

Indian Immigration 1838-1917

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Introduction.

For over three quarters of a century, East Indians workers went from the Indian sub-continent to the West Indian colonies and other parts of the world. This was done presumably to fill the void created by the mass exodus of the ex-slaves from the plantations following the abolition of slavery. The plantation owners wanted to continue sugar production which was very profitable. Without cheap and reliable labor, that the Indians provided, the production of sugar would have been too costly. This mass departure began in 1838 and ended in 1917. Plantation owners tricked Indians into signing five year contracts to work on the sugar estates, promising them an easier, better, and an enhanced lifestyle compared to their current standard of living. With false hopes in their heads, the Indians migrated thinking there was a better life in store for them; however they were being lied to and deceived.

Why the Indians?

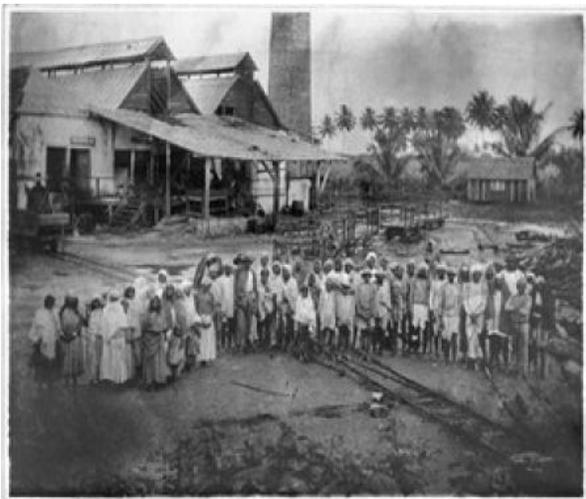
Many Indians felt the necessity to travel abroad to work due to the current economical situation of that time. The British colonization in India strangled the local economy causing mass unemployment. A famous civil war, the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857-1858 (May 10, 1857-June 20, 1858) and the Agra Famine of 1837-1838 gave Indians a hope that a better life was in store for them else where. The Agra famine affected an area of 25,000 square miles and a population of 8 million people. By the end of 1838, approximately 800,000 people died of starvation. The Sepoy Mutiny was known as India first war of Independence which started by Indian soldiers (Sepoys) in the British army which was not successful. The area effected in India were Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi. In addition, the British used skillful tactics to recruit laborers. The British hired fellow Indians with low moral values, who came to be know Arkatis to encourage their own people to sign 5 year contracts.

Indians Were Not the Only Immigrants in the West Indies.

Prior to the arrival of the Indians other groups were encouraged to travel to the West Indies to work on sugar plantations. However, the work was too sever to handle and the work was left inadequate. The Indians provided reliable cheap labor that other racial groups could not provide.

<u>Immigrations</u>	<u>Time Period</u>	<u>Arrived</u>
Portuguese	1835-1882	30,685
West Indians (Those Already Present on the Land)	1835-1928	42,512
Africans	1838-1865	13,355
Chinese	1853-1912	14,189

Contract.



The Indians were easy prey to the requirers who used different tactics in getting them to sign a five year contract to work in the sugar cane fields. The contract is as follows:

1. The natives agree to precede to the Island, to work as laborers there, upon a sugar estate, the property of and to remain there, if required, for the time of five years.
2. The passage of the natives shall be paid by who shall also provide a passage again to this country, at the end of five years, for each native who may then wish to return; but if any individual, from any cause, shall be discharged or leave the employment of before the expiration of five years, such individual shall have no claim on him for a passage.
3. The pay of the natives shall be fixed at the rate of five rupees per man for each man. The labor requires from them will be that of digging holes, weeding canes, working in the sugar- house, repairing roads and bridges, or otherwise making themselves useful, according to their ability, as may order them; the quantity of daily



labor required from each to be fixed by the manager of the property; the pay of one sirdhar .

