were adequate and sufficiently frequent for most plantations, although isolated copra plantations were exceptions. In general, however, no improvement in the machinery of inspection would have produced better results. Its efficiency depended rather on the quality of the inspectors, the conditions of plantation life, and the confidence in the inspectors held by the employers and immigrants. How far did these apply in practice?

It is important, in this respect, that most of the inspectors of immigrants were recruited from the ranks of the C.S.R. Company's overseers, although there were exceptions, especially in earlier years. In 1910 the Colonial Office objected to this practice, and requested that in future inspectors be selected from those not connected with the sugar industry in Fiji, especially from the Government cadets, who were appointed from England. But it was informed in reply that only overseers had a knowledge both of plantation conditions and of Indian labourers and their language. To command the respect of magistrates and employers, inspectors had to be experts on questions such as tasking. Applicants could not be attracted from outside

the colony because of the low salaries offered. A question was asked about these in the House of Commons in 1909, and later there was an increase, although there continued to be a large turnover in the ranks of the inspectors.

Employers were generally satisfied with the work of the inspectors. Indeed, it would have been remarkable if the latter had not possessed the outlook and attitudes of the overseers. There were exceptions, apart from the situation during Anson's term of office. During the trouble at Labasa, about the turn of the century, two successive inspectors were heavily criticised by the C.S.R. Company, and one was rebuked by the Colonial Secretary for not exercising judgment in enquiring into grievances and instituting prosecutions against employers and reminded that an inspector should scrupulously avoid action which might appear vindictive or an encouragement of insubordination.¹ Later still, there was friction at Ba between employers and the local resident inspector. Apart from these general instances, there were others when a particular overseer or planter was on bad personal terms with the inspector. In these cases, the latter was zealous in enforcing the

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C.S.O. 4411/02; C.S.O. Outward 5514/02.

law against the employer. (Old immigrants remember such cases.) But usually the Europeans of a particular locality belonged to the same social circle. The Government officers in the districts were dependent on the employers and overseers for fellowship, and on the companies for meat, ice and transport for their families. The road to ease and even to promotion did not lie along the way of "trouble-making".

Rightly or wrongly, the labourers had in general no confidence in the inspectors.¹ Most considered that they had been brought to Fiji on false pretences. They had not been told of the penal sanctions, nor that the "twelve annas" a day they had been promised did not go as far in Fiji as in India. Nor had they expected the work to be so hard. As a result they were suspicious of Europeans and did not always make fine distinctions as to role. The immigrant noted that the inspector seemed to be on excellent terms with the overseer, and contrasted this with his unsympathetic demeanour towards Indians. There were, of course, occasional inspectors who were regarded with confidence. A lot depended on the plantation in question. Where the law was observed, and immigrants

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Old immigrants left the writer in no doubt on this score.

could make complaints with impunity, they were made and made frequently; some were frivolous or fictitious. But, on other plantations, immigrants were afraid to complain. Warnings before the inspector's visit were not unknown. "The Inspector comes and goes," the overseer might remind his labourers, "but you have to work under me for five years." To complain to the proper authorities at the appropriate time was not always the most sensible course of action for an immigrant. Where the labourers were cowed, detection of abuses was correspondingly more difficult. Even where inspectors realised the limitations of normal inspection procedures, they were precluded from setting traps for the employer or doing anything else which could be construed as underhand, discourteous or subversive of discipline. For these reasons, inspectors did not always see the real conditions of daily life on a particular plantation.

The "typical" indentured immigrant worked long hours to complete hard, monotonous tasks. He was tired. He was unhappy and sorry he came to Fiji. He was afraid of his overseer and sirdar and he had no faith in the Government and its inspectors. He would gladly have commuted if given the chance. The worst thing was often not the fear of assault or prosecution, for these did not happen

to most, but the want of the kind and encouraging word and the ready ear for complaints, however trivial. In India every man had his place in the social order, but in Fiji immigrants were often regarded in the light of "sugar-producing machines" or worse; certainly they thought they were.¹ But plantations where overseers, in firm control of their sirdars, showed, not only firmness, but also consideration, kindness and knowledge, both of the language and psychology of Indians, were happy ones. These were the minority. It was the impersonality and drudgery of the working life of most plantations that made for unhappiness.

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The extreme antipathy of the Fiji Indian towards the term "coolie" (which the writer has used only in quotations) is sometimes attributed partly to its similarity to the Fijian word for "dog" - "kōli". (Obviously considerations of status are important also.)

Chapter XI

PLANTATION LIFE

For five years, the plantation was the immigrant's world. The monotony of acres of sugar cane or coconut trees was broken only by an adjoining plantation or a Fijian village. Beyond there were rolling scrub-covered hills or mountainous rain forest. The conditions of the life on the plantation were far different from those the immigrant had known in India. Although there was variation from plantation to plantation, a certain uniformity was imposed by the law and by Government regulation, as well as by the common conditions of recruitment and employment. Most sugar plantations were alike in their appearance and in the way of life of their occupants.¹

On the highest piece of ground, amid trees for shade, stood the bungalow of the planter or overseer. From there, the overseer could see the whole plantation; the sugar

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The descriptions of the daily life of the immigrants in this chapter are based mainly on the writings of Andrews and Pearson, Burton and Totaram Sanadhya, on scattered material in the C.S.O. files in Suva, and on information obtained in interviews. The only other significant contemporary account is that of Stock, a traveller who described bad conditions on a copra plantation in Fiji just before the First World War.

cane, the land lying fallow or in food and fodder crops, the stables and sheds where the horses, the tools and provisions were kept, and the black "lines" where the immigrants lived. Unless he were married, or lived on a plantation near a large mill centre, the overseer's life was a lonely one. He was not well paid and, except on Sunday and part of Saturday, worked from daylight to dark, with superiors to please and inspectors to satisfy. He had little entertainment or European company, except when other overseers or planters came around for a talk. Drinking and Indian women were often his principal diversions. There were some advantages to his life: he had responsibility, good accommodation, servants and food, a healthy outdoor life, and the opportunity to command, riding around on his horse. But it was dangerous work, for overseers could be beaten or chopped down. It was "a man's life".

Beneath the house were the "lines", the barracks for the immigrants. On a typical plantation there would be two or three lines, each housing between forty and fifty immigrants. Their style and minimum dimensions were prescribed by law. Normally they were long, with corrugated iron roofs, and wooden walls, tarred black. Lines built after 1908 had broad, overhanging roofs to provide

shelter on each side, spouting to carry away rain water and separate detached kitchens.¹ The lines were set in a clearing, and latrines were placed some distance away. Each line was usually divided into sixteen rooms, eight on each side. The rooms were ten feet by seven feet, or ten feet by twelve feet (after 1908). By 1911, about half the immigrants were under the new conditions laid down in 1908.² Each room was assigned to three single men, or to one man, one woman and not more than two children. It had a door but no windows. To assist ventilation, the partitions were not carried to the ceiling but were topped with wire netting; privacy did not exist. After 1908, rooms had to be white-washed internally once a year. There were no floors, although it was usual for immigrants to make one out of cow-dung and clay, as in India. Inside there were three bunks, and with firewood, field tools, cooking utensils and wet clothes cluttered about, there was very little room to move. Until separate kitchens were required in 1908, there was a fireplace as well, for immigrants had to cook in their rooms. With smoke, soot,

¹ Fiji Royal Gazette, 1908, 184.

² Memo. by Governor May, 19 Jul. 1911, enc. to C.S. to Methodist Mission, 9 Aug. 1911, Methodist Mission Papers, vol. 108.

spilt food, and flies and mosquitoes, living conditions were uncomfortable. Sometimes fowls or a dog were kept in the room, too, adding to the already insanitary conditions, but affording a precaution against theft. The mud and straw houses the immigrants had come from in India had often been miserable hovels, but they had at least been detached and had blended into the surrounding earth. The lines were not just crowded and dirty; they were ugly.

Curiously, not all indentured immigrants lived on the plantation on which they were employed. Some leased a plot of land and lived in a Fijian bure¹ or tin shed, or with an unindentured Indian. Until 1912, this was perfectly legal, as long as they turned up to work regularly. Often indentured women lived with unindentured men in this fashion. On the other hand, the lines were sometimes occupied by unindentured labourers, taking advantage of the rent-free accommodation or the proximity of immigrant women.

For the first six months, immigrants were rationed by law.² The object of this provision was to prevent undernourishment through ignorance, the desire to save

¹ Ordinance II, 1912.

² Before 1891, twelve months.

or the persistence of habits of frugality. A daily re-
duction of fourpence¹ was made to cover the cost of the
rations, which were issued weekly, and immigrants were
forbidden to sell them or give them away. Totaram Sanadhya
relates how he fed some visitors, and then went hungry
for days, until he was saved by some Fijians.² Compulsory
rationing was resented by the employers and the immigrants -
by the employers because in most cases they regarded it
as a great nuisance, and by the immigrants because they
would have preferred to have the money to spend in their
own way. Those who were physically weak, might, after
paying for their rations, have little or nothing left
out of their wages. Over the years, there were changes
in the ration scale; at first it was a "scurvy diet",³
but later it was improved,⁴ especially with respect
to protein. Either rice or flour was supplied accord-
ing to the wishes of the immigrants. After six months,
they found their own food. Unless one of them had caste

¹ Before 1895, fivepence.

² Totaram Sanadhya 'Bhut Len ki Katha' ('The Story of the Haunted Line') in Maryada, special overseas number.

³ Minute by Chief Medical Officer, 26 Jun. 1888, C.S.O. 1020/89.

⁴ Ordinance XII, 1895.

scruples or other objections, the occupants of a cubicle would cook in common, for about twopence or threepence a day each (more in the last years of the indenture system). Food bought from stores, from unindentured Indians, or from Fijians, was supplemented with vegetables and roots collected from the bush (or neighbouring Fijian gardens) and by meat. Often poultry or goats were kept by the labourers. In general, the food of the immigrants was adequate for field labour, and better than they had eaten in India.

After the evening meal, many of the immigrants were often too tired to think of anything but sleep. Most of their recreation was reserved for the weekend. After work finished about noon on Saturday they were paid. In the lines of the larger plantations there would be a bazaar, as described by Burton:

The bazar is an animated scene. It is carried on mostly by 'free' Indians who bring their commodities for sale. Long rows of sellers, with their goods before them, flank the sides of the coolie lines. All the colours of the rainbow spill themselves over the space in ever-changing confusion. Here and there little tents made of sacks opened and stretched on sticks, keep off the sun or rain from the goods spread out on the ground. At the entrance to the lines a seller of Fijian yagona (the kava root) makes, in a none-too-clean bowl, the drink which has become so popular with the Indians.... There, huge milk-pans are piled with Indian sweetmeats and strange condiments. Half a score of naked boys look hungrily at them and envy the innumerable flies

which seize every opportunity to settle upon these delicacies. Farther on, open sacks of rice, dhall, maize, pollard and bright black beans stand; and as fast as one bag is emptied another takes its place. In the shade of one of the buildings a couple of Indians are selling rough Fijian-grown tobacco.... In the midst of a crowd of men and women an Indian jeweller sits. He is showing his beautiful and finely wrought pieces of gold and silver. Perhaps there is three hundred pounds' worth, and many of the individual articles are very expensive. One wonders who will buy them - but they go quickly enough. The explanation is that the jewellery answers to our Post Office savings-bank. If a man has a few shillings saved he buys a bracelet or an amulet and puts it on his woman or child. 'Free' women have often fortunes upon their bodies. The very poorest wear something. The children always have a bangle - and very little else, save a thread around their waists. These gold- and silver-smiths are very skilful, and with the most primitive appliances fashion the most elaborate and chaste designs. Under a spreading mango-tree, an Indian tailor sits.... Right in the middle of the roadway a barber squats before his victim.... At right angles to the main line is the vegetable bazar.... Then come the fowls.... A little farther on are goats.... Religion is offered for sale in the bazar too. Here is a Mohammedan faqir offering charms.... Sitting on a box is a Hindu sadhu, or saint, in charge of two most unsaintly looking disciples.... A Christian teacher, near by, is trying to sell Bibles and Testaments.... At the very end of the bazar a Muhammedan moulvi is haranguing a crowd of unbelievers....¹

On the larger plantations, there was a store, often a branch of one of the larger European firms. The abuses of "company stores" often found in other countries under similar conditions were absent. There were occasional

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Burton, The Fiji of Today, 295-9.

irregularities, such as the keeping of stores by sirdars and the overcharging of Indians by store-keepers, but the C.S.R. Company was able to control prices near its plantations, and the wages of indentured labourers could not be attached for debt.

Sunday was also a holiday, and immigrants could not be made to work on that day, without their consent, and then only for vital work, such as caring for stock or overhauling machinery. Other holidays were Christmas Day, Good Friday, Moharram, Holi and, sometimes, Boxing Day, New Year's Day, and Easter Monday. On Sundays, about half the immigrants left to visit other plantations, Indian settlements or Fijian villages. Some went to work for unindentured Indians, or on a plot of land in which they had acquired a share while still under indenture.¹ The permission of the employer to leave the plantation was rarely refused. Some went to the bush to collect roots or firewood, and some went to buy vegetables from the Fijians or get them in exchange for cloth or Indian food. Others would stay at home. The scene in the lines has been described by Totaram Sanadhya:

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In 1899 it was decided that no leases of Fijian land would be granted to immigrants still under indenture (C.S.O. 5469/99), but much unregistered leasing continued.

On Sunday I went to the other lines for a walk. Someone was singing from the Alha and another reading the Ramayana. One was beating a hand-drum and another playing the tambura, while others were singing bhajans. Some were using obscene language. Some were entertaining their friends while others were practising the different holds of wrestling. One was standing before the sirdar with his head down while abuse was showered upon him.... I sat under a mango tree on a piece of ground surrounded by the four lines. I saw women busy everywhere. Some were washing up their cooking vessels and utensils, some were busy in the preparation of food, while among themselves they were asking for news of their husbands, parents etc. and weeping.¹

Weddings were occasions for entertainment. Some immigrants gambled away their time and money, for gamblers, some professional, abounded in the lines. Sometimes immigrants got drunk on spirits obtained illegally, and frequently there was quarrelling especially over the women. Some received visitors from outside. Occasionally these were excluded from plantations by employers - an action that sometimes gave rise to ill-feeling. There was a tendency for the lines at a large mill centre to become the haunt of undesirables from outside, and there was no objection by the Government to their exclusion. But occasionally even husbands of indentured women were excluded, and, although the Immigration Department usually prevailed upon

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Free translation from Totaram Sanadhya, Bhut Len ki Katha, in Maryada, special overseas number.

the employer to allow the husband to commute the wife's indenture in such cases, or to allow the access, there were isolated cases of real hardship and injustice in this respect.¹

Some wrote letters home in their spare time. Most who wrote were illiterate and dictated their letters to a scribe; for this service there was a charge of up to a shilling, which made letter-writing expensive for immigrants. Employers often gave assistance in addressing envelopes. Although there are no regular statistics, it is likely that most immigrants did not write home to India. In 1885, the Fiji Government adopted a scheme of free postage on immigrants' letters to India. This reason was given:

Every effort should be made by Inspectors of Immigrants to induce Indians to write to their friends. Such communications tend to dispel the idea (actually existing) that Fiji is out of reach; that those who go there can hardly expect to return, even if they do not all die in Fiji. The removal of this impression may tend to foster the emigration of a respectable and hard-working class of person.²

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Some Chief Justices ruled that the lines were public places, and others that they were not; it is the practice which is described here.

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Fiji Royal Gazette, 1885, 32. This was at the suggestion of the Emigration Agent who reported that a panic in the depot on the score that no emigrant had ever returned from Fiji had been stopped by the reading out of a letter from someone in the colony. (C.S.O. 519/84.)

But, in 1886, out of an immigrant population of 5237,¹ only 141 free letters were sent to India, and it may be assumed that the opportunity of free postage would not have been passed over by many immigrants who wrote. In the following year, only 425 letters were sent, and in 1888² the scheme was discontinued. By 1909, the Fiji Government had lost its illusions on this subject, and declined a suggestion by the Colonial Office that immigrants be encouraged to write letters, on the ground that, far from stimulating immigration, letters home might do the opposite. Planters were opposed to the proposal, too, because they thought that letters might spread political unrest from India to Fiji. There were many reasons why immigrants did not write home: alienation from the family, shame for past misdemeanours, the relatively high cost of copying and postage, the failure to obtain replies (often because of the inability of the post office to cope with inadequate or incorrect addresses - piles of undelivered letters lay in the post offices in Fiji),³ the desire to avoid remitting money home, and general ignorance and

¹ Indian Immigration Report for 1886 (C.P. 38/87).

² Indian Immigration Report for 1887 (C.P. 29/88).

³ C.S.O. 2074/89.

indifference to communication. For most immigrants, contact with their relatives in India was broken the day they left home. A few immigrants sent money home, especially to wives, and only the Indians in Natal remitted more per head than those in Fiji.¹ Famine years in India saw an increase in the amount remitted, and in 1897 there was a generous contribution to the famine relief appeal.² But most immigrants did not remit money, perhaps because of low earnings, alienation from the family, or difficulty in ensuring that it reached the right address in India. The Sanderson Committee in 1910 regretted the fact that immigrants did not maintain more frequent contact with their homes, since this would have removed one of the main supposed obstacles to emigration - the paucity of news from those who had emigrated.³

If most immigrants maintained no personal ties with their homeland, they had few ties with their new country either. Their relations with the Fijians were for the most part superficial. In the earlier years, employment of Fijians and Islanders on the same plantation as Indians

¹ Annual reports on the condition of India (P.P.s).

² Bengal E.P. Mar. 1899, A.28-40.

³ Cd. 5192 (1910), 18.

was common, and on occasions they even lived in the same lines. Racial relations were not cordial under these circumstances, because the frustrations of plantation life aggravated tensions arising from differences in customs and values. There were several serious riots. In November 1882, July 1883 and June 1884 there were disturbances at Nausori between the Indians and the Fijians and Islanders.¹ Exaggerated accounts appeared in newspapers in India, which made capital out of the alleged warlike proclivities of the Fijians.² Carew was afraid that very serious bloodshed might occur.³ There were other riots - at Koronivia in 1885 and Vagia, Ba, in 1887.⁴ In the following years, there appear to have been no such racial incidents. This was probably due to the fact that Indian labour had replaced Fijian and Island labour on the large estates. Where the races were not in proximity, there was no trouble, as there was none between Fijians in their villages and Indian settlers or indentured labourers. Nevertheless, each regarded the other with a good deal of contempt,

¹ C.S.O. 2839/82; 2141/83.

² C.S.O. 150/84.

³ C.S.O. 1405/84.

⁴ C.S.O. 1701/85; 2577/87.

mixed perhaps with apprehension. MacGregor held the view that the Fijian dislike of the Indian was due to a fear¹ that he would be ultimately dispossessed from his land. Thurston, too, was concerned, particularly because Fijians were in the habit of molesting Indians, especially the women.² The employers and the Government tried to prevent contact between the races: Fijians were often excluded from plantations, the Indians were advised by their employers to keep away from Fijians, and Indians who were detected living in Fijian villages were ordered by the Government to leave.³ (But the census reports showed a few such residents, especially South Indians.)⁴ In addition to preventing trouble, this would guard the Fijians against the unsettling effects of Indian contact. Thus, Government policy contributed towards the separation of the races, although this would probably have occurred in any case, because of differences of temperament and

¹ C.S.O. 2140/84.

² C.S.O. 236/87.

³ C.S.O. 739/93; 3608/99. For instance, an Afghan who dressed and wore his hair like a Fijian and was wanted by the Fijians to stay was ordered to leave (C.S.O. 4016/93). The same policy was applied to Europeans.

⁴ 1921 Census Report (C.P. 2/22).

customs. Each regarded the other as his inferior, although there was no bitterness or real ill-feeling on either side. Contacts were usually limited to commercial dealings, although Indians sometimes went into Fijian villages and were received hospitably; in turn, Fijians were entertained in Indian homes and participated in Indian celebrations such as Moharram and Ramlila.¹ There was little miscegenation. There were, however, a few instances of Indians becoming completely assimilated to Fijian ways and taking Fijian wives. To the Indian, the Fijian was an uncouth fellow, but his children would acquire some of the latter's casual attitude towards life. To the Fijian, both the European and Indian were interlopers, but, whereas he felt respect for the former, he could feel none for the illiterate and servile Indian labourer. Indian influence on the Fijians was slight. The relations of the Indians with the Europeans were even more superficial than with the Fijians (except between Indian women and overseers), and were purely functional in nearly all cases. They were the relations of master and servant. Unless it is appreciated that, with conspicuously few exceptions - and

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They acted as demons in Ravana's army (Totaram Sanadhya, The Religious and Social Condition of the Fiji Indians - unpublished manuscript).

those doubtful, the Europeans regarded the Indians as inferiors, it is impossible to understand why decent and humane men could consider a shilling a day a good wage and the lines excellent accommodation for them. It was simply assumed that the Indians had a lower standard of life and place in the social order. When they behaved in accordance with their environment, this was taken as added proof of their inferiority.

From the beginning, the Government laid down conditions governing the medical care of immigrants. At first, every plantation with more than five indentured immigrants was required to have a hospital, but from 1891 central hospitals for groups of plantations were legalised, although institutions of this nature had been in existence for some time. ¹ There were central hospitals at the mill centres, and generally one other hospital in each of the C.S.R. Company's districts. Immigrants could also be sent to a public hospital. Immigrants were thus well served in the number of hospitals provided for them - more than for the Fijians - although in the last years, when there was a great diversification in the employment of immigrants,

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C.S.O. 2955/91; Ordinance II, 1891.

some, particularly those in the Lau Islands, were a long way from the nearest hospital.¹ Each hospital was in the charge of a hospital attendant, generally a European, and not a qualified doctor, and there were Indian male attendants and nurses. Each hospital was visited regularly by the District Medical Officer, whose salary was defrayed by a capitation charge on employers, and whose main duty was the medical supervision of immigrants. He visited the larger estate hospitals once or twice a week, and inspected the lines twice a year. The hospitals were fitted according to the requirements laid down by law, and, like the lines, were unattractive. Except for beds, the wards were bare. The patients preferred to sleep on the floor, usually spending their days on the verandahs. Although good medicines were used, there was no real nursing,² and in earlier years especially, the patients were often given rough and ready treatment. Occasionally hospitals were used as places of detention. In those years, the Immigration Department was not satisfied with the plantation hospitals, and although conditions greatly improved later,

¹ McNeill and Chimmanlal Report, Cd. 7745 (1914), 248.

² Garnham, A Report on the Social and Moral Conditions of Indians in Fiji, 23-4.

the system of private plantation hospitals was always open to the serious objection that patients seldom received that personal attention which could have made an important difference to recovery.

Most of the complaints treated in plantation hospitals were classed generally as debility or dysentery, although, considering the extent of medical knowledge at the time, many different troubles were undoubtedly erroneously included under these headings. There were epidemics of dysentery at various times, and in the nineties these were often attributed to contaminated water. In 1895-6 the supply was greatly improved by the sinking of wells and the construction of tanks.¹ Undernourishment was also thought to be a cause of sickness, and the ration scales were improved to give more protein. Poor sanitation was undoubtedly a factor, too. Plantations were never entirely satisfactory with respect to sanitation, although from 1908 onwards there was a great improvement. The most important cause of debility was, however, ankylostomiasis (hook-worm) and not until late in the period were its real effects realised. To it can be attributed more real misery than anything else in the indenture system. How

¹ C.S.O. 128/96; 487/96.

many deaths it caused, directly or indirectly, cannot be estimated - certainly many thousands - while countless others were weakened or broken by it. Although new arrivals from India were heavily affected by the disease, it constituted no serious problem except in the "wet" areas - Rewa and Navua. Navua was the worst area, because of the wet climate, swampy ground, and difficulties in the way of effective drainage. After the Vancouver-Fiji Sugar Company opened up new plantations, there was a great increase in the incidence of the disease in Navua, and by 1912 about half the indentured labourers in the district were infected. The Government had been slow to take effective measures against ankylostomiasis. From 1890, thymol treatment was standard, but it was confined to individual cases, diagnosed clinically,¹ whereas the only effective way of controlling the disease would have been by means of an intensive campaign. Finally, in 1912, one was begun at Navua, and by 1915 there had been 15,000 "week-end treatments".² At the same time, the Vancouver-Fiji Sugar Company tried to improve the sanitation of the lines and covered the earth with sulphate of lime. Dr P. Harper,

¹ C.S.O. 3297/98.

² Immigrants were put in hospital over the week-end, given thymol treatment, and sent back to work on Monday.

then District Medical Officer at Navua, was responsible for these measures. He fought dysentery and hook-worm, not by issuing directives, but by regular inspection and by enlisting the sympathy and co-operation of the employers and the immigrants in his campaign.¹ The measure of his achievement was the decline in the death-rate of the indentured Indians in Navua from 96.6 per thousand in 1910 to 29.31 per thousand in 1913.² (Dr Harper was, among Fiji Government officials, the most popular with Indians, the most alive to the deficiencies of the indentured labour system, and the most outspoken in his official reports.)

The other main complaints treated in plantation hospitals were: sores and ulcers, which were very prevalent

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Ankylostomiasis was finally conquered among the unindentured Indians after the end of the indentured labour system by Dr Lambert's Campaign, financed by the International Health Board (Rockefeller). C.P. 75/16 and 17/24.

2

Mortality Rates of Indentured Immigrants by Districts.
Per thousand

	<u>1895</u>	<u>1910</u>	<u>1912</u>
Rewa	61.6	33.6	27.3
Navua	96.3	96.6	50.3
Ba	33.6	34.2	16.7
Ra	15.5	-	-
Macuata (Labasa)	52.3	25.1	15.7
Taveuni	65.7	-	-
Lautoka and Nadi	-	29.2	18.6
Nadroga	-	47.2	14.7
Total	<u>52.8</u>	<u>37.8</u>	<u>22.1</u>

among immigrants in their first year of service, and venereal disease, which was rampant in the lines, because of the social conditions under which the immigrants lived. Tuberculosis, yaws and ophthalmia (at Ba) were also common. Immigrants who suffered injuries while under indenture were usually paid compensation by the employers, although there was no legal liability to do so. There were many others who were weak or sickly, and had been put on limited task. Some of these hardly earned the price of their food. These dispirited and exhausted immigrants, unknowingly suffering perhaps from hookworm infection, with nothing to show for their labour, were real victims of the system.

Women and children suffered even more neglect. Women were recruited as field labourers and were required to work, except for about three months before and after pregnancy, when they were rationed by the employer. Miss Dudley of the Methodist Mission described the indentured women she saw in Fiji:

They arrive in this country timid, fearful women, not knowing where they are to be sent. They are allotted to plantations like so many dumb animals. If they do not perform satisfactorily the work given them, they are punished by being struck or fined, or they are even sent to gaol. The life of the plantations alters their demeanour and even their very faces. Some look crushed and broken-hearted, others sullen, others hard and evil. I shall never forget the first time I saw 'indentured women' when they were returning from their day's

work. The look on those women's faces haunts me.¹

The infant mortality was very high. As late as 1914, the Secretary of State drew the attention of the Fiji Government to the excessive deaths among the children of indentured immigrants in 1913 (83.75 per thousand). The main causes of this were congenital syphilis, improper feeding and poor sanitation, the ignorance of the mothers and the fact that they were too busy to care for their children properly. In earlier years, the supply of milk was insufficient on many plantations. While their mothers were at work, the infants were either carried into the fields and placed on sacks, or put into flyridden "nurseries" which were usually the two end cubicles of a line with the partition removed. There they were put in the charge of nurses, who were normally untrained and old. After they reached the toddling stage, the children were allowed to run wild; no schooling was provided. At the age of fifteen, sometimes earlier, they went to work.²

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Article in India circa late 1912, reprinted Indian Emigrant, Jul. 1915.

2

The adult age was ten before 1892, twelve until 1908, and fifteen thereafter. Immigrants could be made to work on attaining the adult age, but normally they were employed only on domestic or other light work until they were fifteen. The practice was usually kinder than the law.

To a man with a wife and family, who had belonged to a middle or high caste in India, his new life was a miserable one. At best, it was that of a well-treated animal - fed, looked after if sick, driven to work, and given a "stable" (Andrews) or a "kennel" (Burton) to live in. Andrews and Pearson wrote: "In Fiji the amount of satisfaction we found was very limited indeed. Here and there we discovered a set of coolies who were happy on the estates. But this was the exception, not the rule."¹ The unhappiness in the lines, if general, was not universal. Many strong, single man enjoyed the comradeship, lack of responsibility and social restrictions and opportunity for vice. To a labourer from India, who had known hunger and the fear of death, had slept in the open or in a mud hovel, and had encountered little but abuse and ill-treatment from his betters, a plantation in Fiji was an improvement. But, for the most part, immigrants called their new life "narak", which means "hell".

¹

Indian Indentured Labour in Fiji, Perth edition, 13.

Chapter XII

RELIGION

In India, religion and social conduct were closely connected; in Fiji, they were separated. In India, social status, marriage, eating arrangements and occupation were determined by caste, but these distinctions were all but obliterated in the depots, ships, and plantations. A new pattern of association, work and marriage was imposed by the indenture system, and, in the process, religion lost its central position in social life. To Christians or to Muslims this separation would not have been vital, as long as there was toleration of belief and worship; but to Hindus, to whom all the important acts of life are influenced by religious custom, the sudden destruction of the old society meant the destruction of the moral order too. Nowhere was this more true than in the area of family life, because to the Hindu woman, religion and the family are almost synonymous.

The disappearance of caste distinctions was not in all cases sudden and it was by no means complete, but

the change was nevertheless remarkable. The ease with which high caste emigrants mixed with the lower castes in the depots and ships was continued in Fiji. Quarrels arising from religious causes were rare; people of different castes lived and ate together; association was not primarily determined by caste; the sirdars, the only real leaders in most cases, were of all castes and acceptance of their authority did not primarily depend on their caste; and immigrants married across caste lines. Why was this acceptance of the new situation so rapid? In the first place, most immigrants were young. Secondly, they were recruited as individuals. Caste observance depends very largely on the group, with caste panchayats to lay down rules, impose penalties and decide disputes. None of the sanctions used in India to maintain rules of behaviour could be enforced in Fiji. Without leadership and the support of caste fellows, caste lost most of its social significance. Some castes had only one representative on a plantation. Others had several, but these had been recruited separately, and the creation of a caste grouping among people who were previously strangers would have been irrelevant in Fiji. Thirdly, many caste distinctions could not be enforced in the new environment. The depots, ships and lines were so cramped that untouchability became

impossible to observe, and, as meals were taken in common, restrictions on commensality were broken at once (although there were isolated cases of quarrels over cooking). People of different castes had to share the same living quarters (but occasionally immigrants of the same caste managed to share a room together in the lines). With rare exceptions, immigrants were given work without regard for their caste, and, for the most part, this was unskilled agricultural labour. Then, too, at ceremonies people assumed duties which lay outside their traditional caste roles; at a wedding, for instance, there might not be a barber, and someone else would have to substitute for him. Because immigrants belonged to so many different castes and because there were so few women, inter-caste unions, including marriages, were common, although high caste people were usually desirous of marrying themselves or their children within caste. Finally, some people assumed the duties or name of a higher caste; so that people were not always sure whether a man who claimed to be a Brahmin was really one at all.¹

Nevertheless, caste distinctions did exist, even on the plantations. Although a low-caste sirdar had

¹ Mayer, Indian Rural Society in Fiji (unpublished thesis), 153-4.

more authority, and more respect was accorded to him than to the highest Brahmin under him, sirdars were respected all the more if they were of high caste. The private Indian employers, too, were not respected as much by their labourers if they were of low caste. Totaram Sanadhya relates that one sirdar of the Bhangi caste (sweepers and scavengers) took revenge on the Brahmins and Thakurs under him by making them wait upon him. He made the Brahmins serve him water, for in India he could not draw water from the well but had to depend on the charity of others.¹ This, however, was not typical, and in most cases Brahmins were still respected by those of lower castes. Sometimes they were given gifts, and there was at least one case where a Brahmin was completely supported by another man, out of piety.² The basis of this respect was religious; it was respect for the Brahmin as the custodian of learning, the fount of righteousness, and the performer of necessary religious ceremonies. Other castes do not seem to have been given any special recognition, such as was accorded the Brahmin.

¹ Totaram Sanadhya, The Religious and Social Condition of the Fiji Indians (unpublished manuscript).

² C.S.O. 3609/87.

It was on marriage relationships and family life that the breakdown of religion had its greatest effect. The general state of affairs in the lines was one of promiscuous polyandry, and vice of all sorts flourished. The women were exposed to an extraordinary degree of solicitation from the many unmarried men living in the same lines. In some cases, these conditions were regulated by plantation overseers through the allocation of women. Contributory factors to immorality were the recruitment of unmarried women, the drudgery and joylessness of the lives of the women who were without proper homes where daily religious rites could be performed, and the weakening of the traditional form of marriage. The question of marriage legislation was one of great difficulty, because there was no State regulation of Hindu marriage in India. A form of civil marriage was established in 1892, with the approval of the Government of India.¹ Immigrants who declared themselves to be husband and wife on arrival in the colony were registered as such. Others had merely to pay five shillings and declare, before a magistrate, their intention to be married; after the banns were read for three weeks, they received a certificate from the

¹

C.S.O. 2344/90; Ordinance I, 1892.

Agent-General of Immigration to the effect that they were married. There was no actual ceremony. No marriages other than those registered under the Ordinance were recognised, and thus a previous marriage in India, or a marriage in Fiji by a Hindu or Muslim priest or Christian minister, was invalid in the eyes of the law.¹ Immigrants seldom regarded the legal procedure as constituting a proper marriage, although many did follow it, especially for their children. But the non-recognition of Indian customary marriage was only a subsidiary factor in the breakdown of family life. The sex disproportion and crowded lines were much more important.

Once the immigrants had finished their indentures and left the lines, and their families were growing up, the question of the marriage law became more important, because there were now proper homes to be made or broken, and other people who were affected. A demand arose for the legal recognition of religious marriage, in order to provide greater stability.² In 1913, the Reverend Cyril Bavin, of the Methodist Mission, deliberately flouted the law, by marrying two Christian Indians, without first

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Before 1903, Christian Indians could be married by Christian rites.

2

One such request was made by the Muslims as early as 1901 (Fiji Times, 20 Apr. 1901).

obtaining the certificate of the Agent-General (that they were married already!). He was prosecuted but the case was withdrawn, after a deputation from all the Christian bodies had waited upon the Governor to urge recognition of religious (including non-Christian) marriage.¹ The Indian commissioners who visited Fiji in 1913, and the opponents of the indenture system, made the same point, and an amending Ordinance was passed in 1918, which allowed registered priests of all faiths to solemnise marriages. In deference to the Government of India, a proviso was inserted which declared that to perform a marriage according to Indian custom was not an offence, even though the priest was not registered and the marriage not notified. As was feared by the Fiji Government, this had the effect that even fewer marriages were registered than under the old Ordinance.² Until stable family relationships were established, the rates of murder and criminal assault would remain high; in India, infidelity was not

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Methodist Mission Papers, vol. 109 (1913).

2

Fiji Legislative Council Debates, 18 Apr. 1918 and 7 Jul. 1919; C.P. 28/27. This difficult question was not settled until 1928 when legislation provided for the signing of the civil instrument of marriage at the same time as the ceremony was performed by a registered priest, the proviso exempting unregistered customary marriages being abolished.

lightly forgiven, and so in Fiji too. Another major social evil arising out of the shortage of women was the bartering of female children. Money would often be extracted from several successive suitors or "husbands", and then the betrothal would be repudiated. This problem lasted long after the end of the indenture system.

The social life of the immigrants was not entirely without its advantages. The emancipation of the depressed classes of India in their new environment, the opportunity for a man to rise on his merits, the greater freedom given to women (a freedom which was often abused in the days of indenture, when women were in such great demand),¹ and the chance for widows to remarry, were all blessings, which were to be shown to their full value after the abolition of the indenture system. Another advantage was the remarkable religious toleration which prevailed in the lines and in the settlements. Hindus and Muslims ate together, Hindu-Muslim marriages were frequent, religious celebrations were often enjoyed in common, and there was a real tolerance of other religious faiths and religious observances. Without their leaders, immigrants often

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Andrews, 'The Indian Women in Fiji', in Modern Review, Oct. 1920, 380.

performed any religious ceremonies which they imagined might be beneficial; the idea arose that all rites were equally efficacious and their performance a matter of choice or an accident of birth.¹ The mosque at Nausori was built with money largely contributed by Hindus. Religious incidents were rare; when they occurred they were due to extremists and confined to the one issue of cow-killing - to the Hindus the gravest of matters. There was bad feeling at various places on at least five occasions between 1900 and 1918 over the sacrifice of cows and bulls at the Baqr'Id.² On these occasions the Government prohibited the sacrifices, or asked the Muslims not to give offence to the Hindus by public killings. At many places the Muslims spontaneously refrained in order not to give offence. Notwithstanding the widespread toleration, there was considerable proselytising by the Muslims,³ and numbers of converts from Hinduism (of marriage partners especially), and even a few Fijian converts from Christianity.

¹ Mayer, Indian Rural Society in Fiji, 142-3.

² The first of these was in Navua in 1900 (C.S.O. 1478/00; Fiji Times, 9 May 1900).

³ Burton, The Fiji of Today, 324.

If the more important aspects of religious duty had suffered an eclipse in Fiji, there was still a great interest in the external forms. So-called sadhus (holy men) abounded and were treated with reverence, even though many were of idle and disreputable character. In many localities there were kutis (cottages) for resident priests. The major festivals, and readings from the sacred books, were attended, and alms and donations were given generously. On many plantations, immigrants contributed so much per head, in order that every week there could be a religious ceremony and feast. Many of the traditional religious ceremonies were not observed, because of the absence of proper caste and family life. In the lines, there could be no daily household offerings. There were no holy rivers or great places of pilgrimage,¹ and in most places, no temples where prayers and offerings to the Gods could be made. The ceremonies at birth were reduced to the calling of a priest to name the child, and perhaps a feast. The sacred thread of the higher castes was discarded by

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Certain places in Fiji have acquired some religious significance, such as the hot springs near Labasa, and the Nakauvadra Hills in northern Viti Levu, where the snake Degei, the supreme God of old Fiji, is said to live. He has been identified with Kaliya, the serpent defeated by Lord Krishna in the River Jamna and sent back to the distant islands from where he came.

all but a few. The marriage ceremonies, if performed at all, were much abbreviated. The dead were buried and not cremated, and usually with scant ceremony. The festivals lost most of their religious significance, although Totaram Sanadhya was being ironical when he said that the principal one observed by the Indians in Fiji was Christmas Day. The main ones observed by all alike were the Hindu festival of Holi and the Muslim celebration of Moharram; there were holidays on the plantations on these days. Ramlila was staged in several places after about 1902, including Labasa, Navua and Lautoka, with Hindus, Muslims¹ and even Fijians participating.

There were a number of orthodox (Sanatani) priests with large followings. One, Totaram Sanadhya, of Rewa, was to acquire importance as a leader in Fiji and as a critic of the indenture system in India.² Labasa was particularly well served by priests. The Sanatanis were late in organising; a beginning was made in 1917 with the formation of the Sanatan Dharm Mandala in the Rewa district. There were many itinerant mendicants, whose

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Most of the information in this and the following paragraph was derived from Totaram Sanadhya's unpublished manuscript, The Religious and Social Condition of the Fiji Indians.

2

Considered further in Chapter XVI.

main activities were the gaining of disciples and the obtaining of financial and other advantages from them. Most of the sadhus had been indentured labourers, but a few had come as free immigrants; in any case most of them returned to India after a few years. The main sects were the Kabir Panth, Ramanandi Panth, Arya Samaj, Nath Akhara, Nanak Panth, Satnami, Jagjivandas ka Akhara, and Dadu Panth. Those with the most adherents were the Kabir Panth and the Ramanandi Panth. The Kabir Panth sect was started in 1894 by Baba Auridas at Muanavatu, who secured 1000 followers before his return to India; after subsequent leaders also returned to India, the sect declined. The Ramanandi Panth achieved over 1500 adherents - more than any other sect - under Baba Ragho Das, early in the century, but fell into almost total eclipse after his death in 1907.

The Arya Samaj¹ was the most important sect, not because of numbers, but because its leaders demonstrated concern with more than the outward show of religion and

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The Arya Samaj is a Hindu religious body, founded by Dayanand Saraswati in 1868. It advocates a return to the pure doctrines of vedas, has a definite monotheistic creed and simple ceremonial, and advocates social reform. It rejects the complex caste system and countenances inter-caste marriage and widow remarriage. It opposes child marriage, advocates the education of women, and believes in the conversion of non-Hindus.

the gaining of disciples. It was founded in December 1902, at Samabula, by Sucharam Ugav and Babu Mangal Singh. From the first, it concentrated on education. Babu Mangal Singh gave his house and money to the Arya Samaj, and a school was started, with Pandit Shiudatt Sharma, the secretary, as the teacher.¹ In 1908, land at Samabula was leased; the rent was nominal because the Government wanted to encourage the Indians to further their own educational and moral advancement. The leaders at this time were Mangal Singh, Indranarain and George Nanco, a free immigrant jeweller. The Arya Samaj rapidly gained adherents, particularly among the wealthy and influential - the sirdars, storekeepers, richer farmers, pandits, and overseers' cooks. Its rejection of caste promised to many of these people a social position which they might otherwise have felt lacking; its emphasis on education and social advancement appealed to the more progressive; while the simplicity of its beliefs and worship and its iconoclasm appealed to those who wanted to build up a revitalised Hinduism suitable to Fiji conditions. Most of its adherents were "converts" in Fiji, although a few Arya Samajis came from India. It was making rapid progress, until a scandal about a girl pupil forced the closing of the school.

¹

Totaram Sanadhya, unpublished manuscript.

The Arya Samaj revived with the arrival in 1913 of Swami Ram Manoharanand Saraswati. He had come from Burma as a free immigrant, after hearing of the great need of educated pandits in Fiji.¹ Soon after his arrival, he applied for a lease of land, rent-free, at Samabula, to build a school, orphanage, temple, library, cricket ground and gardens. There were approximately 100 members at this time. The Government felt that there was (despite its activities in India) no political danger in encouraging the Arya Samaj in Fiji, but rejected the Swami's application, because there was no assurance that he could find the necessary funds for his ambitious project. He had good intentions, but lacked ability as a leader or organiser, and a command of English adequate to communicate with the Government. Thereafter, he spent most of his energies in raising money to start schools, but his efforts were rather unpractical.² The activity of the Arya Samaj was to be mainly in the educational sphere. Its main social significance lay in the giving of standing and prestige to those who had already achieved economic success, but who lacked traditional caste status. Its religious work was slight and spasmodic.

¹ Totaram Sanadhya, Fiji Dwip Men Mere Ikkis Varsh, 52.

² Banarsi Das Chaturvedi, Fiji ki Samasya, 280.

Muslim customs suffered less disruption than did Hindu customs through transplantation to Fiji, because Islam is less dependent upon particular social groups. Most of the religious duties and festivals were maintained, with the exception usually of the namaz (prayers five times a day), pardah (the seclusion of women), and the full observance of the fast of Ramazan. Moharram¹ and Baqr'Id were celebrated; a holiday was given for the first, and sometimes for the second as well. There was, however, a lack of competent leaders and of mosques. There were several educated Muslims among the immigrants, and there were many self-styled maulvis, who lacked real authority.² The exception was Mulla Mirza Khan, who arrived in Fiji as a free immigrant from India in 1898. He was not an accredited missionary from any Islamic body in India, but, nevertheless, devoted himself to educational and religious work. About 1900, a mosque was built at Navua, by public subscription, on land bestowed by the Fiji Sugar Company; Mulla Mirza Khan was in charge at first. Shortly afterwards, he leased land from the C.S.R.

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This is a Shia celebration, but was observed in Fiji by the more numerous Sunnis as well. It was often called simply the Tazia.

2

Indian Emigrant, Aug. 1915, 26.

Company at Nausori, and, with contributions, erected a small mosque and school. He was in touch with Muslims throughout Fiji, and can be counted as a significant leader. This essentially personal leadership was to give way to organisation along more European lines, with defined purposes. In 1915, the Anjuman Hidayat-ul-Islam (Islam Teaching Society) was formed at Nausori, to promote education among the Muslims. There was also an effort among the Muslims to revive their religious observances. An exquisite mosque was built at Lautoka; the C.S.R. Company provided a subsidy on condition that cattle were not to be sacrificed there. In 1919, the Anjuman-e-Islam¹ (Muslim League) was formed in Suva. These developments reflected a growing cohesion and feeling of separateness in the Muslim community.

The few Christians among the immigrants from India belonged to various denominations; some of those from Malabar especially were of the Syrian Church, and some of the others from South India were Roman Catholics. Those who came from India were, however, swamped by the numbers of converts in Fiji, and did not retain any separate identity as congregations. When the Indians first came

¹ Fiji Times, 7 May 1919.

to Fiji, most of the Fijians had already been converted to Christianity by the Methodist Mission. But a beginning among the Indians was delayed by limitations of funds. As early as 1885, the chairman of the Methodist Circuit in Fiji asked for a catechist to be sent from India, and in 1892 one finally arrived, an Indian named John Williams. He was not a great success because of language and administrative troubles, although a fair amount of evangelical work was done.¹ Following strong appeals from the Fiji Mission, Miss Hannah Dudley, an Australian who had done missionary work in India, was sent to Fiji in 1897, to work among the Indian women and children. She opened a school, took in orphans, and visited homes, hospitals and the gaol, and slowly won the confidence and indeed the love of the Indians in Suva. In 1901, a lay missionary, the Reverend Cyril Bavin came, in 1902 the Reverend J.W. Burton, and in 1907 the Reverend Richard Piper.² The Roman Catholic Church began at about the same time as the Methodists; and in 1902, the Reverend Henry Lateward, a retired missionary to India from the Society for the

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Tippett, 'Preparing the Way', in Fiji Witness (Special Jubilee Number), Dec. 1948, 17-18.

2

Monthly accounts of the work of the Mission appeared in the Australian Methodist Missionary Review.

Propagation of the Gospel (Church of England), started a small mission.¹ Eventually, there was a division of responsibility between the two Protestant missions; the Anglican Mission was confined to Vanua Levu, while the Methodists had the rest of the group. The Methodist Mission was the largest of these bodies.

In the beginning, the missionaries worked very hard to convert the Indians to Christianity, visiting the settlements and the lines on the plantations. Although they confronted not an organised society as in India, but a disintegrated one, with considerable social freedom, and offered educational advantages, the number of converts was small. There were no outcastes in Fiji to whom the missionaries could appeal, while Christianity was the religion of the European who was regarded with suspicion by those who had lived under the indenture system. Although many Indians did listen, ask questions, and debate with the missionaries, they were not prepared to accept a single avatar (incarnation of the deity) as their saviour. A Hindu could agree with nearly everything the missionary had to say and still remain unconverted, for did not all paths lead to God? There were some converts, however,

¹

Burton, Modern Missions in the South Pacific, 185.

especially among those who attended Christian schools. All sections of the Indian community were represented among them. By 1921, 1.17%¹ of the Indian community in Fiji was Christian. Some of the converts were rapidly converted back again by Kabir Panthi sadhus.² This was not the only difficulty the missionaries faced; the sugar companies were averse to their indentured labourers being evangelised or educated in the lines, presumably because this might spoil them as labourers or cause religious trouble. It was only after a long fight that permission³ was granted. By 1914, despite the efforts of three European missionaries (at Nausori, Lautoka and Navua), six or seven missionary sisters, and several Indian catechists and teachers, the Methodist Church in Fiji had less than 100 Indian members (although many more attended services).⁴ But the Mission did much admirable work in its orphanages, schools and hospitals; the example set to the other religions in Fiji was an influential one; and some of the missionaries worked hard to alleviate the

¹ 1921 census report (C.P. 2/22).

² Totaram Sanadhya, unpublished manuscript.

³ Burton, Our Indian Work in Fiji, 16-17.

⁴ Brummitt, A Winter Holiday in Fiji, 143-50.

rigours of the indenture system and expose its abuses in books and articles. Nor can the missionaries be accused, as they have been elsewhere, of disrupting traditional society, for in Fiji, there was little to disrupt among the Indians. The work of the Missions was almost wholly constructive (although, not unnaturally, Christian Indians tended to be less aware of Indian tradition than Hindus or Muslims).

Not until late in the period did the Government pay any attention to the religious life of the immigrants. There was no official attempt to favour Christianity. This policy was based on the assumption that private religious belief and practice were no concern of the State, but it also reflected an indifference to the non-material welfare of the immigrants, or at least a feeling that this was not a suitable subject for official action. In the last decade of the indenture system the Government took a more positive interest, as it came to recognise the connection between social evils and the absence of religion. It then gave a sympathetic hearing to people like Mulla Mirza Khan and Swami Manoharanand. In an effort to remedy the lack of educated priests and leaders, an attempt was made in 1912 to secure Hindu and Muslim priests from India; but apparently none could be obtained. The Fiji Government

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Totaram Sanadhya, Fiji Dwip Men Mere Ikkis Varsh, 47.

was handicapped by the lack of European officers with Indian experience. The same was true of the employers. A little more attention to the spiritual needs of the Indian immigrants, and the presence of even one experienced and sympathetic officer from the Indian Civil Service, could have prevented much of that demoralisation which was a loss to the colony and to the employers as well as to the immigrants. But nothing was done for thirty years. Nearly all migrations have concomitants of social and personal disorganisation, but because of the nature of Indian society, and particularly its close connection with religion, these were much greater in Indian migration under the indenture system than in most other migrations. Moreover, there was a minimum of new social demands upon the immigrants. They were treated as a labour force only. There was no suggestion that they should conform to European or Fijian standards of personal behaviour, religious observance or social life, and no help was given to them to keep up their own standards. They had to evolve a new pattern of their own, and it was a painful process.

Chapter XIII

REPATRIATION

All Indian adult immigrants into Fiji under the indentured labour system had the right to a free return passage, which could be exercised at any time after the completion of ten years' residence in Fiji (five years' industrial service and five years' further residence). Certain of their children, including, in some cases, those born in Fiji, were also entitled to a passage. In the beginning, no objection was raised in Fiji to the offer of free return passages to immigrants. It was understood that the Government of India insisted upon this, as a guarantee that the immigrants would be well treated. Repatriation is still proceeding, although from 6 September 1958 the right to a free return passage for those who arrived in the colony after 31 May 1906 will expire.

The statistics of repatriation are not as exact as those for immigration. So far as can be calculated by adding up the annual figures in the records of the Fiji Government, there were 32,995 repatriates up to 15 May 1957, but this figure must be taken as approximate. Of these, 6,418 were Fiji-born people repatriated after

6 September 1916; the number of Fiji-born repatriates before that date is not known, but was, perhaps, 2,000-3,000. The number of India-born repatriates was thus about 24,000. Since there were 60,553 immigrants, it may be concluded that approximately 40% of the immigrants went back to India, although some of these returned to Fiji.