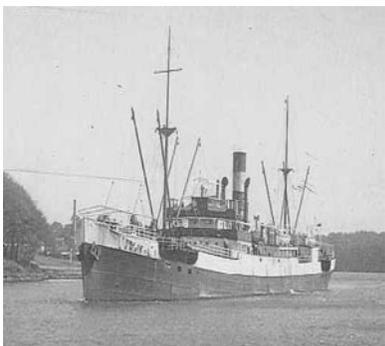
4. As must be responsible to government that the natives shall not be a burden to the colony, in the event of their being

discharged or leaving their employments, one rupee per month shall be retained from the pay of each individual, until there shall be a sufficient sum to provide a passage for each to Calcutta; should no such contingency take place, the money shall be restored at the end of five years. 5. In addition to the pay as above fixed, food and clothing shall be supplied to each as follows—two pounds of rice, two pounds of split peas, two ounces of salt, and some oil and tamarind, daily; and annually for each, clothing as follows; two dhotis, two blankets, one jacket, and one cap.

6. Each individual shall receive six months pay in advance, for which he shall give an acknowledgement here; their pay to commence from the date of their going on board the ship.

7. The nature of this agreement (which shall be registered at the police) is such that each native is individually responsible for the observance of its conditions by every one whose mark it bears; and it is further agreed, that while in hospital, from sickness or any other cause, the pay is stopped during such time.

The First Voyage.



There journey began in Calcutta after taking a physical and filling a form with the date, their name, address, caste, father's and mother's name, any physical marks, height, and the name of their ship. The first journey took place on May 5, 1838 on the ships Whitby and Hesperus carrying 396 Indians to Guyana, South America. On this voyage, 18 Indians died by either harsh treatment, malnutrition, or from the long sea



voyage that took about 3 to 4 months to arrive to Guyana. The survivors were sent to different estates such as

The Whitby

Albion, Portmourent, Skeldon, Vreedenhoop, Devonshire Castle, Leonora, Enmore, etc... to work on the sugar plantations. In many cases, family members were separated from each other due to working in different estates. These

Hesperus

family members would have to wait until their 5 year contract was over to see each other.

Life on the Plantation.

Life wasn't as easy as expected. They were provided with living quarters and medical facilities in the event of sickness. They had 12 hour working days for five days .These conditions were stated in the contract. They had to walk to their work place which is sometimes miles away from their living quarters. At times, transportation was provided for them such as trucks and trains. They were paid \$1.20 a week for their labor, which is equivalent to 2 cents per hour. These Indians had to carry a pass with them at all times. This pass allowed police to arrest any laborer who was two miles or more from their plantation without the permission of their owner.

Statistical Analysis.

A total of nearly 1.2 million Indians traveled to different parts of the world during this period. Immigration occurred from 1838-1917. 95% of the emigrants were from Northern India and 5% from South India. They came from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Madras, Punjab, Orissa, Awadh, and a few other areas. For the 80 years (1838-1917) 487,634 Indians traveled to the West Indies. During this period, 63,538

returned to India. However, hundred migrated back after spending a short time in India.

Diagram 1: *Emigration Occurred to Each Country during the Following Time Periods*

Taken From: (Swami Aksharananda: Hinduism in Guyana: A study in traditions of worship. PhD Thesis, 1993)

<u><i>Colony (Country)</i></u>	<u><i>Time Period</i></u>
Mauritius	1834-1912
Guyana	1838-1917
Natal, South Africa	1860-1911
Trinidad	1845-1917
Reunion	1829-1924
Fiji	1879-1916
Guadeloupe	1854-1885
Kenya	1895-1901
Jamaica	1854-1885
Suriname	1873-1916
Martinique	1854-1889
Seychelles	1899-1916
St. Lucia	1858-1895
Grenada	1856-1885
St. Vincent	1861-1880

Diagram 2: *Total Emigrants that Went to Work on Sugar Plantations in the West Indies*

Taken From: (Dwarka Nath: A History of Indians in British Guiana. 1970)

<u><i>Country in the West Indies</i></u>	<u><i>Total Emigrants</i></u>
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Guyana	238,909
Trinidad	143,939
Jamaica	37,027
St. Vincent	2,472
Grenada	3,200
Belize	3,000
St. Lucia	4,354
Suriname	34,304
St. Croix	321
Martinique	25,509
Guadeloupe	42,326
St. Kitts	337
French Guiana	8,500