There were slight differences between the patterns of repatriation and immigration in respect to geographical origin, women and families, and caste. Of the repatriates, 7188 were South Indians; it is not possible to distinguish how many of those were Fiji-born. This is a lower percentage of repatriation than for the North Indians, but it should be remembered that the restriction of the return passage right in 1906 affected a higher proportion of South Indians, since there was no emigration from Madras to Fiji before 1903, and that in earlier years more immigrants returned. There was probably little difference in the propensity to return of North and South Indians.

Among the immigrants who returned to India there was a lower proportion of adult females to adult males than among those introduced, probably because nearly all the women acquired husbands or families in Fiji. In 1892-6 the proportion was 40% and from 1912-16 it was 31%.¹

¹

From the Indian Immigration reports.

(The difference probably reflects the better facilities for acquiring land in the later period, and the consequent retention of more married men in the country.) Fewer married men returned than single men proportionately; this helped to remedy the disproportion of the sexes. Nevertheless, many families did return to India, even where the partners were of different castes. Family repatriation was more common among the South Indians, who kept closer ties with India (an important reason for this was that emigration was regarded with less disfavour in the south).¹

Among the repatriates, there was a larger proportion of high caste people and a smaller proportion of the very lowest castes. This is understandable, in view of the greatly enhanced social and economic status of the latter in Fiji. Moreover, high caste people, particularly Brahmins, returned with greater savings, due presumably to earnings as priests, or scribes, or in trade. There were many exceptions, however, and the differences were slight; people of all castes returned to India, from the highest to the lowest, married or single, with or without savings. The indentured labour system was a great leveller, and a person's status in India was no reliable guide to his behaviour in Fiji.

¹

Report of the Secretary for Indian Affairs, 1930 (C.P. 38/31).

Some of those who returned to India did so at their own expense, before ten years was up. The first problem concerning repatriation was whether immigrants could do this. The Fiji Government had at first expected the immigrants to remain in the colony for at least ten years, and thus provide an annually increasing labour force. The ten-year period was proposed by Charles Mitchell, who believed that it would not pay the colony to bring them for a shorter period, while Sir Arthur Gordon emphasised in his speeches and despatches that it was a justification of their high cost.¹ The possibility that some might wish to return before ten years was overlooked during the negotiations in 1878, and in the printed terms offered to recruits in India. In 1885 some time-expired immigrants were denied passports, on the ground that they had not spent ten years in the colony, as provided (by oversight) in the Immigration Ordinance of 1878. The Fiji Government was concerned not merely to keep as many labourers in the colony as possible, particularly if they were so hard-working that they could earn the cost of their fares, but also to see that, when immigrants returned to India, they carried with them savings to show to others, as a stimulus

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Thurston to C.O., no.158, 21 Dec. 1886.

to emigration; if they were allowed to pay their own fares, they might arrive home destitute and discontented, or perhaps not at all.¹ The immigrants who were refused passports took their case to a Suva lawyer, who, on obtaining no satisfaction from the Immigration Department, wrote to India. The Government of India asked that the immigrants be permitted to return, since they had been given to understand in India that they could, and suggested that the Ordinance be amended to bring it into line with the practice of other colonies, lest the unfavourable comparison militate against recruitment for Fiji.² The practice and law in Fiji were changed,³ and, thereafter, a considerable proportion of immigrants returned at their own expense.

By 1904, 4076 immigrants had returned to India with free passages, 203 as rejects on arrival, 1837 as "incapables" (those who had broken down physically), and 1436 with passports (paying their own way). By 1907, by which time the proportion of rejects and incapables had

¹ Thurston to C.O., no.143, 23 Nov. 1886; C.S.O. 2872/85.

² Govt. India to I.O., 14 Aug. 1886, India E.P., Aug. 1886, A.8-10.

³ Ordinance VI, 1887.

been reduced, at least one-third of the complement of return ships was made up of people paying their own passages, and over the whole indenture period, about one-quarter. Why did some choose to return under passport, and others to wait for their free passage? Probably most of them intended to return to India eventually, for their experience of Fiji had so far been limited to the drudgery and sordidness of plantation life. But on their wage of one shilling a day, not all immigrants had saved the amount of their fare (£5-£10 usually) by the end of their indentured service. Others wanted to return with substantial savings, and so did not want to spend on a passage what little they had saved under indenture, when they could, by farming for a few years, accumulate a fair sum. But even those who returned under passport often possessed considerable savings. Although no regular, separate statistics are available, the 179 who left under passport in 1889, for instance, declared an average of £42.8.11¹ in savings. It is likely, therefore, that those who paid their own way were often people who had been able to save more than the average under indenture, and who were not handicapped in their return by inter-caste

¹ Indian Immigration Report for 1889 (C.P. 1/90).

marriages. Immigrants in this category would have included: the particularly strong, thrifty and unmarried (or with wives in India), those engaged in non-agricultural work at higher pay - sirdars and those who had an additional source of income, such as priests, tailors, barbers and gamblers. But much depended on personal inclination and circumstances. There does not appear to have been any significant correlation with caste.¹

Those who remained in Fiji even after becoming entitled to a free return passage, did so for a variety of reasons. Family ties in Fiji prevented many from returning, especially since, in most cases, the marriage was an inter-caste one. It would have been difficult to secure acceptance for the wife and perhaps impossible to marry the daughters in India. Others already had wives in India. Some had wronged their relatives or fellow villagers in India and had thus cut themselves off irrevocably. Others had lost touch with their relatives, or presumed them dead, especially if money or mail had been returned undelivered. Some realised that, on their return, they would be subjected to social disabilities, because they had broken caste. Others had achieved a social status

¹

In the repatriation lists in the Fiji Labour Department.

in Fiji which they would lose by returning to India. Some had acquired new habits or techniques which would not be appropriate in Indian conditions. Inertia delayed the return of others, for they knew that their free passage was always open. Some thought that they had not yet saved sufficient money; on the other hand, many repatriates were paupers. Those who returned often did so on the spur of the moment, perhaps because friends were going, or because of an urge to see India, their village or relatives again, or simply to get something for nothing. Some wanted to return to their wives and families; others were worried by the shortage of women in Fiji. Many immigrants used their free passage merely to visit India, with the intention of returning to Fiji. Some old people, having put off their return for years, thought they should die on the soil of Mother India.¹

It is not easy, then, to arrive at any generalisations as to why immigrants remained in Fiji; fresh kinship ties was probably the most important reason, with economic advantage next. The latter certainly operated as a negative reason, for when immigrants found it difficult to secure land, as in the nineteenth century, they returned

¹ Even today, old, semi-invalid men and women beg the Fiji Government to be sent back, and cannot be refused, however pathetic and contrary to their real interests the request seems.

in larger numbers. At first, over half of those introduced returned to India, but later the proportion fell to one-third or less. Of course, in earlier years, there was no long-established Indian community in Fiji and homesickness would have been felt more. There was also a large exodus after the collapse of the strikes of 1920 and 1921, when there was great economic hardship and widespread dissatisfaction with the status of the Indians in Fiji. But normally the economic factor does not seem to have been as significant in the retention of Indians in Fiji as is often imagined. Inevitably, memories of India became more rosy with time. The economic reason was seldom given by old immigrants interviewed by the writer.

That immigrants did not usually make a deliberate choice of permanent settlement in Fiji is shown by the failure of an attempt to allow them to commute their right to a return passage. In 1889, those who had arrived on the Leonidas ten years earlier became eligible for a passage. The Fiji Government, considering that it was "eminently desirable that Indian immigrants should settle in the Colony if so disposed",¹ advertised that the return passage right could be exchanged for a lease of up to

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Minutes of Fiji Executive Council, 18 Apr. 1888 (C.O. 85/6).

five acres of land and goods to the value of £12 per adult and £6 per child. But, as Anson had predicted, there were no applications and the offer was not repeated.¹ There was, however, some further consideration of the question of commutation. In 1897, the Emigration Agent in Calcutta suggested that inducements, similar to those held out to immigrants wishing to settle in British Guiana, should be offered in Fiji. Acting-Governor Berkeley was very much in favour of encouraging Indian settlement through the offer of grants of land. He pointed out that the previous offer had not been accompanied by steps to provide roads to the proposed settlement. But a few months later the new Governor, O'Brien, took the view that commutation would be a great mistake, because the good, thrifty worker would not want to commute, as he already had sufficient capital and would like to keep his passage open as a last resort, while the unpractical, thriftless and lazy man would jump at the chance of obtaining land or money, and eventually become a burden on the colony.² In 1911, when the general question of Indian

¹ Thurston to C.O., no.110, 20 Nov. 1888 and no.47, 31 May 1889; C.S.O. 3174/87 and 2147/90.

² Berkeley to C.O., no.65, 28 Jun. 1897; Minutes of Fiji Executive Council, 26 Jun. and 26 Oct. 1897 (C.O. 85/6); O'Brien to C.O., no.117, 30 Oct. 1897.

immigration was under discussion, the Secretary of State suggested that the offer be revived, but this was opposed by Governor May, on similar grounds. It is unlikely that many immigrants would have commuted, for they regarded the return passage almost as a form of insurance.

The Government of Fiji made several other attempts to alter the system of repatriation. It objected, not only to the cost, but to the indefinite and perpetual character of the obligation.¹ But the planters and sugar companies did not, until a very late stage, care whether the immigrants returned to India or not, since ex-indentured Indians settled on the land as independent farmers and did not add significantly to the labour force. In 1890, the possibility had been suggested in the Colonial Office that a scheme then under consideration for the restriction of the return passage rights in the West Indies might later be extended to Fiji.² After it was decided that immigrants in the West Indies should pay a proportion of the cost of their return passages, a similar scheme was suggested for Fiji; it was rejected by the

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From 1882 to 1905, a sum varying from 15s. to 10s. per annum for ten years had to be paid from general revenue into a Return Passage Fund, on each immigrant introduced.

2

Minute on Thurston to C.O., no.75, 27 Nov. 1890, C.O. 384/176.

Government of India, and not pressed by the Colonial Office, because of the difficulties the Indians had in acquiring land in Fiji.¹ In 1901, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company suggested that the right to return passages should be limited, with a view to retaining Indians in Fiji and settling them on the land as small cane farmers. The Company pointed out, correctly, that the fact that the free return passage could be exercised at any time, tended to prevent the immigrant from looking upon Fiji as his permanent home. The Government thought the time not opportune to restrict the repatriation right, as new recruiting grounds were just being opened up, and plague was restricting recruitment in the old ones. Consideration was given to the possibility of not offering return passages to the newcomers from Madras, but on the advice of the Emigration Agent there, it was decided that until Fiji was better known, they should be offered.² In 1910, Governor Im Thurn revived the proposal for the part-payment

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E.A. to C.O., 10 Oct. 1896 (C.S.O. 8/97); C.O. to O'Brien, no.20, 11 Feb. 1898; I.O./J. & P. 1254/1898. This proposal was discussed also in Chapter VIII (with further references).

²

C.S.O. 3426/01. An additional (but unstated) reason behind the Company's proposal was thought by the Government to be a desire for expenditure on repatriation to be reduced, so the Government could give greater assistance to immigration.

of return passages by immigrants, but it was again rejected by the Colonial Office.

One important change did receive the approval of the Colonial Office and Indian authorities. In 1904, the Fiji Government suggested that the right should be limited to two years from the date when it accrued (so that the liability of the Government should be limited and ascertainable at any time), and that the right of children should also be restricted, as this was an unfair charge against the revenues of the colony. An ordinance was passed which provided for a two-year limit on repatriation for immigrants introduced in future, and for a free return passage to be given thereafter to children of immigrants only if they were under 24 years of age if born in India, or under 12 if born in Fiji.¹ But there was an unexpected result. Previous practice had been to allow India-born children to return at any time; but not Fiji-born children, unless they were under 12 and sailed with their parents, on the ground that after reaching that age they ceased to be "children of immigrants". During the correspondence about the amendments, the Colonial Office objected to this

¹

Ordinance VIII, 1906. The two-year limit was extended on several occasions, until on 6 Sep. 1955 the Legislative Council decided that it should expire on 6 Sep. 1958.

latter practice, on the ground that the provision in the Immigration Ordinance of 1891 granting a return passage to children of immigrants covered all such children unconditionally. Curiously, therefore, the result was the endowment of the Fiji-born children of immigrants introduced before 1906 with a perpetual right to a passage to India, which they had not possessed before, which it was never intended that they should possess, and which was not in force in other colonies. This was an unexpected new liability for the colony, and, as a result, hundreds of Fiji-born Indians have taken trips to India, long after their immigrant fathers have returned or died. This right is to continue, even after 1958, when the right of immigrants introduced after 1906 (second-series immigrants) and their children is to expire. The agreements the first-series immigrants signed in India stipulated that they and their children should receive free return passages, and it would appear that this right was intended to be perpetual. But the obligation to repatriate their adult Fiji-born children rests upon an oversight.

In indenture days, the immigrants were repatriated by the same ships which brought immigrants (apart from ten returned via Australia as an experiment in 1885).¹

¹ Not until 1951, when the numbers offering were small, was a scheme of repatriation via Australia adopted again. Now they are flown in batches from Nadi to Sydney and sent tourist-class to Bombay on a P. & O. liner.

There was regular repatriation in every year of the indenture period from 1889, except in 1897 (because of plague in India) and 1917-19 (because of the shortage of shipping). The repatriates fell into several classes: rejects on arrival, incapables, ten-year people, and those paying their own way. The wives and families of rejects were returned with them. The incapables were those who broke down physically or mentally; occasionally even incorrigible criminals were returned too. Employers would give a list to the District Medical Officer, containing the names of those who were unfit and should be repatriated (with their consent), with their families and near relatives. He would examine each immigrant on the list, before approving his return to India. Before 1889, incapables were returned at the expense of the employer, but, thereafter, at the expense of the colony; no refund was made to the employer of any portion of the cost of their introduction. Those immigrants who had spent at least ten years in the colony were expected to give notice in October if they wished to return in one of the ships sailing in the first half of the next year. In fact, less

¹ C.S.O. 1181/98.

² Ordinance XI, 1889.

than half of those who gave notice turned up, but there were always others to take their places.¹ Usually, too, there were spare berths, and these were sold to those who wished to return on passport. Returning immigrants were accommodated in the depot for a few days, and then sent by barge to the repatriation ship. The Immigration Department arranged for the issue of bank drafts on Calcutta or Madras, and the Surgeon-Superintendent saw to the safe custody of money and valuables. Repatriates were issued with blankets and utensils, although some of those on passport refused to buy blankets and went without. Conditions on a repatriation ship were similar to those on an immigrant ship. But the Surgeon-Superintendent and compounders had a harder task, because up to a quarter of the repatriates were incapables and sickness and mortality were much greater.

There was great variation in the extent of the savings taken back by the repatriates. The annual figures given in the reports of the Fiji and Indian governments are misleading. Not all savings were declared; much was remitted through the post office, or carried in the form of sovereigns or jewellery. The averages given were also

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C.S.O. 2745/02.

misleading, because of the wide variations in individual figures, and because of the inclusion of women, children¹ and incapables. Most repatriates had no savings whatever. The average savings declared by those who returned to Calcutta from Fiji in the five years 1892-6, were £10.7.0.² But, following improvements in the condition of Indians in Fiji, they rose considerably; in 1904, they were £20, and in 1913, £24.³ These sums seem small when it is remembered that most had been away for ten years or more, but they were large by comparison with the wages of unskilled labourers in India, and it should be remembered, too, that many of the more successful immigrants stayed in Fiji. Usually Natal and Fiji topped the list of colonies

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The ship Moy, for instance, brought 393 repatriates to Calcutta in 1898, of whom 213 had no savings, 26 had less than £5, 27 had more than £5 but less than £10, 118 had more than £10 but less than £100, and nine had between £100 and £300. (India E.P. Apr. 1899, A.16-17.) Of 659 (including 325 men), who returned to Calcutta on one of the ships in 1914, 614 brought no savings; and of 308 (including 197 men) on the other, 300 brought no savings. (Report on Emigration from Calcutta in 1914.)

2

Figures for other colonies for the five years 1892-6 were: Natal £14.10.0, Trinidad £13.8.0, British Guiana £10.18.0, Jamaica £7.9.0, Mauritius £2.3.0 (India E.P. Sep. 1898, A.8-10).

3

Reports on India in 1904-5 (P.P. 1906, LXXXII, 253), and 1913-14 (P.P. 1914-16, XLIX, 75).

for savings, with the West Indies next and Mauritius a long way behind. The savings brought back by Madrasis were much lower than brought back by the North Indians; an average of £5 in 1911, for instance.

As soon as the ship arrived in Calcutta, it was boarded by the Emigration Agent, who examined the records kept by the Surgeon-Superintendent, called the roll of emigrants, and arranged for their departure to their homes. Later in the day, inspections were made by the Protector of Emigrants and the Medical Inspector of Emigrants. Before 1907, the emigrants were sometimes kept on board for a few days, while the administrative work was completed, but, following a complaint by the Government of Bengal, the arrangements were changed to allow disembarkation on the next morning. The scene has been described by Totaram Sanadhya:¹ the tying of bundles, shaking of hands, crying, the new hopes in everyone's hearts and their desire to see their families again, mingled with a little apprehension about the reception they might receive. They were all assembled on the depot grounds. Pony carts came up, and

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Much of the information in this and the following two paragraphs was derived from Totaram Sanadhya's unpublished manuscript The Religious and Social Condition of the Fiji Indians. The arrival of the ships is also described in Hill 'Emigration from India', in Timehri, Sep. 1919.

most people left the depot the same day. Some went to the Bank of Bengal to cash their cheques. They had free railway passes to their homes, and the paupers were given a small sum to meet immediate expenses. Those for Madras were sent on by train (if the ship had not called there first). Invalids were returned to their homes under escort; seriously ill persons were kept in the depot or sent to hospital in Calcutta. Most, however, left the depot that day; their fate was no longer of any concern to the agency, and they disappeared into the multitudes of India, never to appear on the emigration records again.

There were more than thirty thousand repatriates from Fiji alone. What happened to them? Did they go back to their villages with capital and new ideas, to spread the spirit of enterprise, as officials hoped they would? It is unlikely that the return of the emigrants had any great effect on villages in North India, although in Madras it probably did, because of the millions who returned from Burma, Ceylon and Malaya. In the north, the money brought back was often lost, taken from them, or squandered; the lives of their fellow villagers were little affected by the presence of an occasional returned emigrant. Some of the repatriates never left Calcutta. Some stayed to work. Some fell victim to malaria or diseases not common

in Fiji. Some were cheated by luggage carriers, booking clerks, gariwalas, or robbed by sharpies, who were always on the lookout for the returned emigrants, who often exhibited both naivete and money. Some women and children were abandoned in Calcutta or on up-country railway stations by men who did not want to take home to their village a wife from another caste when perhaps they already had a wife in India. (They could not have left the new wife in Fiji because the Immigration Department discouraged people returning without their families, leaving them to become charges on the public revenue.) These women and children drifted into the slums of Calcutta, particularly Matiaburz, near Garden Reach where they lived in penury and wretchedness.

Those emigrants who went to their old villages were variously received. The wisest ones did not mention that they had been abroad at all. ¹ Those who had kept in touch while they were away, returned with money and were still fit, were usually received back gladly. Those who managed to acquire land, seem to have settled down without too much trouble: others found that their land had reverted to the landlord and been leased to someone else, or had

¹ Cd.5193 (1910), 193.

passed into the hands of a relative, who was not glad to see the original tenant back. Another problem faced the emigrant who returned without money. He may not have written to his relatives for years, and when he did appear, after having been given up for lost, he came empty-handed and perhaps weak and sick, expecting his relatives to look after him. For a few days, they would hope that he had in fact brought money, but then he would lose their esteem gradually, until he came to be shunned and called a tapuwala ("colonial"). Another problem was the religious one. By eating with people of other castes and crossing the kala pani, emigrants had broken caste, while some brought back wives who belonged to other castes. The village pandit would demand that the returned emigrant perform a ceremony of purification, and sometimes a panchayat would sit to decide upon its form. It would, in any case, involve the giving of a feast, which might leave the poor tapuwala penniless. What money was left, his relatives would take. Sometimes this was the end of the matter. But often, his fellow villagers would still feel uneasy, even after the purification ceremony, and the repatriate would still be subjected to all sorts of humiliation, such as not being allowed to touch the village well for fear of polluting it, or to smoke the common huqqa in the evening.

Because he had broken caste, and because he might return to the colonies again, no one would give their sons or daughters in marriage to his children. He might be spoken to harshly or handled roughly. But such treatment was not always the case, by any means. Some returned emigrants fitted back into the life of the village, and, far from being cowed by their fellow villagers, maintained an attitude of superiority, in the face of the poverty and dirt of the village and the ignorance of its inhabitants. They looked back with nostalgia to the days they had spent in Fiji, and regretted having left it.¹ Emigrants who returned to the United Provinces probably encountered more difficulty than those who returned elsewhere, although in Basti their position was quite favourable, probably because that district supplied many colonial emigrants.² In Madras and the Punjab, there was little objection to emigration, and returned emigrants did not suffer such disabilities.

The repatriates who found life in the village intolerable left, often with the intention of returning to the colonies. Frequently, however, they were now too old or weak, or the poor diet they had received in the village

¹ Sen, Voiceless India, 298-304.

² Cd.5193 (1910), 180.

had reduced their condition so much that they could not pass the physical examinations. Sometimes, within a fortnight of the arrival in Calcutta of a repatriation ship, several returned emigrants would turn up again, begging to be sent back. Important reasons for dissatisfaction, apart from the social environment, were the climate and the low wages in India.¹ Frequently, if they could not return to the colonies, these repatriates ended up in Matiaburz, among others of their kind. Their condition was wretched in the extreme, for they were without work, proper nourishment or medical aid, and were a prey to unscrupulous people in the neighbourhood.² After 1916, even the limited outlet provided by re-emigration was denied them. With the special permission of the Government of India, some repatriates

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E.A. to C.O., 9 Dec. 1897, I.O./J. & P. 1775/1899.

2

After the abolition of the indenture system, efforts were made to help these people, particularly by C.F. Andrews, Banarsi Das Chaturvedi, H.K. Mookerjee, F.E. James of the Y.M.C.A. and S.A. Waiz of the Imperial Indian Citizenship Association. There were several articles and reports on their condition. They include: Andrews, 'The Returned Indian Emigrants: a Problem of Reconstruction', in Indian Review, Jul. 1922; Sannyasi and Chaturvedi, A Report on the Emigrants Repatriated to India under the Assisted Emigration Scheme from South Africa and on the Problem of Returned Emigrants from All Colonies; Waiz, Indians Abroad Directory, 1934, 664-6; Judd, Re-Emigration of Indian Repatriates (C.P.41/28).

from Fiji were returned to Fiji in 1921 and 1928 at the expense of the Fiji Government, which still wanted suitable Indian settlers.¹ In addition, many returned to Fiji at their own expense. Lack of money prevented many others from doing the same. In 1929, there were said to be 650 stranded and destitute repatriates from Fiji in Calcutta alone.² Even today, there are undoubtedly people in India who would like to return to Fiji, including some of those recently repatriated.

Not all the immigrants who left Fiji returned to India. In earlier years, especially, some found their way to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. Some were taken there by Europeans, particularly as domestic servants; others were roving characters, seeking adventure or high wages. Those without sufficient means were not granted passports to leave Fiji. In 1887, there were about 100 Indians from Fiji in Sydney who alleged that they were starving; they knew little English and could not find employment.³ Some of these returned to Fiji. In 1891,

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In 1921, a total of 1300 returned (not all at the expense of the Fiji Government) and in 1928, 350.

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C.P. 33/30.

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C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 21 Dec. 1887 and 16 Feb. 1888, C.S.R./G.M. Outward Letter Book IV, 165 and 195.

the Australasian New Hebrides Company was refused permission to recruit time-expired Indians in Fiji for its plantations in the New Hebrides. The Fiji Government believed, rather unrealistically, that the success of Indian immigration depended on the reputation of the colony in the recruiting areas in India, and that, therefore, those who did not choose to remain in Fiji should return promptly to India with large savings. Accordingly, it decided to restrict the emigration of Indians from Fiji. An additional reason was to prevent them becoming charges on consular funds. Although the India Office believed that this decision was a severe restriction of the rights of unindentured Indians, the Indian authorities agreed with it, because of the possibility that the gullible immigrants would be defrauded or maltreated in remote areas.¹ An ordinance was passed in 1893 which restricted the emigration of Indian immigrants from Fiji to certain scheduled areas (the Australian colonies and the Pacific Islands) without the consent of the Governor.² This consent was seldom given, and outside recruiting was discouraged. Later, immigration restrictions

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India E.P. Mar. 1892, A.15; Thurston to C.O., no.113, 6 Dec. 1892; India E.P. Jun. 1893, A.1-6 and Jul. 1893, A.8-9; I.O./J. & P. 399/1893 and 1496/1893.

2

Ordinance XIV, 1893.

were imposed by Australia and New Zealand, but not before a few Indians from Fiji had settled permanently in those countries.

Repatriation was one of the most obscure and disagreeable aspects of the history of Indian immigrant labour in Fiji. What happened to the thousands of "incapables" who returned to India? How long did they stay alive, cut off perhaps from their relatives? No one bothered to ask. How many repatriates really benefited from the time they spent abroad? Very few; most would have been better off had they stayed in Fiji. This fact was obscured at the time by abstract thinking about the right of immigrants to return to India, if they were dissatisfied with Fiji. No one - certainly not the intending repatriates themselves - realised how much they had cut themselves off from their country, their society, and even their families. And the officials did not ask. More than any other aspect, perhaps, does the story of repatriation illustrate how inappropriate to conditions in India was the system of indentured Indian labour emigration.

Chapter XIV

SETTLEMENT

When an Indian immigrant finished his five years' service under indenture (plus any extensions of time imposed by a Court), he received a certificate of industrial residence, and he was now a free man. If he liked, he could re-indenture (until 1912), or he could continue to work for an employer as a free labourer or under the Masters and Servants Ordinance. He could return to India at his own expense, or, after another five years, at the expense of the Government. He could take to a craft or trade, or, like most, he could settle on a plot of land. From the beginning, the Government encouraged the Indians to remain in Fiji. But there was a special difficulty, compared to other colonies. Under Gordon's land policy, all land, whether in use or not, which had not been alienated to Europeans before cession and confirmed by the Land Claims Commission, remained the property of the Fijians. The Crown had no land on which it could settle Indians; it had to buy or lease it like any private individual. The settlement of Indians

was thus crippled by financial difficulties. Gordon's original decision was a measure of statesmanship which helped to preserve the society and culture of the Fijians and ensured their loyalty: it was also an embarrassment to later Governors who wished to settle the Indians, it allowed the Fijians to live on the unearned increment from their land, and it led to haphazard Indian settlement on unsatisfactory tenures. In the settlement of Indians in Fiji, the action of the Government was of less importance than the inclinations of the Indians themselves and the economic opportunities open to them.

The Government and the employers would have liked most of the male Indians to re-indenture, because it was expensive to replace time-expired labourers with new arrivals from India; but, although inducements were offered, few were prepared to give up their newly-acquired freedom. In 1893, for instance, only 208 men were serving under re-indenture, and, at the end of 1912, 515.¹ They received the same wages as the other indentured labourers, but were given a bonus of from £3 to £10 for re-indenturing,² and sometimes a plot of land as well.

¹ C.S.O. 3208/93; Indian Immigration Report for 1912 (C.P.29/13).

² In Lautoka the bonus was £6 for 18 months or £10 for 30 months, plus an acre of land. (C.S.R. Lautoka circulars no.23, 1904 and no.14, 1905.)

Some Indian labourers were engaged under the Masters and Servants Ordinance mainly for the crushing season. In 1912, they were paid from 1s. 6d. to 2s. a day in the mills, and 15s. to 18s. a week as locomotive drivers and firemen (8s. to 17s. in 1899).¹ Like the Fijian, the unindentured Indian did not usually make long engagements. He worked as a casual labourer or farmed his own land for most of the year. In most areas there was a shortage of casual labour, and an Indian could earn nearly twice as much as he had while under indenture. There were exceptions. In earlier years, the wage seldom exceeded 1s. 3d.² In the depression of the late eighties there was considerable unemployment among the Indians.³ People in Ba and Labasa often found it difficult to obtain work, because the C.S.R. Company, which controlled the labour market in those areas, would refuse employment to Indians unless they re-indentured. Numbers left for Navua, where they could obtain land easily and grow cane for the Fiji Sugar Company.⁴ The

¹ Indian Immigration Reports for 1899 (C.P. 24/00) and 1912 (C.P. 29/13).

² Ibid., 1884 (India E.P. Sep. 1886, A.13-14).

³ Fiji Times, 29 Sep. 1888.

⁴ C.S.O. 2198/97; 2650/97.

C.S.R. Company considered unindentured Indian labour to be unreliable and a possible cause of difficulty on plantations where indentured labour was employed, particularly if higher wages were paid.¹ Towards the end of the indenture system, however, the Company offered more work to unindentured labourers, because of the impending labour shortage.

Some of the ex-indentured Indians settled in urban areas, especially in Suva. At first, there were complaints that many were leading idle and dissolute lives, but, later, the frugal and industrious Indian farmer became a more typical picture. Indians took to a wide variety of occupations. As early as 1886, 96 hawker's licences had been issued to Indians, and 20 of them were travelling in boats from Suva to the Rewa, Navua and Ba to sell their wares.² By the time of the First World War, the Indian had become the artisan and small trader of Fiji. Most of these were ex-indentured people; the big Gujarati influx came later. Apparently, few reverted to traditional caste

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Hughes, Labour for Fiji (report), enc. to C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 28 Mar. 1911, C.S.R./Fiji Private Letter Books, H.O. to Nausori, 1906-11; C.S.R./Fiji to C.S.R./G.M. 25 Apr. 1911, C.S.R./Fiji Private Letter Books, Nausori to H.O. 1906-11.

2

C.S.O. 1731/87.

occupations (apart from the agriculturists, of course). The techniques used in India were not always appropriate to Fiji; exceptions included barbers, jewellers, laundrymen and leatherworkers, but it is impossible to say how many such men there were.

In 1911, three-quarters of the Indians were settled on the land, as owners or tenants.¹ Most of them had managed to save a little out of the £50-60 an average man earned in his five years as an indentured labourer. In earlier years, frugal men saved £30 even, but not in later years because prices rose considerably. Those who had saved little or nothing, could borrow from others. Some acquired or selected their land while still under indenture. Those who took a lease in a Government Indian settlement were the most fortunate, because the rents were low and the security of tenure good. Those who leased privately from Europeans or Indians often paid high rents and enjoyed little security. There was much trafficking in land; often an Indian would lease his plot to someone else after a year or two. Speculators took larger areas for sub-leasing, usually without proper surveys or titles; they were frequently in the hands of the large European trading firms.

¹

Indian Immigration Report for 1911 (C.P. 48/12).

Most of the Indian settlers leased land from the Fijians.¹ Sometimes a lease was obtained without difficulty, but usually the procedure was cumbersome and expensive. First, the Indian selected a piece of land, and ascertained that the owners were willing to lease. The Fijians were more sophisticated in these matters than they had been in the days before cession when large areas had been obtained by European settlers for very small sums. To obtain the consent of the Fijians was an expensive business for most of the Indians. This was the subject of complaint, not only by the Indians, but also by the Government and, later, by the C.S.R. Company, which were anxious to see the Indians settled on favourable terms. After obtaining the Fijians' verbal consent, the Indian would make a formal application to the Immigration Department or the local stipendiary magistrate. (Before

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Land Held by Indians

	1888		1898		1908	
	Area	No. of holders	Area	No. of holders	Area	No. of holders
Leasehold from Fijians	-	-	492	30	13,880	1,467
Leasehold from Others	2	11	2,038	118	24,478	158
Total Leasehold	2	11	2,531	148	38,359	1,625
Total Freehold	1	3	4,164	27	7,772	63
Total	3	14	6,695	175	46,131	1,688

(Major to C.O., no.62, 19 Apr. 1909 - Cd.5194 (1910), 67.)

1904, a rough sketch map, costing £3-4 was required at this stage.) The application would be passed on to the Fijian administration: before 1897, it would be sent to the Provincial Council (meeting every six months), and thereafter to the District Council.¹ In 1904, in order to prevent long delays, it was enjoined that the District Council should meet every month, and should deal with applications at its first meeting. The decision of the Council was by no means automatic. Often the buli (a Fijian official) had to be given presents, too, before he would recommend approval of the application. In 1916, the system was changed to allow of closer Government control, in order to prevent costly and tedious negotiations. Applications were to be made in the first instance to the District Commissioners, who then conducted the negotiations with the Fijians.

After securing his land, which had to be properly surveyed, the Indian put up a house, usually a Fijian-style bure or a shanty, built of old packing-cases, kerosene and biscuit tins and old corrugated iron on a wooden frame. Sometimes more substantial houses were built, but these usually waited upon prosperity. With

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Berkeley to C.O., no.31, 13 Apr. 1897.

the insecurity of tenures, absence of compensation for improvements (until 1916), and high mobility due to trafficking in land and repatriation to India, there was often little incentive to put up better houses, even when one could be afforded. The bure was, in any case, suitable for the climate; the shanties were often small and insanitary, but they were not inhabited by more than one family as a rule. The Government was able to contrast the labour lines favourably with the houses erected by the ex-indentured Indians themselves. It is significant that in Natal, where there was much greater security of tenure, the Indians put up much better houses¹ (as, of course, they have done in Fiji in recent years).

An important feature of the settlement of Indians in Fiji was the relatively loose character of the pattern of settlement. The Indians settled wherever they could obtain a suitable piece of land. Apparently, they selected land without regard for religious or ethnic considerations; there were occasional instances of concentrations of people of the same ethnic or religious group, but the data

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Andrews and Pearson, Indentured Labour in Fiji - Calcutta edition, note VIII.

is scanty.¹ They settled not in clustered villages, as in India, but in scattered homesteads.² There were no "villages", just "localities". The reason for this was, principally, the individual character of immigration and of settlement after indenture; other reasons were the absence of forest to clear and any problem of defence against external attack.³ The localities were loose also in their social structure,¹ and remained so until, or even after, substantial numbers of Fiji-born children grew up. The typical situation in this period was one of individual family units, with the remoter kinship ties weak or non-existent, little if any recognised pattern of authority or association, and a high degree of mobility. (There was less mobility in Labasa, which was more isolated.) There was little contact with the Government, apart from the police.

¹ C.F. Andrews mentioned that more than 1000 Tamils were settled at Buniasi, with one Kutigawindan as their leader. (Modern Review, Jun. 1918, 582.) Such a concentration may have been due to the fact that South Indians came later to Fiji and were indentured together.

² Except in early years in Ba and Rewa (C.S.O. 129/01).

³ Mayer, Indian Rural Society in Fiji (unpublished thesis), 120.

Many different crops were grown, including rice, maize, pineapples, tobacco and vegetables for sale in the neighbouring towns or plantations. Most Indians bought at least one cow, and sometimes would sell some of the milk; by 1911, Indians owned 32% of the cattle in Fiji.¹ They used bullocks for ploughing, instead of horses which were used on the plantations, or ploughed by hand. Sugar-cane, which was to become the main crop grown by the Indians in Fiji, acquired an increasing importance, as a crop grown by Indian settlers, throughout the indenture period. By the early 1890s, the C.S.R. Company and the Fiji Sugar Company were buying cane from Indian farmers. Where the land was suitable, cane was the most profitable and readily marketable crop that could be grown. In contrast to other crops, advances of money were obtainable from the companies at low rates of interest before maturity, the crop was readily saleable, and fetched a substantial lump sum. By 1912, cane accounted for over one quarter of the acreage cultivated by the unindentured Indians. In subsequent years, this proportion increased, as European planters were replaced² by Indian tenant farmers and contractors.

¹ Indian Immigration Report for 1911 (C.P. 48/12).

² In 1912 the acreages were: cane 6,621, rice 10,008, maize 2,503, bananas 2,064, beans 559, tobacco 100, others 141½ (Indian Immigration Report for 1912 - C.P. 29/13).



The Indian settlers were much more prosperous than they had been in India, as is indicated by the figures of bank deposits and fixed assets. They paid only light taxes. Customs duties were the most important of these. More direct taxes, such as the dog tax, cattle-brand tax, and "hut tax" (a tax of at least ten shillings on every building, introduced in 1912) were extremely un-¹popular. The volume of indebtedness was undoubtedly large, although no figures are available. Promissory notes were used for the purchase or leasing of land, and advances on crops were usual. The usual method was a crop lien or mortgage arranged through a solicitor or an account at a store. The money-lenders were both European and Indian, and many were store-keepers. The rate of interest was often as high as 30%. Indians growing sugar-cane could borrow at very moderate rates from the companies - 5% was charged by the C.S.R. Company - but usually preferred private transactions, fearing to become too dependent upon the companies. The Government was slow to recognise the problem, and, although the possibilities of introducing agricultural banks or co-operative credit societies, and legislation to control

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Cd. 7745 (1914), 263.

usury were under consideration at the end of the period,¹ it was to remain a serious one for many years to come.

In social welfare and general contentment, there was a great difference between the Indians on the plantations and in the localities. Once they were freed from the sordid conditions of the lines and the drudgery of work in a gang, there was a great improvement. But social evils persisted. The shortage of women, if not as bad in the localities, was still considerable, and would remain so while new immigrants were still coming in, and for some time afterwards. Polyandry was not uncommon,² and the bartering of female children was a serious problem. Crimes of violence were still frequent, and were nearly always due to quarrels over women. The amount of litigation was prodigious; it was swelled by the absence of any strong forms of social control (although it was very frequent in India too). The community was largely illiterate, and schools did not exist, except in later years near the mill centres.

The medical attention, sanitation, water-supply, and, often, housing, of the unindentured Indians were worse

1

C.P. 46/19.

2

Garnham, A Report on the Social and Moral Conditions of Indians in Fiji, 17.

than those of the indentured - almost inevitably so, because of the lack of means of enforcing standards. In contrast to the situation on the plantations, medical facilities were very inadequate. (It should be remembered that this was true for the Fijians too, and for the rural areas of other countries with higher national incomes than Fiji.) Indians were admitted to the plantation hospitals, at a charge of 2s. a day, but there was considerable prejudice against hospitals in general, and plantation hospitals in particular, as well as reluctance to pay the fees.¹ (Destitutes were cared for by the Government or by private charity, and did not constitute a serious problem, notwithstanding the absence of kinship ties in many cases.) Indians could also be admitted to the Government hospital in Suva, and Native Medical Practitioners treated them when required. But Fiji has a healthy climate, and famine and dread diseases were absent, so, notwithstanding the poor sanitation of the homesteads and inadequate medical facilities, the Indians thrived, except in Navua, where ankylostomiasis was the rule. The immigrants themselves lived to a good age, while

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Garnham, 25. There was a greater willingness to seek treatment from the missionaries who did not make any charge and were trusted more. (Australian Methodist Missionary Review, Jan. 1912, 11.)

their children were healthier and of better physique.

The history of Government policy towards Indian settlement is largely that of efforts to encourage the Indians to remain in Fiji by the provision of better facilities for them to acquire land. As early as 1883, proposals for securing land for Indian settlements were under consideration.¹ The Government would have preferred to see the Indians working as labourers, but recognised that, if they could not obtain land, they would return to India.² The first Government Indian settlement was started at Vatuwaga, near Suva, in 1887. Preference in the settlements was given to married men with savings. On one occasion, Governor Thurston objected to allotments being made to Indians who had not been in the colony ten years, as they had been introduced for that term to provide a labour force.³ This objection was apparently allowed to lapse, for the Indians could acquire land elsewhere, but with difficulty. The Government Indian settlements were insufficient for the growing ex-indentured population, and in the eighties and nineties, it was

¹ C.S.O. 885-6/83.

² C.S.O. 1125/85.

³ C.S.O. 1380/93.

difficult for the Indians to find land elsewhere. This was one reason why the Government of India rejected the proposal that immigrants pay a portion of the cost of their return passages.¹ A higher percentage of immigrants returned to India than in later years.

In 1897, Acting-Governor Berkeley put forward ambitious proposals of his own for the commutation of return passages, in return for grants of land, and even for assistance to free Indian immigrants. "It is in the multiplication indefinitely of these industrious people, as I have in other despatches previously stated,² that the bright future for the Colony lies," he wrote. But Berkeley had more exuberance than soundness of judgment. The new Governor, Sir George O'Brien, who was directed to enquire into the proposals, concluded that they were impracticable. For one reason, the Government did not have sufficient money to purchase or lease land for Indian settlements and build the necessary roads and bridges. For another, the area of fertile land was very limited. Moreover, the only feasible crop the settlers could grow was sugar-cane, and the C.S.R. Company preferred

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This was considered in Chapters VIII and XIII.

²

Berkeley to C.O., no.68, 6 Jul. 1897.

the existing plantation form of production. Arrangements were made with the C.S.R. Company to buy cane from the Indians on Government settlements, but any large expansion was out of the question.¹ O'Brien conceded that more should be done to encourage Indians to settle in Fiji and protect them against insecure tenures and high rentals. He established an Indian Settlement Fund, with money withdrawn from the surplus in the Return Passages Fund, to acquire land for settlement and open up communications.² From this fund, five blocks were purchased for Indian settlement, and more land was leased from the Fijians for the same purpose. Within a few years, the opportunities for the Indians to acquire land had improved greatly. The opening up of the C.S.R. Company's mill at Lautoka led to settlement on the western side of Viti Levu, while the Company leased out land for the growing of cane, maize or vegetables.³ By 1906, the position had improved so much that the Government was able to restrict the repatriation right, without objection from London or Calcutta.⁴

¹ O'Brien to C.O., no.109, 22 Oct. 1897.

² O'Brien to C.O., no.117, 30 Oct. 1897.

³ C.S.O. 4827/98; 3426/01.

⁴ Discussed in Chapter XIII.

The Government Indian settlements were an extremely successful venture, for they concentrated the Indians and provided land at low rentals and secure tenure. By 1914, there were 18 of them, 15 on freehold and 3 on leasehold. They contained 1377 allotments of from two to seven and a half acres (usually three to five acres), 993 of which were occupied. The rentals ranged from 3s. to 20s. an acre (usually about 7s. 6d.), compared to 10s. to 20s. an acre, plus expensive presents, for other leases. Most of the settlements were near the mill centres or towns; because of marketing difficulties the exceptions were not successful. The Government did not find it easy to acquire land in accessible areas; most of it had been secured by the sugar companies, while the Fijians were often reluctant to dispose of land to the Government, when they could make more out of it by leasing small lots direct to the Indians. But the haphazard leasing of Fijian land to the Indians was disliked by the Government, because it took the eyes out of the land, preventing the acquisition of large blocks either for Government Indian settlements or for commercial development by Europeans, and because it added to the difficulty of administration and might have unsettling effects on the Fijians. In 1910, in order to prevent

sub-leasing, the Government limited the area of land to be leased to Indians in future to five acres (subsequently increased to ten acres). In 1911, it decided to confine settlement by the Indians as far as possible to the more settled districts,¹ although in the past this had been the rule, because the Indians themselves liked to be near their markets and compatriots (country storekeepers being the exception). The Commissioners from India - McNeill and Chimmanlal - who visited Fiji in 1913, reported unfavourably on the facilities for acquiring land, particularly the costly and tedious negotiations necessary to secure leases of Fijian land, and the insecurity of tenure. Following their report, there were reforms in the leasing system. Applications were to be made to the District Commissioners, thus avoiding negotiations with the Fijians. In 1916, the principle of compensation for improvements was introduced, thus making renewals easier. (The leases were mainly for 21 years.)

The question of Indian land settlement was closely connected with two other problems - the control of Fijian lands, and the supply of labour from India. The

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McNeill and Chimmanlal Report - Cd.7745 (1914), 262.

first was not solved in this period. Not until the Fijians had handed over the control of their unused lands to the Government would abuses in the making and renewal of leases come to an end.¹ The second problem precipitated the large-scale settlement of the Indians as tenant-farmers supplying cane to the C.S.R. Company. It was realised by the Government and Company that the resumption of immigration from India depended at the very least on land being available for Indian settlers; while if no more immigration were to be allowed, the settlement of the Indians as tenant-farmers would ensure the survival of the sugar industry. From 1917 onwards, both the C.S.R. Company and the Vancouver-Fiji Sugar Company systematically broke up their plantations (and those leased by the European planters who had to give up because of the labour shortage) for leasing to Indian settlers. The leases were accompanied by conditions about the treatment of the land and supervision of the sugar-cane. The C.S.R. Company could have settled its lands more rapidly, if it had been prepared to dispense with these conditions, which were considered irksome by

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By the Native Land Trust Ordinance of 1940, the control of all Fijian land was vested in the Native Land Trust Board.

the Indians.¹ But its decision to impose a close control ensured the maintenance of an efficient sugar industry in Fiji, and resulted in a very efficient partnership between grower and producer. At the end of the indenture period, this tenant-farmer system was still in its infancy, but the future was clear.

By 1921, the Indian population of Fiji numbered 60,634, of whom 37,015 were males and 23,619 females. Of these 26,810 had been born in Fiji.² They were settled mainly in the sugar growing areas and in the town of Suva. Those in the drier northern and western parts of the group were more prosperous than those in the wetter southern areas.³ The farmers were in a much better position than the labourers, who had been greatly affected by wartime price rises; in 1920 and 1921 there were two large-scale strikes for wage increases. There were growing differences in wealth in the Indian community;

¹ C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 4 Feb. 1918, C.S.R./Fiji Private Letter Books, H.O. to Nausori, 1917-18, 373. This question is considered also in chapters VI and XVII. In the Ba District a number of Indians gave up their holdings, objecting to the close supervision exercised over them by the Company's officers. (Indian Immigration Report for 1916 - C.P. 48/17.)

² 1921 Census Report (C.P. 2/22).

³ Garnham, 17.

the richer Indians were large cane planters employing labour. As a whole, the Indians were much better off than they would have been in India. Their native industry and frugality, the sound, if hard, training in agricultural techniques suitable for conditions in Fiji they had received under indenture, and Fiji's fertile soil were the ingredients of this prosperity.



Chapter XV

FREE IMMIGRATION

Although most Indian immigrants to Fiji came as indentured labourers, there were others who paid their own way, and arrived in the colony as free agents. The peak of this unassisted immigration was not reached until the late 1920's, but perhaps two to three thousand arrived before 1920. No statistics were kept, either in India or in Fiji, and their numbers can be gauged only from official estimates. By 1907, there were at least 1000 in Fiji; by 1911, 250 were arriving annually.¹ Most of these were people who had previously served as indentured labourers in Fiji or other colonies, or had been born there. Others were Punjabi farmers or Gujarati craftsmen or traders who were leaving India for the first time. There were also people who could be classified as specialist and elite groups, such as clerks, policemen, artisans, gardeners, experienced agricultural workers, a lawyer, a doctor, a school teacher, and

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Indian Immigration Report for 1907 (C.P. 21/08);
1911 Census Report (C.P.44/11).

religious teachers and missionaries. These people filled the demand for tertiary services and leadership created by the growth of a large Indian population in Fiji, consisting almost entirely of illiterate labourers and farmers.

The first Indians to arrive in Fiji - apart perhaps from an occasional seaman (Peter Dillon left one) and some servants whom Governor Gordon had at Government House - were not the immigrants brought on the Leonidas. A group of 31 South Indians, probably all men, who had originally been indentured labourers in Reunion, was brought from New Caledonia in January 1879. They were put under contract to Harper and Wilson on Taveuni before they left New Caledonia. Soon after their arrival in Fiji, they became discontented with the heavy work¹ they were given - clearing bush. Their contracts were dissolved by mutual consent, since the employers were also dissatisfied, as is shown by a contemporary report in the Fiji Argus that they did not work as well as Islanders and had many wants to attend to:

If they were not supplied with everything, they were able to cite section so-and-so of Ordinance No. so-and-so, &c, and point out requirements of

¹

Des Voeux to C.O., no.95, 6 Sep. 1879; I.O./P.H.C. 8/136f.

same; but when they commenced to quote decisions of the court in several cases in Mauritius and elsewhere in regard to coolie labour, their employer thought that such intellectual labourers were out of place on a plantation, and so was not sorry to get rid of them. A little learning is a dangerous thing, and may serve to make the services of coolie labour anything but sought after.¹

In 1881, 38 more South Indians, including four women,² came. Many of these early immigrants from New Caledonia left Fiji. Few of those who stayed took Indian wives,³ but some had Island women.

Of those who paid their own way from India to Fiji, some were returning after having used their free return passage to visit India. A few were relatives of people already in Fiji (although the number of these was much fewer than in most migrations). Others, having returned from Fiji or one of the other colonies, had been dissatisfied with conditions in India. They were lucky if they had the money for the passage to Fiji - about £8 to £10; and some arrived penniless. Some came to Fiji to trade and brought stock with them, some to be priests,

¹ Fiji Argus, 16 May 1879.

² India E.P. Jul. 1882, A.8; I.O./J. & P. 270/1882. They were called "Malabar coolies", but whether they were really Malayalis it is impossible to say.

³ C.S.O. Outward 213/88.

and some just to earn high wages. Usually they came in the regular immigrant ships from India and were treated in depot and on board in the same way as the indentured immigrants. The Immigration Department tried to induce able-bodied free immigrants to become indentured labourers, with the offer of a refund of their passage money, but very few were willing to give up their freedom. They became labourers in the towns, storekeepers or hawkers, and eventually leased land. They seldom became field labourers.

The immigration of Punjabis was not dependent upon the previous settlement of Indians in Fiji; and this movement was the least artificial of all Indian migrations. The Punjabis are the great wanderers of India, and are to be found almost everywhere in India and throughout the world. The reason for this is primarily a cultural one. The people of the Punjab are largely Sikhs and Muslims; both religions, with their relative freedom from caste restrictions, give more occupational and geographical mobility to their adherents. Punjabis are a martial people of excellent physique, and more vigorous and enterprising than some other peoples in India. They were enlisted in large numbers for the Police and Army. Many were taken to the Far East, to Singapore,

Shanghai and Hong Kong. The Boxer Rebellion gave a big impetus to Punjabi emigration, because many Punjabis helped in its suppression and so gained a greater knowledge of the outside world. From 1905, many went to Canada and the United States; others to East Africa, Latin America, Australia and New Zealand. Over 90% of these were Sikhs, and the rest Muslims (Pathans particularly).¹

The first Punjabi free immigrants to Fiji were perhaps a group which arrived from Noumea in 1904. They had been induced by a person who received a commission from a shipping company, to emigrate from Bombay under the mistaken impression that they could obtain unskilled work at high wages in New Caledonia. When they could not secure work there, about seventy went to Fiji. Although they expected to earn about four shillings a day, they found the current wage for unskilled labour to be only 1s. to 1s. 6d. a day. Some were taken by the C.S.R. Company, but left or gave trouble. When the British Consul in Noumea asked the Fiji Government to admit more of them, the request was refused; instead sixty-nine returned to New Caledonia and were repatriated to India

¹

Modern Review, Jul. 1911, 69.

as distressed British subjects. But more came from India after 1905, when the Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand commenced a regular three-monthly service from Calcutta to Auckland, with a connecting service to Suva. The sum of £10 was charged for a deck passage. As a result, there was a great increase in the number of free immigrants. For instance, by one ship in 1911, 75 arrived, of whom 15 were Punjabis and the rest Gujaratis. In January 1912, 82 arrived, of whom 41 were said to be agriculturists - probably Punjabis. Some would have enlisted in the Fiji Police, but for the small wage offered.¹ Most Punjabi immigrants who arrived in Fiji before the First World War were dissatisfied with the money they could earn there. Some worked on the roads for a while, but usually they ended, not as agricultural labourers or domestic servants, as the Government would have preferred, but as storekeepers, hawkers or farmers.