Diagram 3: *Total Emigrant that Went to Work on Sugar Plantations to Other Parts of the World*

Taken From: (Swami Aksharananda: Hinduism in Guyana: A study in traditions of worship. PhD Thesis, 1993)

<u>Other Countries</u>	<u>Total Emigrants</u>
South Africa	152,184
Kenya and Uganda	32,000
Reunion	26,507
Seychelles	6,315
Fiji	60,969
Mauritius	453,063

Diagram 4: *The Various Countries with the Division of Men, Women, and Children during 1842-1870*

Taken From: Swami Aksharananda: Hinduism in Guyana: A study in traditions of worship. PhD Thesis, 1993).

<u>Country</u>	<u>Adult Males</u>	<u>Adult Females</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Percent of Children</u>	<u>Total</u>
Mauritius	243,853	63,459	44,089	12.54	351,401
Guyana	53,323	16,983	9,385	11.77	79,691
Trinidad	28,030	9,280	5,209	12.25	42,519
Jamaica	10,022	3,233	1,914	12.61	15,169
Natal	4,116	1,463	869	13.47	6,448
St. Vincent	1,008	395	234	14.29	1,637
St. Lucia	1,333	401	209	10.75	1,943
St. Croix	244	60	17	5.29	321
Grenada	1,810	626	323	11.70	2,759
St. Kitts	192	113	56	15.51	361
Reunion	10,751	2,939	1,315	8.76	15,005
Guadeloupe	5,813	2,331	738	8.30	8,882
Martinique	3,667	1,336	520	9.41	5,523
French Guiana	1,320	421	165	8.65	1,906
Total:	365,482	103,040	65,043	12.19	533,565

Diagram 5: *The Areas in India that Laborers were taken to and their Destination during 1842-1871*

Taken From: Swami Aksharananda: Hinduism in Guyana: A study in traditions of worship. PhD Thesis, 1993).

<u>Destinati on</u>	<u>Orissa</u>	<u>Wester n</u>	<u>Beng al</u>	<u>Easte rn</u>	<u>Biha r</u>	<u>North Western Punjab and Awadha</u>	<u>Other s</u>	<u>Tota l</u>
Guyana	719	14,028	2,116	238	24,681	26,681	1,164	68,547
Trinidad	378	8,396	1,304	176	16,027	16,02	853	38,413
Jamaica	147	3,214	341	106	4,654	4,654	377	13,335
W.I Colonies	28	1,461	266	46	2,076	2,076	100	6,382
Mauritius	3,116	33,131	8,951	1,118	47,286	47,286	3,619	205,377
Natal	2	216	24	-	370	370	16	984
Reunion	19	1,667	171	29	4,469	4,469	262	10,644
Total	4,409	62,113	13,224	1,713	155,399	100,433	6,391	343,782
Percent	1.28%	18.08%	3.85%	0.49%	45.22%	29.22%	1.86%	100%

Culture and Tradition.

Despite the hardships the Indians were forced with, they had the ability to overcome those difficulties due to their cultural values. They had the vigor, to not only complete their contract, but also maintain and preserve their culture, values, and heritage. Because of the traditions they upheld, the same traditions and values were taught to the generations that came after and they are still being taught up to this day. They were taught to sing songs, study the religious scriptures, and recite mantras in traditional languages such as Sanskrit, Hindi, Tamil, and Urdu, play Indian instruments such as the Harmonium, Tabla, Dholak, Mangleera, Dantaal, etc... and study classical dance styles such as Bharathnatyam, Kuchipudi, and Kathak. This rich culture was only preserved due to our fore-parents who kept their culture alive despite their struggles and difficulties in life.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, immigrants from all over the world were encouraged to work on the sugar estates in the West Indies and many parts of Africa. However, only the Indians were proven to provide reliable and cheap labor which allowed plantation owners to make profitable ventures. Despite, the many difficulties and hardships that the Indians faced, they all remained loyal and faithful to their culture, values, beliefs, and traditions. Due to their unshaken faith, generations to follow were able to learn their culture and pass on these same traditions to future generations.