Although some of the Punjabi immigrants were roving characters such as ex-policemen or ex-soldiers, emigration from the Punjab to Fiji before the First World War was in most cases organised. This is indicated by a

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C.P. 105/14.

letter written to the "Deputy Commissioner, Jullundur" by 46 recently-arrived Punjabi immigrants in 1914.

We all the Punjabis now residing in Fiji Islands left our country on the inducement and representations of Wali Mohamed and Atta Mohamed, castes Sayed, residents of Karnana tahsil, Nawanshar District, Jullundur, Punjab.

They have been sending our people during the last 5 years and on each steamer 45 or 46 men are being emigrated while they take Rs. 35 as their commission for each individual and Rs. 5 from the Shipping Co; - we were made to understand that in Fiji we can get work on daily wages at 5/- but regret to say that even 2/- can be hardly earned - thus we have been suffering much. We had no previous experience of such tricks and they are deceiving to the people and are also against the law. We all paid Rs. 325 as commission to them. We therefore request that enquiries be made and action be taken to stop further emigration. If possible the money be refunded to us.

The undermentioned 46 men were sent by them ----.

There followed 46 names, in most cases with home villages and castes. All were men, and all were from Jullundur District; 22 from Nawarshahar tahsil and the rest (where stated) from Garshankar, Phagwara and Phillaur. There were little groups from each village, usually about four in each. Five were Muslims, and the rest Hindus or Sikhs, including 23 Jats and four Chamars; they were apparently a fair cross-section of Punjab village society. In transmitting this letter to India, the Fiji Government asked that a warning be given to intending emigrants to Fiji that they could not earn more than two shillings

a day. It would appear that most Punjabi emigration to Fiji before 1914 was organised by individuals - perhaps by the two mentioned in the letter - who received a commission from the shipping company. Few, if any, of the immigrants intended to stay in Fiji. Sometimes they believed that, by going to Fiji first, they could circumvent the immigration restrictions in Australia or New Zealand. They went to earn high wages, with the intention of returning to their villages.

Although the Punjab was a rich area, there were strong economic pressures, similar to those elsewhere in India. In the late 1920's, emigration from the Punjab to Fiji became considerable, depended more on family contacts and the example of neighbours who returned with savings, and was checked only by immigration restrictions imposed by the Fiji Government in 1930. It was particularly important for the districts of Hoshiarpur and Jullundur, because of the increasing population, decreasing size of holdings due to sub-division, rising agricultural indebtedness and declining water-level.¹ These causes were also operative in the earlier period. Most of the Punjabis in Fiji came from the Nawarshahar and

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Darling, Rusticus Loquitur, 7-33, 160-1.

Phyllaur tahsils (administrative sub-divisions) of Jullundur District. Hoshiarpur District provided many also, and some went from Ludhiana, Amritsar, Ferozepore, Lahore, Ambala and Rohtak districts. They were nearly all young male cultivators or herdsmen, many of them younger sons. They brought few women,¹ and since Punjabis marry relatively late, probably fewer of them were married than was the case with the indentured labourers. Most of them were Jat Sikhs, although some were of the lower castes, and some were Muslims. Preference was expressed for those places where high wages were to be obtained, such as North America and Australia and New Zealand, but their ideas were vague. In 1912, during a Court case in Suva, one witness testified: "In my country people used to go to the Argentine. I came to Fiji because I thought Fiji would be just the same as the Argentine." Punjabi immigrants maintained close ties with home, and many returned with money which had important effects in the villages in Hoshiarpur and Jullundur, especially.² Those who stayed in Fiji became

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With 1508 listed Punjabi male immigrants to Fiji in 1927-30, there came only 18 females. (Information in Fiji Labour Department.)

2

Darling, Rusticus Loquitur, 362-3, and The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt, 267.

prosperous. Most settled on the land and became excellent farmers, although some took to trade.¹

The main traders in Fiji were, however, to be the Gujarati free immigrants. The first were two jewellers originally from Porbandar, in Kathiawar - Virjee Narshi and Choonilal Gangjee, who came from Natal in 1906. Business was slack, and they had heard about Fiji from Indians who had been there as indentured labourers. They wrote to Totaram Sanadhya and Peter Grant,² who promised assistance; on arrival they stayed with Totaram for a while. At first they were hawkers, but later they opened a shop, stocked with goods sent from Natal. More jewellers arrived from Porbandar in 1908, and thereafter Gujarati immigration increased rapidly. Some were attracted by the success of their predecessors: others read in Indian newspapers that craftsmen were badly needed in Fiji. Most of the jewellers, the most numerous group in indenture days, were from Porbandar and surrounding areas, Jamnagar and Jetalsar, and were of the Sunar caste (strictly goldsmiths and silversmiths,

1

Annual reports on the Colony of Fiji for 1928 and 1930; McMillan, Notes on the Indians in Fiji; and information obtained orally in Fiji.

2

Considered in chapter XVI.

rather than jewellers). Tailors, mostly of the Khatri caste, came from Navsari, in Baroda State, and Surat, in the Bombay Presidency. Patels (the village headman and landlord caste of Gujarat) came from Baroda State, Nadiad, in the Bombay Presidency, and adjacent areas, and, although they had often been farmers in India, became grocers, drapers and laundrymen in Fiji. There were also barbers and bootmakers. The writer heard in Fiji a description of the arrival back in a town in Gujarat of one of the early immigrants to Fiji; he created a great impression with his European clothes and gold watch and cuff-links. These first immigrants were the most adventurous, and, after "chains" were established, others had just to follow.¹

Gujaratis emigrated for economic advantage. They maintained close ties with their relatives, received stock from them, remitted money to them, and returned home after a few years to marry or settle back in India. Most were Hindu, although a few were Muslim. Most immigrants of the same caste were related; they maintained their caste customs and married in caste. Some brought their wives to Fiji; the first in 1917. They were often

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Most of the information in this and the following paragraph was obtained orally in Fiji.

penniless on arrival, but were assisted by other Gujaratis in Fiji and by their people at home, and in turn, did likewise. They were very successful in business in Fiji, even in lines where they had no previous experience. Those who became established brought assistants from India. The Gujaratis are thrifty and hardworking, with a strong sense of loyalty to one another. In contrast, the few ex-indentured Indians who took to trade or crafts often lacked skill, business ability and group loyalty. Apart from the Gujaratis, there was one other important merchant who came as a free immigrant. He was V.M. Pillay who came from South India before the First World War. He arrived with capital, and established a chain of general stores, on a much larger scale than any Gujarati and almost comparable to the larger European firms. He went bankrupt, because of bad management.

The specialist and elite immigrants were small in number but very important, in that they gave the Indian community leadership and diversity. The missionaries have been described elsewhere. The clerks and interpreters were recruited for the Fiji Government by the Emigration Agents, under contracts, usually for five years, with free passages to and from the colony. They came from different areas in India, and there were even

some Bengalis. Some of the clerks and interpreters stayed on in Fiji. In the last years of the indenture system, the Fiji Government introduced a doctor and a school-teacher from India. Gardeners and bricklayers were also recruited. Parsi mechanics were introduced (from Bombay) by the C.S.R. Company in 1901. From 1911, Sikh policemen were brought from Hong Kong.

On several occasions before 1920, the Fiji Government considered what policy it should adopt towards unassisted immigrants. In 1895, following the arrival of an immigrant ship, which carried, in addition to the indentured immigrants, 19 who paid their own way, of whom only three were likely to become labourers, Forster proposed that such non-labourers be excluded from the ships. On this occasion, Acting-Governor Berkeley disagreed on the ground that free immigration should be encouraged.¹ Indeed, Berkeley proposed that the colony should give assistance to free immigrants, as the indenture system was too slow a way of promoting that Indian settlement which would, he thought, turn Fiji into one of the largest sugar-producing possessions of the Crown.² This proposal was rejected by the next Governor,

¹ C.S.O. 2884/95.

² Berkeley to C.O., no.56, 14 Jun. 1897.

Sir George O'Brien as impracticable.¹ In later years the Fiji Government instructed the Emigration Agents not to take these people at the expense of berths for indentured immigrants. They were regarded rather as a nuisance in the depots and ships. In 1908, a discretionary power was given to the Police to exclude undesirable immigrants likely to become a charge on the colony, and not in possession of £5. But this was not enforced, and anyone who was fit was allowed to land. In 1909, as a preliminary to putting Fiji views before the Sanderson Committee in London, the Planters' Association and the sugar companies were asked by the Government to express their opinions on several matters, including the possibility of Government assistance being given to the introduction of free immigrants. Their reaction was unfavourable, for the reason that these immigrants did not usually become labourers.² The Government agreed, and gave the additional reasons that adoption of the proposal would affect the recruiting of indentured labourers, would entail extra calls on revenue for the maintenance of old people, and was not of that general

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Already considered in Chapter XIV.

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Fiji Times, 27 Mar. 1909.

benefit to the colony which could justify assistance.¹
While indentured immigrants were obtainable from India, free immigrants were not regarded with any enthusiasm. But, in 1911, Governor May, who believed that the latter should be encouraged, had circulars distributed in India advertising the fact that land was available in Fiji, but these also contained a warning about the level of wages. The circulation was not wide and had little or no effect on stimulating free immigration, for there was little inclination among the people of India to leave their homeland to settle abroad.

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Major to C.O., no.62, 19 Apr. 1909, Cd. 5194 (1910), 60.

Chapter XVI

ASSOCIATION, LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION

Indian emigration to Fiji was both a selective and an individual process; the emigrants were mostly illiterate villagers and were not integrated institutionally. The few traditional leaders who slipped through no longer had an institutional basis for authority over the rest. The result was that there was in the depots, ships and lines an atomistic collection of individuals, with no consistent, recognisable pattern of authority beyond that imposed from outside. Not until the immigrants left the plantations did any new pattern begin to emerge, and this was a slow process. There is little data on the social structure of the settlements - such as it was. The large number returning to India and the constant influx of ex-indentured people inhibited the formation of new institutions. The main associations among rural Indians in Fiji - the organised cane-gang and the school committee - postdate the indenture period. In the period covered by this study, the little association there was for religious, arbitrational, political

or educational objects was temporary, local, and depended very much on individual leaders.

The most important tie, except for those who came with kin, was that between shipmates - "jehajis". Employers complained that immigrants would refuse to give evidence against their shipmates, or would object to being transferred away from them.¹ They took the place of relatives in certain customary observances. Even today this bond is a strong one. Sometimes the immigrants on a particular plantation or in the same line felt a common bond, and fights between the occupants of different lines occasionally occurred. Apart from the South Indians, who, being a minority, with marked differences in customs and language, developed a consciousness of being separate, immigrants did not normally recognise any tie based on the district of origin in India. Nor was religion or caste very important as a bond or barrier between immigrants on the plantations.

Immigrants sometimes organised for protection or arbitration of disputes. Factions were formed around sirdars or strong men, for mutual advantage or protection. Arbitrational activity was intermittent.

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C.S.O. 2213/96.

Panchayats, for the settlement of disputes, were common in districts where there were large numbers of immigrants, and were not unknown in the lines. Because of their lack of effective sanctions, they did not possess the authority of those in India. Among the unindentured Indians in the Rewa District about 1910 panchayats levied fines which were enforced by ostracism, but the Government warned the leaders to desist. There were, however, sporadic official attempts to foster the panchayat system. As early as 1886, the Stipendiary Magistrate at Ba established successful panchayats, composed of sirdars and elders, in an attempt to reduce litigation.¹ Although some individual officers did encourage panchayats,² there was no real official effort, until a very late stage, to replace the social institutions and leadership which the immigrants had left behind them in India.

Usually, the only leaders in the lines recognised by the employers and the immigrants were the sirdars. These men were appointed by the employers. Their authority was upheld by the power to deduct wages and have immigrants prosecuted and fined or imprisoned, and,

¹ C.S.O. 1050/86.

² Brewster, The Hill Tribes of Fiji, 299.

practically if not legally, by the threat of physical violence, and the allocation of women. On most plantations, no other Indian, except perhaps the overseer's cook, enjoyed such influence and authority. Sometimes, a sirdar might derive a secondary part of his authority from more traditional sources. A previous position of authority in India was, in fact, a recommendation for the post, for older men who could read and write, were strong and of commanding presence, were preferred as sirdars. Occasionally such people had won individual respect and recognition from other immigrants, especially if they were of high caste, and even from overseers, too. These natural leaders were usually made sirdars. Some refused the post, because they considered it too dangerous, or because they had moral scruples about the sort of behaviour needed to maintain effective authority over the immigrants. There was much factious intrigue around the sirdars, and often they were able, through bribery and extortion, to accumulate fair sums of money, which enhanced their prestige when they left the plantation.

In indenture days, the most important distinction among the Indians in Fiji was that between the "grimit-wala" and the "khala" - indentured and free.¹ It was in the

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Andrews and Pearson, Indian Indentured Labour in Fiji, 38.

settlements that the first leaders, deriving their authority from the immigrants and not from the employers, began to emerge. They fell into three main categories - educated free immigrants, priests and rich planters - and they all appear to have been of high caste - Brahmins or Thakurs. All priests were Brahmins (or pretended to be), but not all rich planters were of high caste. Some low-caste men became wealthy, but did not become leaders, which suggests that wealth was not the only criterion of leadership. The high-caste man, not only won respect more easily, but also had a tradition of service and command. Leadership, then, was the result of many factors, including wealth, caste, experience in India, and intelligence and education.

The earliest recorded associational activity among the Indians in Fiji was in 1887, during the final months of Anson's term as Agent-General of Immigration. In August 1887, the Indians on the Rewa held a meeting to ventilate their grievances, which included difficulties in obtaining land, and the prohibition of alcohol and opium; the latter was denounced as an infringement of the liberty of the British Indian subject. It was resolved that the immigrants should eschew dutiable goods, including rice, live on indigenous vegetable foods, and

save sufficient money to take them away from Fiji.¹ In October 1887, the Indians in the Suva area met to discuss their grievances. Although wages were mentioned, the main complaint was the violation of caste rules involved in doing certain work, particularly night work with the town council. Those engaged in this work were urged to give it up; they replied that this was impossible while they were under indenture, but promised to do so when their terms of service expired.² These meetings were held at about the same time as the Indians on the Rewa had formed a strike fund, and were giving Carew and Thurston great anxiety.³ It is significant that this activity came during Anson's term of office, when there was a sympathetic official reception of grievances. But the reason for it is unknown.

After the end of the century, there was a revival of associational activity, with the work of Mulla Mirza Khan for the Muslims, the formation of the Arya Samaj, and the arrival of Christian missionaries. The first individual to emerge as a political figure was Peter

¹ Fiji Times, 27 Aug. 1887.

² Fiji Times, 2 Nov. 1887.

³ Described in Chapter VII.

Grant, who worked for a European lawyer in Suva, and who had previously been in the West Indies. He was a Roman Catholic and did not have any consistent or substantial following among the Indians, but he played an active part in political life, because of his command of English. Some of the early members of the Arya Samaj also engaged in political activities and circulated newspapers from India, but this activity was not substantial. Another group began to meet in Suva in J.W. Burton's time; it was composed both of young, educated Fiji-born people and high-caste men from India.

Outstanding among the latter was Totaram Sanadhya. He had gone to Fiji as an indentured labourer in 1893, from Firozabad, Agra, and like many Brahmins, had been registered as a Thakur. He served his indenture term at Nausori, and afterwards settled at Wainibokasi, and married the daughter of a rich Indian farmer. He was not well educated when he left India, but studied in Fiji and became accepted as a pandit. He was a remarkably able man. His writings in Hindi (for he knew no English) show a perception, idealism, tolerance, wit, balance and shrewd practicality seldom matched by any of his European or Indian contemporaries. As a debater he was supreme,

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This estimate is supported also by Banarsi Das Chaturvedi in Fiji ki Samasya, 279.

and Burton tried unsuccessfully to convert him to Christianity. As a Sanatani pandit, he built up a following of several hundreds on the Rewa. He held discussions about the indenture system with Burton and politically-minded Indians in Suva, including Babu Ram Singh, Ram Rup and J.P. Maharaj.¹ At one meeting, it was decided to ask Mahatma Gandhi, who had led the struggle for Indian rights in South Africa, to send an English-educated lawyer to Fiji, to serve the Indians and prevent them from being exploited by European lawyers, who benefited greatly from the copious Indian litigation. Totaram wrote the letter. While Gandhi replied that he did not know of any one suitable, he asked to be kept in touch with conditions in Fiji, and promised to send an English-educated patriot to Fiji when he found one suitable. The correspondence was published in Indian Opinion and read by Doctor Maganlal Manilal,² a Gujarati lawyer who

¹ Shrikrishna Sharma, Svagirya Pandit Totaram Sanadhya, 26.

² His name is somewhat confusing. In Fiji he is usually referred to as "Dr. Manilal". In Mauritius, he was called "Manilal Doctor", articles in the Modern Review were attributed to him thus, and Hazareesingh in A History of Indians in Mauritius, uses the same form. Manilal signed himself "D.M. Manilal" in letters to the Fiji Government. He certainly did not hold a doctorate degree. The explanation, it seems, is that his given name was Manilal, and his father's name was Doctor Maganlal, and that, in accordance with Gujarati custom, his name became Doctor Maganlal Manilal.

was the leader of the Indians in Mauritius. He agreed to go, money was raised in Fiji for his fare, and he arrived in September 1912.¹

Manilal was the only Indian leader in the indenture period who commanded a following throughout the colony. He had been educated in law in England, and had a fluent command of English. He had that combination of simplicity of manner, idealistic outlook, and political sophistication so often in evidence in the nationalist movement in India. In his political views, he was left-wing and an Indian nationalist. It was said of him in Mauritius:

He was energetic, buoyant, frank, fearless, socially unorthodox, simple mannered, almost a free thinker. He had a cheerful disposition and an impressive demeanour and donned a European suit and a defiant-looking crimson coloured turban. He was quick to avenge an insult to his people and ready to unsheathe his sword not the sword of steel but that of Duty in defence of their honour.

It was unfortunate that, unlike Totaram (or Gandhi himself, of course) he was not a man who commanded the respect of the Europeans with whom he had contact.³ From

¹ Totaram Sanadhya, Fiji Dwip Men Mere Ikkis Varsh, 29-31.

² Boodhun (ed.), Indian Centenary Book.

³ This was because of temperament perhaps, and also because of his private life. He was subjected to rudeness and molestation by a few Europeans in Fiji, which he did not accept without retort and complaint to the police.

the beginning, the Government was suspicious of him, and gauged, rightly, that he intended to work for the abolition of the indenture system. His record in Mauritius from 1907 to 1912 was one of energetic activity in the cause of Indian rights,¹ and in Fiji he soon devoted himself to the same cause. Every year he sent telegrams to the Sessions of the Indian National Congress,² urging the abolition of the system,² and it was after discussion with him that Totaram returned to India, in 1914, with the intention of combating the indenture system.³ In Fiji, he wrote to the Government on a host of matters, where injustice, real or supposed, to Indians had occurred, particularly where racial discrimination was involved; and in turn, the Government sometimes consulted him on Indian affairs. Indians came to him to complain, and, in many cases he referred them to the Immigration Department; some he defended in Court, often for very low fees. He sent information to the Press in India about conditions in Fiji, and suggested that traders,

¹ Hazareesingh, A History of Indians in Mauritius, 136-45.

² Indian Settler, May-June 1917.

³ Totaram Sanadhya, Fiji Dwip Men Mere Ikkis Varsh, 107.

craftsmen and professional men come to the colony.¹ For a time he was the editor of the English section of the first Indian journal to appear in Fiji, the monthly Indian Settler, which was published for a few months in 1917 before it collapsed from lack of funds (Swami Manoharanand was the editor of the Hindi section).

Manilal also helped to organise the Indians in Fiji. His arrival had been eagerly awaited, for he was expected to become a leader as well as a barrister. When he arrived, hundreds met him at the wharf and followed his carriage through the streets of Suva.² His support was not confined at first to any particular group, although it was centred in one organisation - the British Indian Association of Fiji, formed in 1911 and later renamed the Indian Imperial Association of Fiji.³ Manilal became president, and its secretary was Babu Ram Singh. At first, membership of this body was representative, especially of the educated Indians in Fiji, and included

¹ Modern Review, Mar. 1913, 35; Mar. 1915, 281.

² Fiji Times, 5 Sep. 1912.

³ It is said that the name was changed because Manilal objected, being a citizen, not of British India, but of Baroda State.

even Government clerks.¹ It seemed that the Indian community, under able leadership, and with a fair measure of unity, might be able to make considerable advances. There was a current of reform running, and petitions and letters were sent to the Government, asking for reform of the marriage laws, the maintenance of the existing system of election for the municipal council, the non-enforcement of the death penalty for crimes passionelles, and representation in the Legislative Council. The last issue was to reflect and even widen a split in the Indian community.

When changes in the Letters Patent were under consideration in 1903, to provide for elective European representation, Governor Jackson wrote to London that he did not consider it necessary to provide for the representation of the Indians and Pacific Islanders, because they had shown themselves open to corruption at the municipal elections, and because, in any case, their interests were safeguarded by the presence of the Agent-

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Some of the latter played a fairly important, if necessarily somewhat clandestine and therefore little known, part in the abolition of the indenture system; they sent letters to India for publication or for the private information of the anti-indenture people. One Bengali, N.B. Mitra, became a leader on the western side of Viti Levu, after leaving the government service. He pursued a moderate policy, and was characterised by Banarsi Das Chaturvedi as "generous, tolerant and wise". (Fiji ki Samasya, 286.)

General of Immigration as an official member of the
Legislative Council.¹ The Indians did not accept these
propositions, and in 1910 a petition, asking for political
representation and for education, was submitted by over
two hundred Suva and Rewa Indians. Its representative
character was shown by the facts that it was said to be
inspired by Peter Grant, who hoped to be appointed, was
written in Hindi by Totaram, and was signed by Mangal
Singh among others. Another petition in 1910, from
Indians in Suva asked for the right to elect "two English
gentlemen". However, the Government ignored the part
about political representation. In 1915, another petition
was put forward, signed by many prominent Indians, and
Manilal's name was proposed. At the suggestion of the
Government of India, the Letters Patent were amended in
1916 to provide for one extra nominated member.² He had
to be a British subject who did not hold an official
appointment, and it was understood that an Indian would
be selected. There were petitions from all over the
colony asking for Manilal.

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Jackson to C.O., no.39, 24 Apr. 1903, Fiji Royal
Gazette, 1905, 105.

²

C.O. to I.O., 7 Jun. 1917, C.P. 93/18.

Manilal was, in fact, the obvious choice to represent the Indians, because of his education, command of English and wide popular support. His letters and articles in the Indian Press were moderate; only on the subject of racial discrimination was he bitter. His articles against the indenture system were far less critical in tone than were those written by the European missionaries. He even told the Government that exaggerated accounts were being circulated in India, and that certain local Indians were dangerous and were spreading rumours (although this may have been a tactical move). He tried, unsuccessfully, to interest the Government in the formation of an Indian platoon for the war effort.¹ But Manilal was an opponent of the indenture system and a staunch defender of Indian rights and interests, especially those of the poorer classes, who constituted the majority. For this reason the Government considered him unsuitable. It declined to appoint him, on the stated ground that, being a citizen of Baroda State, he was not a British subject and thus ineligible. (If it had wanted to appoint him, no doubt this objection

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Manilal sent in the names of 32 volunteers. Several Indians went to New Zealand to volunteer, and one of these served in the European theatre.

could have been overcome in some way.) Instead, the Government appointed Badri Maharaj, of Penang, who took his seat as the first Indian member of the Legislative Council of Fiji on 16th November 1917.

Badri Maharaj had hitherto been virtually unknown outside of Penang. He had come to Fiji as an indentured labourer from Garhwal, and had previously been in Singapore. He had served his indenture at Penang until 1894, and after working as a free labourer for a while, settled on the land and became a wealthy planter.¹ He opened a school at his own expense. He was considered by the Government to be intelligent, broad-minded, progressive, a man of character, respected by Europeans and Indians alike, and as suitable an Indian member as could be found. His conversational English was, however, inadequate. There was considerable opposition to the appointment among the Indians² and even by the Fiji Times which suggested, instead, Manilal, C.F. Andrews (this was before his second visit and unpopular second report), or someone else brought from India, and urged the Indians to protest.³

¹ Waiz, Indians Abroad Directory, 1933, 160.

² Indian Emigrant, Jan.-Feb. 1917.

³ Fiji Times, 1 Nov., 2 Dec., and 23 Dec. 1916.

The appointment helped to create two parties in the Indian community, deprived Manilal, the ablest Indian in Fiji, of whatever influence he still possessed with the Government and perhaps drove him into an even more radical position, and enabled the intrusion of religious issues into politics. Badri Maharaj was an Arya Samaji¹; whereas Manilal was a free-thinker (although he believed that the Arya Samaj was the best sect for the Indians in Fiji). Manilal would have judged issues from a broad and non-sectarian point of view, and would have helped the poorer Indians. On the other hand, although there was no close-knit organisation, individual Arya Samajis were anxious to promote their ideas, while their economic interest was not with the poor. It was not that the Government deliberately intended to split the Indian community - "divide and rule" is in this case too facile an explanation. Officials knew nothing of the religious factors involved and they underestimated Manilal's popular appeal. Now that the Arya Samajis had the ear of the Government, the Indian Imperial Association became virtually an opposition party and less representative in character, and was headed on the

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He was a Brahmin who had taken a Muslim wife.

road which led to the 1920 strike and the deportation of Manilal, at the suggestion of, and with the approval of certain Indians.¹ The granting of Indian political representation was to enable the Government to exercise, through patronage, a control over the Indian community that it had not exercised before, and to add Government support to the criteria of leadership.

Although they had no elective representation in the Legislative Council in this period, the Indians, like all other ratepayers, enjoyed the right of voting in elections for the Municipal Council of Suva. In 1911, they constituted one-seventh of the electorate,² and as this proportion was increasing, it was apparent that the control of the Council would eventually fall to the Indians. In 1912, a Chinese was elected to the Council, and it was apparent that Indians would follow. Moreover, most of the voters were illiterate, many of the abler citizens refused to stand for election, corruption flourished in elections, and the administration

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As late as 1919, the Indian Imperial Association was allowed to present an address of welcome to Admiral Lord Jellicoe on behalf of the Indian community, showing that the Government still regarded it as a reasonably responsible and representative body at that time.

2

Indian Immigration Report for 1911 (C.P. 48/12).

of the town was inefficient.¹ In 1910, the European elected members of the Legislative Council had asked for the introduction of a literacy test in the English language, in elections to the Municipal Council.² In 1912, a bill was passed providing for this but a technicality prevented its adoption.³ In 1915, the object was achieved, the number of non-European voters was greatly reduced, and the possibility of a non-European candidate being elected was eliminated for many years to come. Indians, Chinese and Pacific Islanders protested.⁴ Manilal tried to have the measure stopped through the intervention of opinion in India. The Government of India, while conceding that there were practical arguments for change, pointed out that the Government of Fiji was disfranchising Indians who did not know English but, at the same time, was not providing them with the facilities to learn it.⁵

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E.A. to editor Indian Emigrant, 27 Sep. 1915 (issue of October 1915, 89-90); Andrews and Pearson, Indian Indentured Labour in Fiji - Calcutta edition, 53.

2

Fiji Legislative Council Debates, 1 Jun. 1910.

3

Ibid., 17 Nov. 1914.

4

Fiji Times, 21 Nov. 1912; C.P. 67/15.

5

According to the 1911 Census, the literacy rates in any language were:

Europeans	86.5%	
Fijians	52.8%	
Indians	9.4%	(C.P. 44/11).

Indeed, the Fiji Government was just beginning to pay any attention to education. A generation of Fiji-born Indians had grown up, without education. The Government had left the work of educating all but Europeans to the Christian Missions; it could not have afforded to provide schools for either the Fijians or the Indians until after the turn of the century. Nevertheless, there were earlier proposals for educating the Indians. In 1886, after twelve Indian children had applied to be admitted to the Suva Common School, and had been refused, the Acting Agent General of Immigration drafted a questionnaire to be submitted to employers and other leading Europeans, asking them whether they thought that it was desirable to educate Indians, and, if not, why not. Thurston promptly rejected the proposal for the questionnaire, as inopportune in a depression.¹ In 1894, Forster, after reading an Immigration Report from Trinidad, remarked that the question of the education of Indians in Fiji, too, should be taken up, both in the interests of the children and the interests of the colony,² and the Colonial Secretary agreed, but nothing was done.

¹ C.S.O. 1371/86.

² C.S.O. 3472/94.

The main obstacle was financial, and the missions were similarly handicapped.

The earliest recorded schools for the Indians were organised by the people themselves about 1894; want of cohesion and confidence in the teachers caused them to fail.¹ The Marist Brothers were the first Christian body in the field, with a multi-racial school at Toorak, Suva, in 1898.² The Methodists started in the same year, with the arrival of Miss Dudley, who commenced a school in Suva for day pupils, and later, a night school for men. The Christian bodies had difficulty in persuading Indians to send their children, apparently because of the fear that they would be converted to Christianity.³ This feeling was gradually overcome, and, with the arrival of other missionaries, the Methodist Mission greatly expanded its educational work. By 1910, 200 pupils were regularly attending its five day schools. Boarding establishments were later started at three centres. The Anglican Mission also maintained a school at Labasa.⁴ It is to the Christian missions that most

¹ Indian Immigration Report for 1894 (C.P. 24/95).

² Vridhhi, Aug. 1928, 30-1.

³ Ibid.; Australian Methodist Missionary Review, Jul. 1900,

⁴ Ibid., Jul. 1910, 15; C.P. 58/15.



of the credit for the educational awakening of the Fiji Indians is due; many non-Christian leaders of the Indian community in Fiji received their education in Christian schools. The Missions did not merely meet an existing demand; they helped to create that demand, for there was at the time no great popular hunger for education, such as developed later.

Individual Indians were, however, very interested in education, and some gave private instruction. By 1908, the Muslims maintained three or four small schools attached to mosques. Some Indians learned how to read and write from Fijians, although, as a rule, they were excluded from Fijian schools.¹ By 1917, there were twelve small schools, established and maintained by the Indians themselves, in which untrained teachers taught children in the vernacular.² In 1916 a school was opened at Nausori by the Anjuman Hidayat-ul-Islam (Islam Teaching Society). The Arya Samaj school conducted by Pandit Shiudatt Sharma was perhaps the first important school maintained by the Indians in Fiji. The Arya Samajis were particularly active. Badri Maharaj started a school

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Report of 1909 Education Commission (C.P. unnumbered, 1910).

2

Report on Education for 1917 (C.P. 44/18).

and Swami Manoharanand another, and the latter toured Fiji in an attempt to raise funds for more.¹ It was agreed by the Arya Samajis that the first big school would be started on the side of Viti Levu which raised the most money. The western side won, and in 1917, the plans for the new Gurukul school were laid before the Government, with a request for financial assistance.

In the final decade of the indenture system, the Government began to take some interest in the promotion of Indian education, and, in this respect, it was in advance of the prevailing sentiment of the employers and of the Europeans generally. The 1909 Education Commission, although not appointed to consider Indian education alone, recommended that primary schools should be provided for Indians at the main centres, under Government control or with Government grants-in-aid. Its recommendation that these should be multi-racial schools was not adopted.² The Commission also recorded its objection to the opposition expressed by some Europeans to assisting the

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Fiji Times, 11 Aug. 1915.

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All the mission schools were separate, except the Marist Brothers School on Suva, which was attended by non-Europeans generally and the Methodist Indian School at Navua which was attended also by Europeans and Fijians.

education of Indians:

We feel it necessary to record that the facilities so far offered for the education of East Indian children compare most unfavourably with those offered for other classes of the community. We have not failed to detect a tendency on the part of witnesses and others, to deprecate the adoption of proposals for the general education by Government aid of the children of East Indians. We desire to protest against this attitude.¹

The attitude referred to by the Commission, which had been encountered also by the missionaries, was a common one among Europeans, especially among the employers.

The Indians had been introduced primarily as an unskilled labour force, and it was believed that general education would spoil them for this purpose, for they would develop new aspirations. At the same time, however, this attitude was on the wane, because of the influence of the missionaries and the incidence of crime and vice among the immigrants.²

The Sanderson Committee in 1910 and McNeill and Chimmanlal in 1913 also thought that greater attention should be devoted to Indian education,³ and the Fiji

¹

Report of 1909 Education Commission (C.P. unnumbered, 1910).

²

Andrews and Pearson, Indian Indentured Labour in Fiji, 41.

³

Cd. 5192 (1910), 104; Cd. 7745 (1914), 321-2.

Government was under pressure now from India and from London to provide it. In 1912, it was enacted, as recommended in the report of the 1909 Commission, that employers should provide whatever school buildings and equipment the Government considered necessary for the education of the children of the plantation labourers.¹ It was decided that the employers at the five mill centres should provide facilities, but agreement was reached that the C.S.R. Company and the Vancouver-Fiji Sugar Company, instead of providing schools of their own, should contribute money to the Methodist Mission for this purpose. The Government was to provide schools where the Missions or the Indians themselves were not doing so, and grants-in-aid were to be given to efficient private schools.² The machinery for Government control of education was set up in 1916 with the constitution of a Board of Education and the appointment of a superintendent of schools. But outside of the mill centres, there were great obstacles to be overcome - the diffusion of the population (most plantations had less than

¹ Ordinance II, 1912.

² Correspondence Relating to Education, C.P. 22/14, 68/14, 82/14, 91/14, 58/15.

ten children, and the settlers were scattered), the shortage of teachers, the multiplicity of languages, and the indifference of the parents and their opposition to the education of girls. When C.F. Andrews was in Fiji in 1917, he felt very strongly that the Government should do more to assist the "self-help" movement which was spreading among the Indians, and should give grants-in-aid to vernacular schools. The Government, on the other hand, preferred to have a few good schools at the main centres, rather than a large number of inefficient ones, and believed that English should be taught to all, rather than to a select few, who would thereby be lost to agriculture.¹ Nevertheless, provision for grants-in-aid to vernacular schools was made in 1917. Government assistance to Indian education was extended slowly; one teacher was obtained from India and, in 1918, the Government opened its first school for Indian children, at Natabua. The indenture period ended with a growing demand among Indians for education as the key to social advancement which only the Missions were in a position to meet.

¹

C.P. 44/18; Fiji Legislative Council Debates, 31 Aug. 1917.

Another type of associational activity, which was to do much to raise the self-respect of the Indians in Fiji and contribute to their advancement, was provided by the young men's and sporting associations. In the indenture period there were two - the Young Men's Sports Club, under the auspices of the Methodist Mission, and the Indian Young Men's Association, which was more political in aim, and was connected with the Indian Imperial Association. These bodies were composed largely of Fiji-born Indians.

The end of the indenture period saw also the emergence of farmers' unions. The first of these was, probably, the Indian Cane Planters' Association, representing cane planters in the north and west districts of Viti Levu. In 1919, the Indian farmers in these districts had a dispute with the C.S.R. Company over the price paid for cane and the method of computing the yield of sugar per ton. The Association made representations to the Government, which settled the dispute amicably.

The indenture period closed, then, with a growing amount of association among the Fiji Indians, with organisation for particular purposes - religious (the Muslim League, Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharm Mandala), political (the Indian Imperial Association), economic (the Indian

Cane Planters' Association), social (the Young Men's Sports Club and Indian Young Men's Association), and educational (the Arya Samaj and many local committees in the settlements). The main characteristics of the associations developed in this period were that they were primarily organised on European rather than traditional lines, were ephemeral (apart from the communal religious bodies), had small memberships, and depended on a few personalities, who, with the exception of Manilal, derived their authority, not merely from education, but from wealth and traditional, religious status. Growing economic and religious differences in the community were being reflected in the type of associations developed.

Chapter XVII

THE FINAL YEARS, 1913-19

From 1913, the critics of the indentured labour system directed their main attack to Fiji. It was taking more immigrants at this time than any other colony, was receiving the most publicity in India, and had the greatest need for leadership and social reform among the immigrants. A resume of The Fiji of Today was published in the periodical India of London at the end of 1912, and with it a moving letter from Miss Hannah Dudley, describing how Indian women were recruited, and employed on the plantations in Fiji. They were reprinted in the Modern Review of Calcutta in March 1913, and attracted considerable attention. ¹ Manilal also sent his first articles from Fiji about this time; they contrasted Fiji favourably with Mauritius as a field for Indian settlers, but concluded, nevertheless, ² that the indentured labour system should be abolished. In

¹ Modern Review, Mar. 1913, 322.

² Ibid., Jan. 1913, 35.

1913, too, a letter under the heading "The Cry of an Indian Women", which related the alleged experiences of one Kunti, appeared in the vernacular Bharat Mitra, a journal which was to give a great deal of attention to the problem of overseas Indians.¹ The Government of India sent it to the Fiji Government with the requests that it be investigated, and if found to be true, that steps be taken to prevent such maltreatment of female labourers. The story was exaggerated, but the sober denials of the Fiji Government were submerged beneath the emotional appeal of Kunti's story, which was reprinted elsewhere.

In January 1914, the Reverend Richard Piper, of the Methodist Mission in Fiji, sent an article to the Calcutta Statesman, which described the deficiencies of the indentured labour system, and urged its abolition.² The Chairman of the Methodist Mission in Fiji publicly dissociated the Mission from the views expressed in the article, saying: "While the Methodist Mission is by no

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Reprinted in Report of Marwari Association, 1915-16. The letter had apparently been written by Swami Manoharanand.

2

Calcutta Statesman, 16 Jan. 1914; reprinted Madras Times, 21 Jan. 1914 (Madras G.O. 178/14).

means blind to the abuses connected with the working of the Indenture System, it has never gone so far as to condemn the system on account of those abuses, believing them to be an excrescence that can be, and will be, removed."¹ And the Reverend Cyril Bavin wrote to the Statesman defending the system.² It was not a clear choice between good and evil. The system was undoubtedly of great economic advantage to thousands of people, and was, moreover, a valuable training in sound husbandry appropriate to conditions in Fiji. It was a question rather of knowledge, sympathy and the questioning of utilitarian values. The words of Burton and Piper, and Miss Dudley, were far more decisive.

In May 1914, Totaram Sanadhya arrived back in India³ with the intention of fighting the indenture system. Assisted by public-spirited people in North India, he made many speeches. He attended and spoke at sessions of the Indian National Congress, where resolutions urging abolition were passed.⁴ But his supporters were by no

¹ Fiji Times, 26 Feb. 1914.

² Ibid., 30 Jul. 1914.

³ Totaram Sanadhya, Fiji Dwip Men Mere Ikkis Varsh, 107.

⁴ Ibid., 6.

means all, or even primarily, extreme nationalists; they included, for instance, the Marwari Association in Calcutta, a group of wealthy merchants, who were conservative and loyalist, rather than nationalist, and concerned themselves with numerous questions of public importance, as well as with matters affecting their own community. In the United Provinces, a society was formed for the abolition of indentured labour. Information was sent from Fiji by Manilal and others, including several of the Government's Indian clerks and interpreters. Leaflets were distributed in the villages, relatives were brought to Calcutta to secure the release of recruits, and parties of emigrants were approached, and the recruiters molested.¹ What was the motive behind this activity? Was it political (the desire to embarrass the Government or to provide a clear-cut issue on which all India could unite), economic (for employers were opposing emigration on the grounds that it robbed industry and plantations in India of much needed labour), or traditional and religious (the prejudice against crossing the waters and leaving kinsfolk and caste associates)? While all of these motives were undoubtedly

¹

Madras G.O. 1635-6/14.

present, what gave the movement its wide public support was the feeling that the system reduced India to the status of "a nation of coolies", and was therefore an affront to its national pride.

In November 1914, the Government of India temporarily stopped emigration from India, because of the shortage of shipping and the danger from German raiders;¹ several of Nourse's ships had been commandeered as troopships and one had been sunk by the Emden. It was doubtful whether emigration would be resumed. The Colonial Office considered that it should be stopped because of the shortage of ships and danger at sea, while the Government of India may well have thought that this would be opportune when the system was beginning to arouse such strong public feeling and was taking labourers out of the country at a time when they were needed for the war effort. The C.S.R. Company acted with its customary promptness and efficiency. Knox, who was on the spot in London, offered to find steamers, while Hughes persuaded the Government of India to allow the engagement of the emigrants for Fiji, since the German cruisers had just been destroyed. But by January 1915

¹

Fiji Times, 1 Dec. 1914.

the Colonial Office had still not reached a decision so the Company asked the Fiji Government and planters to make representations to London that, if immigration were not resumed, this would be "a crushing blow to the Colony". Appropriate resolutions were passed by branches of the Planters' Association and the Chamber of Commerce, and by the Suva Municipal Council. These proved to be unnecessary, as in January 1915 the ban on emigration was lifted, on condition that the sea-routes were safe when the ships were ready for despatch.¹ The Government and planters of Fiji had no time in which to make representations: the C.S.R. Company had done it for them. Indeed, a month before, Knox had thought that pressure from the colonies on the Indian authorities, through the Colonial Office, might be resented, would embarrass Hughes's negotiations, and should be used only as a last resort. Both the Fiji Government and the C.S.R. Company appreciated that the matter would be decided, not in London, but in India.

In order to please the Indian authorities, the Fiji Government continued to make reforms in the indenture

¹

Ibid., 19, 21 and 26 Jan. 1915.

¹ system. Employers were warned about the high suicide
² rate among the Madrasis and the heavy infantile
³ mortality; a committee was set up to study the latter,
 and suggestions for improvements were made. Another
 committee was to consider the recommendations of McNeill
 and Chimmanlal,⁴ The C.S.R. Company was to the fore
 in advocating reforms, for it realised full well the
 strength of the opposition in India. Hughes even pressed
 the West Indian colonies to fall into line with the re-
⁵ commendations of McNeill and Chimmanlal. In 1915, the
 power to imprison for labour offences was completely
 eliminated, and a limited commutation of indentures
⁶ was to be allowed in future. Medical services, educa-
 tion and the facilities for leasing land all received
 attention. The new spirit was illustrated by a circular

1

In 1914, Agent-General Coates retired. He was suc-
 ceeded by Sydney Smith, who also retired because of
 ill-health and was succeeded by R.M. Booth, who was
 Agent-General from 1915 to 1919.

2

Fiji Times, 4 Mar. 1915.

3

Ibid., 12 Dec. 1914.

4

Reports, C.P. 103/15; 12/16.

5

Fiji Times, 21 Aug. 1915.

6

Ordinance XXIX, 1915.

issued to all District Commissioners in 1915, instructing them not to use the offensive words "coolie" and "free"; instead "indentured Indian immigrant" and "non-indentured" were enjoined.¹ To all appearances, everything possible was being done to reform the system, and to remove all reasonable grounds for objection. Malnutrition, high mortality, systematic over-tasking, excessive prosecutions, and terrorising of immigrants were things of the past.

But the really unanswerable, social and moral case against the system was yet to be stated. This was the work of Charles Freer Andrews. It is often said that of all Andrews did for India and for mankind, his finest achievement was the abolition of the indentured labour system. It can not be said that he alone was responsible nor can it be denied that, in the prevailing climate of social reform, its abolition was a matter of time. The Government of India had already decided that the system should go. If he had lived twenty years earlier, his work would have been as futile as that of the philanthropists in London who had consistently opposed

1

Fiji Times, 18 Sep. 1915. In 1915, Stipendiary Magistrates were constituted District Commissioners.

the system. But without Andrews the system might well have lasted longer.

Before going to South Africa at the end of 1913, Andrews called for the abolition of the indenture system everywhere, as a cause which should be taken up by the people of India:

There will be other evils, such as our inhuman treatment of our own depressed classes, which must be remedied. We shall not forget these, or become self-righteous. But here is an immediate issue, which the whole of India with one united voice can deal with now, while all our hearts are warm and all our consciences are stirred. Here is an issue which is simple, clear and definite, not complicated and obscure. Here is an issue which appeals to the common heart of our humanity, deeper than all divisions of race and sect and creed. Here is an issue, which if rightly and honourably faced, will raise us as a nation in the eyes of the whole civilized world.¹

His appeal was well calculated. In 1915, he read the Report of McNeill and Chimmanlal, and noticed especially the high murder and suicide rates in Fiji; also a book Fiji Dwip Men Mere Ikkis Varsh ("My Twenty-One Years in the Fiji Islands"), which related the experiences of Totaram Sanadhya.² This book made a very strong impression in India, and was published in several editions in Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi and Bengali; a drama in

1

Modern Review, Jan. 1914, 112-13.

2

The book was written by Banarsi Das Chaturvedi, to whom Totaram told his story.

Hindi was based upon it. One of the dying Gokhale's last wishes had been that others should take up his work for the abolition of the indenture system everywhere. Andrews, idealistic, passionate, indefatigable, with a remarkable capacity to identify himself with the feelings of the Indian people, and the sufferings of the wretched and oppressed, threw himself into the cause. Indeed he regarded it as a commission from Christ Himself. He wrote to his friend, Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy, and the Provincial Governors, urging them to put an end to the system.¹

This was already being considered in Delhi. After receiving the report of McNeill and Chimmanlal, the Government of India had asked the Provincial Governments whether they thought the system should be continued. The arguments for and against the system were well brought out in the replies. The Governments of the United Provinces, Madras and the Central Provinces, which provided most of the emigrants, recommended that it be replaced by a system without penal sanctions. They recognised that emigration gave many individuals the opportunity of escape from virtual social and economic slavery. They

¹

Chaturvedi and Sykes, Charles Freer Andrews, 112-13.

perceived that emigration had no important economic effect, favourable or unfavourable, on India. It gave only microscopic relief to population pressure, while the emigrants were often not of a type suitable for industry or the development of new tracts, and brought back savings which had no more than an infinitesimal effect on the general level of poverty. But the decisive factor, in their view, was the political danger of disregarding the strong public opinion against the indenture system. The Government of the United Provinces pointed out that no other Asian or European power would be prepared to accept contracts for its emigrating subjects based on penal provisions. India could not claim reciprocal citizenship, while her people could be bought for five years' labour. Through the system, Indians were made to appear a servile race. The constant repetition of this grievance swelled "the volume of misrepresentation and disaffection" which Britain had to face in India.¹

The British officials thought it worthwhile to maintain the indenture system only while India was

¹

Govt. U.P. to Govt. India, 20 Aug. 1915, correspondence printed in British Guiana Court of Policy Paper no. 860/16.

politically weak. The sense of political limitations, which had led them to reject Lord Salisbury's proposals in 1875 for the State encouragement of emigration, now brought them to the view that the system should be abolished. If the Government of India did not stand up for the rights of Indians abroad, then it had less claim on the loyalty of Indians at home. Yet, at the same time, the attitude of the British officials was different. They recognised now that the system was objectionable because it involved temporary slavery for the emigrants. The supremacy of economic values was no longer taken for granted, and there was a growing respect for the rights and feelings of Indians.

The Government of India endorsed the recommendation, and Hardinge asked Andrews to assist the Commerce and Industry Department. A detailed despatch was then sent to London, which analysed the system, especially in Fiji, and proposed that it be replaced by one under which immigrants were not bound to specific plantations nor subject to penal sanctions. The main objections to the indenture system mentioned in the despatch were the abuses inherent in recruitment, the high rate of suicide, the vice in the lines, and the taint of slavery represented by the penal sanctions. But the main argument

for change was political:

No matter how great might be the economic advantages, the political aspect of the question is such that no one who has at heart the interests of British rule in India can afford to neglect it. It is one of the most prominent subjects in Indian political life today, and its discussion arouses more bitterness, perhaps, than that of any other outstanding question. Few Indian politicians, moderate and extremist alike, do not consider that the existence of this system which they do not hesitate to call by the name of slavery, brands their whole race in the eyes of the British Colonial Empire with the stigma of helotry.¹

Andrews was not content to leave the question with this despatch, because he knew that the report of McNeill and Chimmanlal would still be regarded as authoritative in many quarters. He decided that the success of the cause depended on a fresh and independent enquiry in Fiji. The Indian members of the Imperial Legislative Council were anxious for him to go, and Lord Hardinge expressed his approval, too. Thus, although the visit was unofficial, it had behind it a considerable weight of authority. His trip was financed from the South Africa Fund, which had been collected by Gokhale to fight for Indian rights in Natal. Andrews was accompanied by his friend, the Reverend W.W. Pearson, whose fare was paid by the Anti-Indentured Labour League of Calcutta, in

¹

Govt. India to I.O., 15 Oct. 1915 (C.P. 36/16).

which the Marwaris were prominent. In India, Andrews and Pearson visited the emigration depots and main sub-depots; in Australia they talked to the officers of the C.S.R. Company; and in Fiji they looked into the conditions in which the immigrants lived, and discussed them with planters and officials (who had been briefed to handle the visitors with great tact).¹ Their report, which was submitted to the Government and planters for suggestions before publication, is undoubtedly the most authoritative account of conditions on the plantations in Fiji during the last years of the indenture system. Fiji Government officials admitted in private that it was fair. It condemned the existing system, with its inherent fraud in recruitment and moral evils, acknowledged the new spirit shown by the Government and employers, and asserted that Fiji was a suitable place for the settlement of Indian families under civil contract.²

By the time the report was published in Calcutta in February 1916, the British Government had considered the despatch from India recommending that the system be

¹ Chaturvedi and Sykes, 113-16.

² The report will not be summarised here. Where appropriate, data from it has been incorporated in the thesis.

replaced. This despatch had come as a surprise in London, for there had been no suggestion of abolition in previous correspondence. But it was accepted without question, for the Government of India was presumably the best judge of the strength of feeling in India.¹ Thus, on 20 March 1916, Lord Hardinge was able to accept a motion in the Imperial Legislative Council, urging the abolition of the system, and to announce that he had secured the promise of the British Government that this would be effected "in due course". When he heard the news, Andrews wrote: "We feel today that God has overwhelmed us with His goodness in allowing us to have our share in this great fact. It means the taking away of one more abomination from God's earth."² In Fiji there were celebrations among the Indians, and effigies labelled "coolie" were burned. The Government and the planters accepted the news without despair. The C.S.R. Company had done all it could to preserve the system: in 1914 Hughes had pleaded very hard in Delhi and London for separate treatment for Fiji in the event of changes, but could get the agreement of only one high Colonial

¹

I.O. to Govt. India, 11 Feb. 1916 (C.P. 36/16).

²

Chaturvedi and Sykes, 116-17.

Office official; while in March 1915, he distributed a pamphlet extolling the advantages of the life of the indentured and ex-indentured Indian in Fiji. Now the Company regarded the situation as grave but not desperate, if the planters were unanimous about meeting the requirements of the Government of India.¹ Pending the creation of a new system, recruiting continued for Fiji, although it was greatly hampered by a shortage of recruits; only two shiploads left for Fiji in 1916.² In Fiji, reforms suggested by McNeill and Chimmanlal were delayed, to prevent planters being put to unnecessary expense before changes in the Ordinance were made.³ In London, preparations were made for an Inter-Departmental Conference to draw up an alternative scheme of emigration, which, it was agreed, would not be introduced for five years, to allow time for new organisation and shipping arrangements.⁴

When a "high official in Fiji" wrote to Andrews who was in Japan at the time, to tell him that the

1

Fiji Times, 31 Aug. 1916.

2

Fiji received only 1600 of 3000 requisitioned.

3

Fiji Legislative Council Debates, 14 Mar. 1916.

4

Govt. India to I.O., 23 Mar. 1917 (C.P. 93/18).

planters were congratulating themselves on gaining a five years' respite, Andrews at once returned to India and wrote to the new Viceroy. Lord Chelmsford did not share Hardinge's great personal distaste for the indentured labour system, nor his sympathetic appreciation of Indian feelings, and Andrews did not receive more than an acknowledgement and promise of investigation. When he challenged the Government in the Press, indignation¹ swept the country.

On 9 January 1917, a great demonstration to open a campaign against indenture was held at Allahabad. It was presided over by Pandit Motilal Nehru, H.S.L. Polak read a paper written by Andrews, who was ill at the time, recounting the life of the indentured women in Fiji, and Mrs Sarojini Naidu, the poetess and nationalist, appealed to the people of India not to allow their women to be degraded any longer.² This was to be the emphasis in the campaign; the statement of Andrews which aroused most indignation was that women were allotted to men by plantation overseers. In February 1917 the Government refused permission for a motion to be

¹ Chaturvedi and Sykes, 120.

² Indian Emigrant, Jan.-Feb. 1917.

introduced in the Imperial Legislative Council for the immediate prohibition of emigration. Andrews and Polak lectured throughout India. Andrews's paper was translated into several Indian languages and thousands of copies were distributed at the Magh Mela, the great annual fair of Allahabad. Pamphlets were spread through the recruiting areas warning people against the recruiters. In villages in the United Provinces and Madras, recruiters, who had always been unpopular, now became "bogey-men", and songs were sung about them. Thus the agitation was not confined to the educated classes.¹ Moreover, it enlisted more support among the latter than any other movement in modern times, even the movement for independence. Meetings were presided over by people in high places, such as the Lord Bishop of Madras (who called the system iniquitous and immoral). A deputation of prominent Indian women went to the Viceroy - an unprecedented event. Anti-Indenture Leagues were formed in several places, while the Imperial Indian Citizenship Association of Bombay and the Marwari Association of Calcutta were active, too. Mahatma Gandhi decided that the issue was suitable for the first trial

¹

Andrews, mss. second report.

in India of satyagraha (non-violent resistance or "civil disobedience"), which had been so effective in South Africa. He announced that the ships would be picketed, unless the system was ended.¹

Confronted with this highly representative agitation, which even the colonies did not try to counter, the Government of India would have been foolish indeed to persist, and on 12 March, it stopped all recruiting for the colonies, as a special measure under the Defence of India Act, for the duration of the war and two years afterwards. This decision was welcomed by - and perhaps even inspired by - the military authorities, who wanted labour for the campaign in Mesopotamia. Recruiting for Assam had already been slackened off to meet their requirements;² and Fiji would have found it very difficult to meet their competition even if recruiting had not been stopped. The Agent had reported that a ship could not have been sent before November 1917, and this to supply only a quarter of Fiji's requirements for the year. It is, moreover, unlikely that the colonies would have been able after the war to secure unlimited supplies

¹ Gandhi, An Autobiography, 489.

² Indian Emigrant, Mar.-Apr. 1917; Fiji Times, 30 Jun. 1917.

of labour from India at a shilling a day. The economic conditions in India which made the indenture system possible were already changing before the war and this had been reflected in the growing scarcity of recruits.

Although it was announced that the indentured¹ labour system would not be revived after the war, it was still the intention of the British Government to substitute some other type of assisted emigration from India to the colonies. Although Andrews and Pearson had not been opposed to assisted family immigration under non-penal contracts, other leaders of Indian public opinion rejected any form of assisted emigration. Andrews was convinced by Gandhi that any such system would involve abuses in recruiting and social and moral breakdown in the colonies, since Indian village life was an organic whole, and he now wrote a minute for the Inter-Departmental Conference in London, opposing all recruited² emigration for many years to come. He had been converted to the Indian view of emigration, and an extreme view at that; there were other Indians who agreed with the Government officials that to stop all emigration

¹ Report of Marwari Association 1916-17, 29.

² Andrews, mss. second report.

would deprive many in India of the opportunity to rise.¹ That the widows who could no longer emigrate were forced to become prostitutes, or that the poor of India lived in virtual serfdom, unable to escape from their wretchedness, were facts to which the opponents of emigration shut their eyes in their desire for national self-respect. But they did not accept the utilitarian values which justified Indian migration by reference to the undoubted economic benefit it afforded to thousands of individual migrants, while Gandhi and Andrews saw man living in communities, not in isolation and by bread alone.

In 1917, Andrews went to Fiji again, this time without Pearson. His intention was apparently twofold: to help the Indians already there, and to discredit the colony as a field for future settlement. This time he was greeted with more reserve and suspicion by the Government and planters of Fiji. He found that the Indian labourers were suffering from wartime price rises. The wages of indentured immigrants had not been increased

1

The Indian Emigrant of Madras, edited by T.K. Swaminathan, which commenced publication in August 1914, represented this point of view. It opposed the indenture system, but favoured emigration generally.

since immigration began; this was one respect in which conditions were not better in the last years of the system. He enquired into their grievances, secured some concessions from the Government and planters, and was named by the Indians "Deenabandhu" (The Friend of the Poor).¹ He started two schools. His published report was less cautious than the joint report, reflected more impatience and moral indignation, was sometimes inaccurate in details, and tended to exaggeration. But his recommendations were sensible and progressive and, characteristically, in tune with Indian tradition.

Schemes for an alternative system of immigration were already being considered in Fiji and London. A committee in Suva, composed of official and unofficial Europeans, drew up a plan for "assisted and protected immigration", and its provisions were more favourable to the immigrants than were those of the old system.² At the end of 1916, there was a Conference at the Colonial Office, to which the planters and the C.S.R. Company sent representatives, as a preliminary to the Inter-Departmental Conference to be held in the following year.

1

Chaturvedi and Sykes, 121-4.

2

Free Emigration to Fiji. Suggested Scheme (unsigned and undated).

The representatives of Fiji and the West Indian colonies arrived at a joint scheme. At the Inter-Departmental Conference, a scheme of "aided colonisation" was agreed to, under which immigrants would serve as free labourers for three years, and then be settled on the land.¹

This modest scheme was still-born, although it was accepted by Fiji and British Guiana. Anti-indenture opinion, headed by Gandhi, rejected it, because it would not have overcome the main objections to the indenture system - that recruitment could not be made free from abuses, and that the environment in which the labourers had to live in the colonies was not conducive to their moral well-being.² An occasional voice was raised in India in defence of the scheme, but there was no chance of its being adopted.³ Moreover, it was not even acceptable to the C.S.R. Company and the Vancouver-Fiji Sugar Company, for the changes would have practically doubled the cost of labourers and made it impossible for Fiji to compete with sugar produced in Java, Formosa

¹ C.P. 89/17; Fiji Legislative Council Debates, 3 Sep. 1917.

² Indian Emigrant, Aug.-Sep. 1917; Report of Marwari Association, 1916-17; Report on India in 1919 (P.P. 1920, XXXIV, 705).

³ Indian Emigrant, Aug.-Sep. and Oct.-Nov. 1917.

and Mauritius. As early as November 1917, Knox told his manager in Fiji that there was no hope of an acceptable scheme of organised immigration being arrived¹ at. But the private planters were more optimistic and more desperate. They were willing to accept the proposed scheme, and, over the opposition of the larger companies, an Immigration Fund was started, financed by an additional export duty of five shillings a ton on copra and sugar.² To the sugar planters, outside labour was a matter of survival, for no labour was available to replace those whose indentures expired. The C.S.R. Company and the Vancouver-Fiji Sugar Company now decided to make themselves independent of further immigration by large-scale settlement of Indians as tenant farmers. This policy was forced upon them by the labour shortage. The C.S.R. Company for one would have preferred to have continued to buy its cane from European planters, for it doubted the capacity and reliability of the Indian when working on his own.³ But settlement of the Indians

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C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 28 Nov. 1917, C.S.R./Fiji Private Letter Books, H.O. to Nausori, 1917-18.

²

Fiji Times and Herald, 31 Aug. and 14 Sep. 1918; C.P. 63/18.

³

C.S.R. Reports, 1917 (2) and 1918 (1).

made the Company independent of labour from India, and also was a necessary condition of further immigration being permitted.¹

But while Knox talked of putting the industry on a surer basis than ever,² the mood of the planters became one of desperation. Many of them were forced to give up their plantations because of the labour shortage. Execration was heaped upon Andrews, and an answer to his second report was prepared by the Planters' Association, in which several errors of fact and misleading generalisations were exposed, and others added.³ But the time for such argument had passed. On his way back to India, Andrews made many speeches in Australia about the moral conditions in Fiji, especially those in which the women lived. Labour unions and women's organisations in Australia and New Zealand took up the campaign. Women's organisations in Australia sent messages of sympathy to the women of India, and explanations were demanded of the Fiji Government and the C.S.R.

1

C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 30 Aug. 1916, C.S.R./Fiji Private Letter Books, H.O. to Nausori, 1915-16.

2

C.S.R./G.M. to C.S.R./Fiji, 4 Feb. 1918, C.S.R./Fiji Private Letter Books, H.O. to Nausori, 1917-18.

3

Fiji and the Indians. A Reply to Mr C.F. Andrews (Fiji Times, 20, 21 and 22 Feb. 1918).

Company.¹ Governor Sweet-Escott published a memorandum, in which he called Andrews's report "exaggerated and misleading", but he admitted that in four respects the criticism was just: the lines were unfit for married couples, the hospital arrangements needed improvement, the children were neglected, and the proportion of women was too low.² The Governor was fully supported in his attack on the report by Booth, his Agent-General, and by Badri Maharaj, the Indian Member of the Legislative Council, who wrote that it was very, very unfortunate for the Indian people that Mr Andrews had not devoted his time towards improving the system rather than abolishing it. On the other hand, Eyre Hutson, the Colonial Secretary, who was always just to the critics of a system, the deficiencies of which he recognised, considered that although Andrews's report contained exaggerations and inaccuracies, its conclusions were fair. He thought that it would be inadvisable to fan the controversy and provoke further investigations and questioning of immigrants in Fiji, by issuing denials of specific statements. The India Office was of the same

¹ Modern Review, Mar. 1918, 677-8, and Jul. 1918, 89.

² C.P. 112/18.

opinion, and so the Fiji Government did not attempt to controvert the report in detail.

In 1919, in order to obtain independent information, 46 women's organisations in Australia and New Zealand sent Miss Florence Garnham of the London Missionary Society, Calcutta, to make an investigation into the social and moral conditions of the Indians in Fiji. Although less critical than Andrews's second report, her report confirmed the existence of grave moral evils, and recommended that all existing indentures should be cancelled as soon as possible. The report was acknowledged to be moderate and reasonable by the Government and planters of Fiji.¹

But history was being shaped in India, where the Government allowed itself to be carried along by public opinion. When Andrews returned, he pressed for the early cancellation of indentures, for reforms in Fiji, and the rejection of proposals for further emigration. In September 1918, the Government agreed in the Imperial Legislative Council to negotiate for the early release of Indian labourers in Fiji. (It rejected an earlier resolution which did not contain these two words.)²

1

Fiji Legislative Council Debates, 1 Jul. 1919.

2

Modern Review, Oct. 1918, 439.

In 1918, Fiji received a new Governor, Sir C.H. Rodwell. He, too, recognised that reform was necessary, and decided that the Government should knock the ground from under the feet of the critics by boldly accepting Miss Garnham's conclusions, including the cancellation of indentures (which had been under consideration in Fiji since 1917). He suggested that they be cancelled on 1 January 1920, but the planters were not as bold, and the Legislative Council passed a resolution that they be ended on 1 August 1920.¹ This was a compromise between the desire to obtain more labour from India, and the immediate needs of the planters, who wanted to retain their labourers as long as possible, especially when they suspected that immigration would not be permitted no matter what reforms they made. A committee was appointed at the same time to draw up plans for reform.

The resumption of Indian immigration was regarded by the Government and planters as extremely important to the prosperity of the colony. The prevailing attitude was well expressed in the Legislative Council by Mr H.M. Hedstrom, an elected member:

¹

Fiji Legislative Council Debates, 1 Jul. 1919.

We should try and get new population out here; in addition to this it is essential that we should do everything possible to retain the East Indians already settled in the Colony.... We want to make the conditions so good that there will be no desire on their part to return to their own country, and, by that means, to retain people who are such a big asset to the Colony today.... The Colony will remain empty unless it is going to be populated with East Indians, and therefore we should do everything we can to raise the status of the people so as to make them better citizens.¹

In 1919 it was still possible to believe that the Fijians would not increase in numbers. The Fijians themselves remained inarticulate, although it is unlikely that they shared the views of the Europeans. In the same year, Governor Rodwell told a deputation of Indians from north-west Viti Levu:

You say in your petition that you would like to have one school for every fifteen children. Now it costs very nearly as much to establish and maintain a school for fifteen children as it does for three times that number. But if there were three times as many Indians in Fiji as there are now, the position would be very different: you would be able to say to the Government "Here are forty or fifty children, not fifteen only; give us a school," and the Government would have much less difficulty in providing education (not free perhaps, but on very favourable terms) because they would be getting more revenue. And whose fault is it that you remain so few in numbers? It is certainly not the fault of the Government of Fiji. We should welcome more immigrants from India to this 'beautiful new country', as you rightly describe it.

¹

Ibid.

Rodwell believed that an increase in the Indian population would be in the interests of both the Europeans and Fijians, because it would bring more revenue; and that without further immigration, the colony faced stagnation. An unofficial mission was sent to India to try to induce a change of heart,¹ but Fiji had become far too discredited in India for that to be possible.

The Government of India continued to press for the cancellation of indentures in Fiji by 1 January, as proposed by Andrews. The Colonial Office thought that, unless India paid compensation, this would not be fair to the colony. But it agreed that they should be cancelled on plantations where four important reforms² suggested by Andrews had not been carried out. Not all the planters were prepared to meet the expense of these, and it appeared that on 1 January only half the

¹ Fiji Times and Herald, 3 Dec. 1919.

² Ibid., 7 Jan. 1920; Indian Emigrant, Sep.-Oct. 1919. The reforms were: (1) that at the mill centres the lines be reconstructed to give privacy and separateness to married labourers; (2) that at the mill centres the hospitals be placed under the supervision of a resident matron; (3) that no young, unmarried overseer be placed in charge of field gangs of Indian women; (4) that no young unmarried hospital assistant be placed in charge of an Indian hospital where there was no matron.

labourers would be released. To prevent discontent, and even desertion, among those who would otherwise have had to wait another seven months, and to create a good impression in India, it was decided in Fiji to cancel them all at once. Thus it was that on 1 January 1920, the last indentured labourers were freed.

Indian indentured labour was introduced into Fiji by one great and good Englishman, and it was ushered out by another. Accepted ideas and political relationships changed much in the forty years that lay between the works of Gordon and Andrews. The growing movement for reform in many aspects of society, including the conditions of labour, had its repercussions in the overseas empires of the European powers. The birth of Indian nationalism gave an impetus to the ever-present opposition to emigration in India and constituted a new force to be recognised by its British rulers. The continuance of migration under the indentured labour system was an impediment to the healthy development of the Indian communities in the colonies and to India's claim for equality of treatment as a nation.

The promoters of Indian immigration into Fiji expected certain beneficial results from it, and these

expectations were indeed fulfilled. It ensured the prosperity of the sugar industry and of the colony generally, it gave new social and economic opportunities to thousands of the poor of India and their descendants, and, as Gordon had hoped, it shielded the Fijians from commercial pressure. It had never been simply a matter of the exploitation of India and its people in the interests of the British Empire and its planters and investors. But, before the benefits to the immigrants could make themselves fully felt, much suffering and degradation had to be gone through. Some of this could have been avoided if administrative machinery and market conditions had been better, but much of it was inherent in a system, framed with the best of intentions, but with a disregard of the conditions of Indian society and of the feelings of the people of India. The promoters of the system did not see that the abuses were inherent; sometimes they did not even know they existed. Perhaps they asked too much of men. If the system had worked in practice as it was intended to work - if, invariably, the recruiters had been honest, the registering officers conscientious, the employers enlightened (even to their own self-interest), the inspectors sufficient and sympathetic, the magistrates fair, and the

immigrants virtuous "economic men" - organised recruitment and temporary servitude might have been to the advantage of all. But this could not be, and it remained for men of Andrews's generation to affirm the necessity for free labour.

But out of the suffering of the first generations of Indian labourers arose a new society with great potentialities for improvement. In 1920 it was only a shadow of what it was to become; hardly yet a community, but a collection of poor, illiterate individuals, plagued by social evils, in great need of leadership, divorced from and distrustful of the Government, and subservient to the Europeans. But changes were in progress. The indenture system - that badge of inferiority - was ended. The Government was more alive to the needs of the Indian population. Help was coming from India and Australia. More schools were being started. Elective political representation was on the way. Now that assisted immigration had ceased, the sex disproportion would gradually right itself, and the dreadful lines were to go. The Indians were staying on the plantations, not as gang labourers, but as tenant farmers, and it was from this rural settlement that there was the greatest hope of regeneration. There was the promise that the new society

might give opportunities for the realisation of human potentialities in an environment freed from the terrors of nature and the injustices of man. If, in some ways, the Indians in Fiji were behind those in India, in other ways they were in advance. Already a greater independence of bearing was shown by the average colonial Indian, especially by the women, while the children were healthier. Religious divisions were growing, but the degree of toleration was still remarkable, and caste would remain unimportant. Economic divisions, too, were emerging, but opportunity was still open to the enterprising and industrious.

There were many problems ahead for the Indians in Fiji: cohesion, education, social reform, political rights, land acquisition, and, perhaps the most important of all, the winning of acceptance by others, particularly by the indigenous Fijians. Freedom was not yet fully achieved, for the immigrants had lost one country and not yet found another. That was a task for another generation.

APPENDIX A

CALCUTTA: REGISTRATIONS FOR FIJI 1878-1916

Places of Registration

Percentages to Total Registrations in each year¹

Year	Total Registered	Bengal & Bihar	United Provinces North-West Provinces	United Provinces Oudh	Punjab	Central Provinces	Ajmer District
1878-9	649						
1881-2	586	10.24	44.36	33.95	11.43	-	
1882-3	1,190	5.12	52.18	29.91	11.93	0.84	
1883-4	1,829	36.30	35.10	19.35	8.25	-	
1884-5	3,366	58.56	31.40	6.86	1.45	0.41	
(21 mths)							
1886	1,237	44.38	42.27	13.36			
1887	-						
1888	665	41.80	40.30	17.89			
1889	899	48.83	42.04	9.11			
1890	1,600	49.06	37.31	13.62			
1891	1,851	24.20	51.02	24.74			
1892	2,418	18.40	64.39	17.20			
1893	1,468	27.72	54.49	17.77			
1894	1,827	25.72	50.46	23.80			
1895	1,927	6.79	70.16	23.04			
1896	1,701	14.46	58.78	26.74			
1897	1,930	14.50	59.58	25.90			
1898	1,824	6.67	57.03	36.28			
1899	1,278	12.91	59.38	27.69			
1900	3,357	8.43	53.77	30.83		6.97	

Year	Total Registered	Bengal & Bihar		United Provinces		Punjab	Central Provinces	Ajmer District
		North-West Provinces	Oudh	North-West Provinces	Oudh			
1901	3,630	18.26		32.72	21.99	4.79	22.31	2.87
1902	2,143	7.88		40.83	22.02	0.69	28.55	2.72
1903	2,051	9.94		32.08	17.06	15.30	22.72	1.01
1904	1,396	7.16		36.53	32.95	8.95	11.67	2.22
1905	2,074	21.45		45.66	24.25	4.67	2.94	-
1906	4,362	33.26		42.10	18.91	1.87	3.50	0.40
1907	1,060	22.26		42.16	31.98	1.98	1.60	-
1908	5,448	10.04		47.15	42.19	-	0.19	0.69
1909	1,349	10.37		46.77	41.95	-	0.88	0.30
1910	3,321	12.73		48.33	34.53	3.70	-	3.76
1911	2,922	22.21	5.80	34.63	29.35	12.97	-	2.32
1912	1,275	1.96	8.47	43.52	30.35	14.58	0.53	-
1913	1,672	6.51	3.39	41.14	24.34	15.25	-	-
1914	1,711	1.28	4.65	56.63	33.13	5.55	0.37	0.21
1915	2,370	5.14	2.04	60.75	28.81	-	-	1.56
1916	1,276	6.50		63.55	25.23	-	-	
Total	68,662							

1 Before 1886 the Emigration Reports were for the year ending on 31st March; thereafter for the calendar year.

2 1883-4, Bombay 0.98%

3 1884-5, Orissa 1.27%

4 1913, Orissa 1.49%

5 1915, Orissa 0.03%

6 1916, Orissa 1.09%

APPENDIX B

EMIGRATION FROM CALCUTTA TO FIJI 1879-1900

Home Provinces of Emigrants

Year	Total Emigrants	Bengal and Bihar	United Provinces		Central Punjab	Nepal and Princely States	Others
			North-West Provinces	Oudh			
1878-9	498	52	216	213	11	3	3
1882-3	922	21	474	277	32	105	3
1883-4	1,514	287	628	402	32	101	33
1884-5	2,316	1,129	723	289	10	37	128
1885 (9mths)	540	227	201	70	15	8	14
1886	1,012	300	374	265	6	5	53
1887			No emigration to Fiji				
1888	537	164	215	152	-	2	3
1889	675	205	346	111	6	1	4
1890	1,155	317	544	234	7	3	-
1891	1,055	126	571	318	-	8	2
1892	1,529	161	933	360	3	8	2
1893	1,781	68	485	201	2	6	-
1894	1,082	171	486	281	1	2	2
1895	1,432	28	755	622	7	1	1
1896	1,179	61	692	396	-	8	-
1897	1,339	75	757	472	8	2	1
1898	567	21	297	230	1	-	-
1899	931	47	478	362	5	6	-
1900	2,304	110	1,083	630	139	63	10

Notes:

- (1) From 1893 the figures under "Bengal and Bihar" include Assam.
- (2) The figures under "Central" include Princely States in Central India up to 1883-4, but thereafter refer to the Central Provinces only.
- (3) The figures under "Nepal and Princely States" do not include Nepal after 1894 when recruitment of Nepalis in British India was prohibited to prevent competition with enlistment for the army.



APPENDIX CEMIGRATION TO FIJI 1901-1916

Year	Number of Emigrants Despatched	
	From Calcutta	From Madras
1901	2,409	-
1902	1,558	-
1903	1,234	596
1904	1,158	-
1905	1,405	1,731
1906	2,594	879
1907	758	796
1908	3,162	-
1909	668	215
1910	2,256	1,589
1911	2,233	1,971
1912	827	2,546
1913	1,020	2,202
1914	1,033	542
1915	1,394	1,115
1916	806	950

No detailed figures of home provinces are available for these years because the length of Calcutta Emigration reports was reduced (presumably for reasons of economy).

APPENDIX DEMIGRATION FROM CALCUTTA TO FIJI, 1879-1916Religions and Castes of Emigrants

	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage
	to Total Males	to Total Females	to Total Emigrants
<u>Hindus</u>			
Brahmins and other High Castes	17.0	14.2	16.1
Agricultural Castes	32.7	28.4	31.3
Artisan Castes	6.9	6.5	6.7
Low Castes and Out- castes	29.3	35.0	31.2
<u>Muslims</u>	14.0	15.8	14.6
<u>Christians</u>	0.1	0.1	0.1
	100.0	100.0	100.0

APPENDIX EEMIGRATION FROM CALCUTTA TO FIJI, 1879-1916Ages of Emigrants

Age Group	Percentages to total number of Emigrants		
	Males	Females	Total
Under 2	1.3	1.3	2.6
2 - 10	3.3	2.4	5.7
10 - 20	12.4	5.5	17.9
20 - 30	48.8	19.9	68.7
30 - 40	3.7	1.2	4.9
Over 40	0.1	0.1	0.2
	69.6	30.4	100.0

APPENDIX FFORM OF AGREEMENT FOR INTENDING EMIGRANTS

(in force in Madras in 1912)

Fiji

Conditions of Service and Terms of Agreement which the Recruiter is authorized to offer on Behalf of the Agent to Intending Emigrants.

1. Period of Service. - Five years from Date of Arrival in the Colony.
2. Nature of labour. - Work in connection with the Cultivation of the soil or the manufacture of the produce on any plantation.
3. Number of days on which the Emigrant is required to labour in each Week. - Every day, excepting Sundays and authorized holidays.
4. Number of hours in every day during which he is required to labour without extra remuneration.- Nine hours on each of five consecutive days in every week commencing with the Monday of each week, and five hours on the Saturday of each week.
5. Monthly or Daily Wages and Task-Work Rates. - When employed at time-work every adult male Emigrant above the age of fifteen years will be paid not less than one shilling, which is at present equivalent to twelve annas and every adult female Emigrant above that age not less than nine pence, which is at present equivalent to nine annas, for every working day of nine hours; children below that age will receive wages proportionate to the amount of work done.
6. When employed at task or ticca-work every adult male Emigrant above the age of fifteen years will be paid not less than one shilling, and every adult female Emigrant above that age not less than nine pence for every task which shall be performed.

7. The law is that a man's task shall be as much as an ordinary able-bodied adult male Emigrant can do in six hours' steady work, and that a woman's task shall be three-fourths of a man's task. An employer is not bound to allot, nor is an Emigrant bound to perform more than one task in each day, but by mutual agreement such extra work may be allotted, performed and paid for.
8. Wages are paid weekly on the Saturday of each week.
9. Conditions as to return passage. - Emigrants may return to India at their own expense after completing five years' industrial residence in the Colony.
10. After ten years' continuous residence every emigrant who was above the age of twelve years on introduction into the Colony and who during that period has completed an industrial residence of five years, shall be entitled to a free return passage if he claims it within two years after the completion of the ten years' continuous residence. If the Emigrant was under twelve years of age when he was introduced into the Colony, he will be entitled to a free return passage if he claims it before he reaches 24 years of age and fulfils the other conditions as to residence.

A child of an emigrant born within the Colony will be entitled to a free return passage until he reaches twelve years of age, and must be accompanied on the voyage by his parent or guardian.

11. Other Conditions. - Emigrants will receive rations from their employers during the first six months after their arrival on the plantation according to the scale prescribed by the Government of Fiji at a daily cost of four pence, which is at present equivalent to four annas, for each person of twelve years of age and upwards.
12. Every child between five and twelve years of age will receive approximately half rations free of cost, and every child, five years of age and under, nine chattacks of milk daily free of cost, during the first year after their arrival.

13. Suitable dwelling will be assigned to Emigrants under indenture free of rent and will be kept in good repair by the employers. When Emigrants under indenture are ill they will be provided with Hospital accommodation, Medical attendance, Medicines, Medical comforts and Food free of charge.
14. An Emigrant who has a wife still living is not allowed to marry another wife in the Colony unless his marriage with his first wife shall have been legally dissolved; but if he is married to more than one wife in his country he can take them all with him to the Colony and they will then be legally registered and acknowledged as his wives.

(Also in Tamil and Telegu)

I agree to accept the person named on the face of this form as an Emigrant on the above conditions.

In my presence

Dated 191

Registering officer

Recruiter for
Fiji Government Emigration
Agency

APPENDIX GLIST OF SHIPS, DATES OF ARRIVAL,
AND REGISTERED NUMBERS OF IMMIGRANTS¹

Ship No.	Name of Vessel and No. of Voyage	Date of Arrival	Registered Nos	
			From	To
1	Leonidas	15 May 1879	1	463
2	Berar	29 June 1882	464	887
3	Poonah I	17 Sept. 1882	888	1364
4	Poonah II	19 June 1883	1365	1860
5	Bayard	20 Aug. 1883	1861	2354
6	Syria	14 May 1884	2355	2792
7	Howrah	26 June 1884	2793	3287
8	Pericles	3 July 1884	3288	3748
9	Newnham, S.S.	23 July 1884	3749	4323
10	Maine	30 April 1885	4324	5048
11	Ganges	27 June 1885	5049	5571
12	Boyne	26 April 1886	5572	6108
13	Bruce	21 May 1886	6109	6566
14	Hereford I	24 April 1888	6567	7105
15	Moy I	3 May 1889	7106	7782
16	Rhone I	15 May 1890	7783	8367
17	Allanshaw	17 June 1890	8367	8940
18	Danube	15 June 1891	8941	9531
19	Jumna	27 June 1891	9532	9978
20	British Peer	23 April 1892	9979	10505
21	Avon I	5 May 1892	10506	11025
22	Hereford II	15 June 1892	11026	11504
23	Moy II	14 April 1893	11505	11971
24	Jumna II	23 May 1893	11972	12281
25	Ems I	20 April 1894	12282	12851
26	Hereford III	28 June 1894	12852	13362
27	Vadala S.S.	26 March 1895	13363	14109
28	Virawa I, S.S.	26 April 1895	14110	14786
29	Erne	24 April 1896	14787	15343
30	Elbe I	13 June 1896	15344	15958
31	Rhone II	11 May 1897	15959	16611
32	Clyde	1 June 1897	16612	17281
33	Moy III	1 June 1898	17282	17849
34	Avon II	25 July 1899	17850	18316
35	Ganges	3 Sept. 1899	18317	18780

Ship No.	Name of Vessel and No. of Voyage	Date of Arrival	Registered Nos	
			From	To
36	Ganges	21 June 1900	18781	19334
37	Elbe II	26 July 1900	19335	19938
38	Arno I	23 July 1900	19939	20565
39	Rhine	30 Aug. 1900	20566	21056
40	Fazilka I, S.S.	28 March 1901	21057	21860
41	Fultala I, S.S.	12 May 1901	21861	22669
42	Fazilka II, S.S.	18 June 1901	22670	23445
43	Virawa II, S.S.	26 April 1902	23446	24163
44	Fazilka III, S.S.	20 June 1902	24164	25003
45	Mersey	13 June 1903	25004	25588
46	Elbe III	5 Aug. 1903	25589	26178
47	Arno II	4 Sept. 1903	26179	26812
48	Arno III	3 May 1904	26813	27443
49	Ems II	30 July 1904	27444	27969
50	Fultala II 2	10 April 1905	27970	28796
51	Virawa III	17 July 1905	28797	29411
52	Wardha I	28 July 1905	29412	30303
53	Fultala III	17 Aug. 1905	30304	31093
54	Fazilka IV	17 April 1906	31094	31974
55	Fultala IV	28 April 1906	31975	32775
56	Wardha II	28 June 1906	32776	33609
57	Fazilka V	28 Jan. 1907	33610	34484
58	Virawa IV	23 March 1907	34485	35243
59	Fazilka VI	25 April 1907	35244	36039
60	Sangola I	18 March 1908	36040	37171
61	Sangola II	6 June 1908	37172	38257
62	Sangola III	1 Feb. 1909	38258	39409
63	Sangola IV	21 April 1909	39410	40076
64	Sangola V	7 March 1910	40077	41002
65	Santhia I	22 April 1910	41003	42023
66	Sangola VI	5 June 1910	42024	42892
67	Santhia II	8 July 1910	42893	43922
68	Mutlah I	22 May 1911	43923	44756
69	Sutlej I	25 June 1911	44757	45606
70	Ganges I	22 July 1911	45607	46466
71	Mutlah II	18 Aug. 1911	46467	47329
72	Sutlej II	4 Oct. 1911	47330	48140
73	Sutlej III	27 April 1912	48141	48997
74	Indus	8 June 1912	48998	49801
75	Ganges II	18 July 1912	49802	50644
76	Ganges III	8 Nov. 1912	50645	51490
77	Ganges IV	21 Feb. 1913	51491	52261
78	Sutlej IV	11 April 1913	52262	53069

Ship No.	Name of Vessel and No. of Voyage	Date of Arrival	Registered Nos	
			From	To
79	Ganges V	29 May 1913	53070	53917
80	Ganges VI	9 Sept. 1913	53918	54701
81	Chenab I	24 March 1914	54702	55556
82	Chenab II	16 June 1914	55557	56273
83	Mutlah III	7 May 1915	56274	57125
84	Ganges VII	21 June 1915	57126	57971
85	Mutlah IV	1 Aug. 1915	57972	58783
86	Chenab III	1 Sept. 1916	58784	59665
87	Sutlej V	11 Nov. 1916	59666	60553

- 1 Supplied by Labour Department, Fiji Government.
- 2 From 1905, all ships were steamers.

APPENDIX HEXTRACT FROM 'NOTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A NATIVE
COUNCIL HELD AT SAWAIEKE, MAY 1888'

Resolution VII - Concerning Coolies whose Term of Indenture has Expired: A large number of coolies have been brought to this Colony, and are still being imported. We notice that many of those who have served their term of indenture locate themselves amongst us; and, though we do not wish to be inhospitable, yet we cannot help observing that their number is increasing, and that they are becoming a source of annoyance to us by their thieving propensities and by their customs, which are entirely different from ours and distasteful to us. Furthermore, some of us have been punished when deserters have been found in our villages. We have, therefore, weighed this matter carefully over in our minds, and have unanimously agreed to respectfully ask Your Excellency to explain to us the future position of those who are likely to settle in the Colony.

Governor Thurston's reply:

The questions you ask are important, and, as far as I can answer them briefly, I will do so: if the matter is then not plain to you let me know; so that any want of information upon your part may be remedied. A large number of Indian immigrants have been imported; some, however, have gone back; and next year their regular yearly return to India begins. There is, as you know, not a large labouring population in this country, and men must be had to work for planters, or plantations would go to ruin. You must not forget that in this Colony there is much land lying idle, - land which you neither do nor can make use of. Now, land is given us for use; and it would be a mistake for you to suppose that in the present age anything can be allowed to be idle and useless. It has, as you know, often been said that there is a large labouring population in Fiji. But this is a great mistake, for there is really a very small

population. Of you, actual natives, there are only fourteen souls to the square mile. This being the case, it becomes absolutely necessary that a labouring population - that is to say, a class of people who will work steadily on plantations - be introduced from other countries. But, in this I do not think you have any real cause of objection. The number of settling coolies is not likely to rapidly increase; and it is yet an open question whether they will settle in any number. As British subjects they may settle if they wish; and, if properly settled, it is not unlikely that they may be useful and good neighbours to you Fijians. If they annoy you by thieving or otherwise, let it be reported, so that they may be punished; and do not copy their distasteful customs. It will be well not to let Indians live in your villages, for they are almost sure to be deserters from work; and I have known cases where Indian labourers have been sheltered by taukeis, knowing them to be deserters. As to the future position of those Indians who may settle in the country, it is this: they will either settle in towns like Suva or Levuka, as house servants or as gardeners, masons, road-makers, petty storekeepers, and so on; or they will rent land and settle in the country out of towns. In this case they will probably live together in communities under control of the Government, like other people. They will pay rent, taxes, licenses, and other things, as other people do. There will be head men over them, and officers appointed from among them, who will be responsible for keeping order, - and those head men and officers will be paid by their community. The Government will take care that they behave in an orderly and proper manner, neither injuring nor annoying the taukeis - but, it is hoped, being of use to them. I am glad these questions have been asked, and hope that at all times you will write or send to me and make full enquiries on the subject.

APPENDIX IDEPARTURES OF INDIANS FROM FIJI (to 1920)

Year	Number	Year	Number
1881	2	1901	515
1882	4	1902	479
1883	2	1903	579
1884	-	1904	366
1885	10	1905	341
1886	9	1906	351
1887	92	1907	641
1888	119	1908	693
1889	533	1909	414
1890	149	1910	445
1891	427	1911	708
1892	496	1912	719
1893	573	1913	802
1894	1067	1914	1256
1895	608	1915	510
1896	684	1916	678
1897	35	1917	-
1898	413	1918	-
1899	361	1919	-
1900	405	1920	4741

(These figures, derived from collated information in the Fiji Labour Department, must be treated as approximate only. It is not clear whether all those who left the colony with passports are included.)

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<u>Page</u>	<u>Last Word of Sentence</u>	<u>Reference</u>
73	impressions.	C.S.O. 2405/07.
87	licence.	C.S.O. 1249/08.
88	(footnote 3).	C.S.O. 884/04; C.O. to Major, no.6, 5 Jan. 1909.
90	wasteful system.	C.O. to Sweet-Escott, misc., 15 Jan. 1917.
91a	opinion.	C.S.O. 8351/11.
95	unscrupulous.	C.S.O. 8351/11.
96	(quotation)	E.A. to C.S., 30 Sep. 1907, C.S.O. 5595/06.
127	quarrelsome.	C.S.O. 2320/03.
	India.	Jackson to C.O., no.104, 3 Sep. 1903.
	extent.	C.S.O. 4410/03.
129	Rules.	C.S.O. 4410/03.
130	prohibited.	C.S.O. 4410/03.
131	procurable.	C.S.O. 3963/04.
	revenue.	C.S.O. 8351/11.
133	emigrants.	C.S.O. 8351/11.
	(footnote 2)	C.S.O. 7679/11.
141	years.	C.O. to Im Thurn, no.91, 22 Aug. 1908.
151	died.	C.S.O. 2526/06.
156	1910.	C.S.O. 5868/08.
	persons.	C.S.O. 4719/10.
157	1909.	C.S.O. 7512/09.
	Company.	C.S.O. 5503/13.
193	result.	Im Thurn to C.O., no.29, 15 Feb. 1910.

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195	one. (footnote)	G.S.O. 1919/06; 2912/08. C.S.O. 950/08
198	overseers.	C.S.O. 5257/03.
199	New Hebrides. adaptable. declined.	C.S.O. 4955/04. C.S.O. 1033/06. Fiji to G.O., no.101, 27 Feb. 1913.
202	resources.	C.S.O. 4201/14.
252	respect.	The Colonial Secretary, Eyre Hutson, wrote: "The Co. never take any steps to inform the Im. Dept. of disciplinary steps taken against subordinates, nor express regret for these occurrences, until they are written to on that subject Mr Knox may not know but Mr Fenner and his Managers must know that the infliction of corporal punishment on indentured labour is a common practice among their overseers The Co. always resent any request that one of their officers be dismissed. They should do it without being asked and report the case for the Government's information Less of this high-flying nonsense [the Company's "good name" etc.] and a stricter supervision by their managers over their subordinates' treatment of labour would be more to the point." Sir Charles Major, the Acting-Governor, added: "The whole of the Coy.'s system makes concealment of these outrages and active obstruction to any outside steps for their exposure essential to the success of an overseer or manager." (C.S.O. 3435/12.)

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252	(footnote 3)	"I am further to remark that the Immigration Department have substantial grounds for the presumption that the convictions obtained for ill-treatment represent a small minority of the actual number of such cases which have occurred." (C.S. to C.S.R./Fiji, 29 Jul. 1912 - C.S.O. 3435/12.)
253	number.	C.S.O. 8134/12.
255	(footnote 2) improved.	C.S.O. 4371/04. Jackson to C.O., no.12, 31 Jan. 1903.
260	move. (quotation)	C.S.O. 344/07. C.S.O. 5171/08.
261	occurred. Company.	C.S.O. 3435/12. C.S.O. Outward 7740/12.
262	assault.	C.S.O. 4433/13.
263	(footnote 2) sort. improbable.	C.S.O. 4767/08. C.S.O. 5196/08. C.S.O. 1626/13.
266	Court.	C.S.O. 817/05.
267	this.	Agent-General Coates wrote in 1910: "I believe the remedy for excessive prosecution by employers to be largely in the hands of the magistrates, but from time to time, instances have been brought to the notice of His Excellency the Governor of excessive or improper penalties being awarded for minor breaches of the Ordinance which seem to denote that by some magistrates

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		views are held in regard to the position and liability of an indentured immigrant, that are not in accordance with the letter or the intention of the law." (C.O. to Im Thurn, no.163, 27 Aug. 1910). Im Thurn to C.O., no.277, 23 Dec. 1910.
267	wages.	C.O. to May, no.90, 4 May 1911.
268	done.	Memo. by McNeill, enc. to Fiji to C.O., no.445, 27 Oct. 1913.
	reasons.	C.S.O. 4371/04; Im Thurn to C.O., no.108, 15 Nov. 1904.
269	months.	C.O. to Sweet-Escott, no.68, 12 Mar. 1914; Sweet-Escott to C.O., no.262, 28 Jul. 1914.
270	too.	C.O. to Sweet-Escott, no.243, 18 Aug. 1914.
	Government.	C.S.O. 1626/13; 1710/13; 1711/13; 1712/13; 1834/13; C.S.O. Outward 2136/13.
271	proportionately.	C.S.O. 3721/06; 4466/06.
272	detail.	C.S.O. 950/08.
273	employers.	C.S.O. 5060/08.
	permitted.	C.S.O. 8281/13.
274	depot.	C.S.O. 2514/07.
275	Fiji (line 3)	C.S.O. 9712/13.
	India.	Im Thurn to C.O., no.136, 20 Oct. 1908.
283	change.	C.O. to Im Thurn, no.163, 27 Aug. 1910; Im Thurn to C.O., no.277, 23 Dec. 1910; C.O. to May, no.90, 4 May 1911;

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		May to C.O., no.125 and no.126, 6 Jul. 1911; C.O. to May, no.209, 21 Sep. 1911 and no.230, 18 Oct. 1911.
292	(quotation)	Protector to Bengal Govt., 22 Jun. 1912, enc. to C.O. to Sweet-Escott, no.339, 31 Dec. 1912.
	clauses.	C.O. to Sweet-Escott, no.339, 31 Dec. 1912.
295	of India.	C.S.O. 6793/14.
296	Company.	Fiji to C.O., 23 Sep. 1913.
298	it.	Fiji to C.O., no.493, 8 Dec. 1913.
305	copra. (footnote 1)	C.S.O. Outward 2889/13.
306	before.	C.S.O. 4466/06.
315	observed.	C.O. to Major, no.14, 9 Feb. 1909.
319	plantations.	C.S.O. 344/07.
321	inspectors.	C.O. to Major, no.85, 6 May 1909; C.O. to Im Thurn, no.123, 30 Jun. 1910; Im Thurn to C.O., no.185, 5 Aug. 1910.
335	Fiji.	C.O. to Major, no.95, 2 Jun. 1909; C.S.O. 5659/09.
338	(footnote 3)	In 1912, some Fijians asked that an Indian living among them and married to a Fijian be formally recognised as a Fijian. The Executive Council decided that "it was not competent for the Governor in Council to sanction the formal recognition of an Indian as a Fijian." It was feared that Indians might, in this way, secure control of Fijian land. (C.S.O. 3657/12.)

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344	(footnote 2)	Fiji to C.O., no.369, 23 Aug. 1913, and no.26, 19 Jan. 1914.
346	thousand).	C.O. to Sweet-Escott, no.243, 18 Aug. 1914.
356	killings.	C.S.O. 5544/08; 5579/08; 6139/08; 4478/18; 5742/18.
358	priests.	C.S.O. 9004/11.
360	advancement.	C.S.O. 2225/08.
361	(footnote 2)	C.S.O. 6529/13; 9730/13; 257/14; 295/17.
362	first.	C.S.O. 9323/11.
363	Muslims.	C.S.O. 613/16.
	there.	C.S.O. Outward 448/1063/17; 1130/1995/17; 1530/1995/17.
367	(footnote)	C.S.O. 9004/11.
373	way).	Fiji to C.O., no.93, 17 Sep. 1904.
379	grounds.	C.O. to May, no.91, 4 May 1911; May to C.O., no.125, 6 Jul. 1911; C.O. to May, no.209, 21 Sep. 1911.
381	Office.	Im Thurn to C.O., no.277, 23 Dec. 1910; C.O. to May, no.209, 21 Sep. 1911; May to C.O., no.125, 6 Jul. 1911; C.O. to Sweet-Escott, no.287, 29 Oct. 1912.
	colony.	Fiji to C.O., no.93, 17 Sep. 1904.
382	oversight.	C.O. to Im Thurn, 17 Aug. 1905; C.S.O. 4031/07; May to C.O., no.125, 6 Jul. 1911.
386	morning.	C.S.O. 4646/06.

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401	application.	C.S.O. 897/04.
405	companies.	C.S.O. 5009/19.
406	come.	C.S.O. 8351/11; C.S.O. Outward 1674/12; Rodwell to C.O., no.220, 24 Oct. 1919.
407	required.	C.S.O. 1759/12.
411	occupied.	C.S.O. 888/14.
	Fijians.	C.S.O. 3680/14.
412	acres).	C.S.O. 6561/10; 9851/13.
421	subjects.	C.S.O. 4548/08.
	immigrants.	C.S.O. 3686/11.
	Punjabis.	C.S.O. 439/12.
422	(quotation)	C.S.O. 8533/14.
423	day.	C.S.O. 905/15.
424	Argentine."	C.S.O. 663/12.
429	land.	C.S.O. 439/12.
	(footnote 2)	C.S.O. 2117/09.
430	wages.	C.S.O. 3686/11.
432	(footnote)	C.S.O. 445/09.
433	lines.	C.S.O. 1819/08.
	desist.	C.S.O. 6937/10.
442	Council.	C.S.O. 5911/10; 9004/11; 1626/13; 1810/13; 10385/14.
443	others.	C.S.O. 5911/10.
	gentlemen!	C.S.O. 4608/10.

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443	proposed.	C.S.O. 4365/15; 5884/15.
444	move).	C.S.O. 8637/15; 8659/15.
	(footnote)	C.S.O. 5906/16; C.S.O. Outward 2551/16.
445	way.)	Hutson wrote: "Mr Manilal's national status gives you the reply to be made to the petition even if you considered him not otherwise eligible." (C.S.O. 9263/16.)
	inadequaté.	Sweet-Escott to C.O., no.370, 20 Dec. 1916.
446	Fiji).	C.S.O. 6529/13.
448	(footnote 3)	Sweet-Escott to C.O., no.344, 16 Dec. 1912.
452	(footnote 1)	C.S.O. 3474/14.
	assistance.	C.S.O. 295/17.
456	amicably.	C.S.O. 4025/19; 4056/19; 5009/19; Rodwell to C.O., no.211a, 4 Oct. 1919.
459	elsewhere.	C.S.O. 8779/13; 8865/15.
463	(footnote 1)	C.O. to Sweet-Escott, no.26, 27 Jan. 1915; Sweet-Escott to C.O., no.38, 27 Jan. 1915 and no.55, 16 Feb. 1915.
	resort.	C.S.O. 158/15.
	India.	C.S.O. 6793/14.
464	(footnote 2)	C.S.O. 7121/15; 8358a/15.
	(footnote 3)	Sweet-Escott to C.O., no.430, 7 Dec. 1914.

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464	made.	C.S.O. 3733/15; Fiji to C.O., no.137, 30 Apr. 1915.
465	(footnote 1)	C.S.O. 7578/15.
470	Natal.	C.S.O. 10485/15.
471	(footnote 1) fair.	C.S.O. 8546/15. C.S.O. 5319/17. Also, in a statutory declaration in Sydney, Andrews stated: "A high official in Fiji wrote to me a confidential letter telling me he regarded it as fair and that he had never heard its fairness disputed." (Sweet-Escott to C.O., no.303, 15 Aug. 1918.) In this declaration, Andrews painted an even darker picture of the moral conditions in the lines than in his published reports.
473	Fiji. (footnote 2)	Sweet-Escott to C.O., no.252, 5 Sep. 1916; C.S.O. 4040/15. C.S.O. 1545/17.
474	overseers.	I.O. to C.O., 4 Oct. 1917, enc. to C.O. to Sweet-Escott, no.109, 5 Jun. 1918.
475	immoral).	C.O. to Sweet-Escott, no.121, 10 May 1917.
476	year.	C.S.O. 404/17; 1545/17.
479	(footnote 2)	C.S.O. 6623/16.
481	(footnote 2) farmers.	Sweet-Escott to C.O., no.383, 5 Dec. 1917, and no.399, 11 Dec. 1917. Sweet-Escott to C.O., no.10, 4 Jan. 1918, and no.30, 1 Feb. 1918.

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483	it.	Sweet-Escott to C.O., no.56, 27 Feb. 1918.
	statements.	C.S.O. 5319/17.
484	detail.	I.O. to C.O., 4 Oct. 1917, enc. to C.O. to Sweet-Escott, no.109, 5 Jun. 1918.
	(footnote 1)	Governor Rodwell wrote: "I am bound to say that, considering her sex and her missionary connections (both of which are conducive to extremism) Miss Garnham's report appears to me to be both temperate and reasonable." (C.S.O. 1157/19.)
485	1917).	Rodwell wrote: "It seems possible that it might be well worth the while of employers generally to face the inconvenience which would be involved by the cancellation of all indentures at the end of the year for the sake of the good effect which such a decision might be calculated to produce As to the adjustment of the sex ratio, the appointment of woman doctors and nurses, and the provision of education, it ought to be possible, I think, for this Government to put forward schemes which, whatever their prospects of success may be, will at any rate have the appearance on paper of being workable, and will afford evidence of a policy of reform." (C.S.O. 1157/19.)
486	(second quotation)	C.S.O. 5940/19.

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487	stagnation.	Rodwell wrote that, if further immigrants could not be obtained from India (even immigrants free of any liability to work) "this Colony, which, with its great natural resources, might in proportion to its size become one of the richest assets of the Empire, will be faced with an indefinite prospect of retarded development, political discontent, and administrative retrogression." (Rodwell to C.O., no. 186, 14 Aug. 1919.)
488	freed.	C.S.O. 6529/19; 6661/19; 7597/19.
