The Currents of Restless Toil: Colonial Rule and Indian Indentured Labor in Trinidad and Fiji

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The study of Indian indentured servitude in the British Empire has largely been confined to the histories of slavery or free labor. Few scholars have connected indenture to larger processes in the British Empire. This dissertation examines the global nature of Indian indenture to find how trends in colonial power were inflected in the relationship between the state and the indentured worker. This dissertation uses the colonial experience in South Asia as a basis for its global history. It contends that the history of the colonial rule of law in the subcontinent was of deep importance to the mechanisms of indenture.

By looking at archival records from the United Kingdom, Trinidad, Fiji, and elsewhere, this dissertation finds that officials in the indenture colonies were attempting to transform indebted Indian peasants into indentured workers. This process was inflected by the experience of colonial rule elsewhere. At first, this meant the implementation of ideas tied to imperial liberalism.

Following the challenges to British colonialism in the mid-nineteenth century, the indenture colonies mirrored a wider movement towards conservative governance. The ways in which the colonial state attempted to control and manipulate workers underwent a dramatic shift. In the indenture colony, colonial power exerted both authoritarian and paternalist tendencies. This dissertation uses the governorships of Arthur Hamilton-Gordon in Trinidad and Fiji to explore this shift.

This dissertation makes its argument by focusing on the indenture colonies of Trinidad
and Fiji. In doing so, it moves beyond the model of studying indenture that has looked at the British Empire as a whole, or otherwise in specific colonies or sub-regions. Using Trinidad and Fiji allows for a deep understanding of continuity and change. For example, Trinidad can be used to examine indenture’s beginnings, as the colony began to import Indian indentured labor in 1842, while Fiji can be used to understand late indenture. Furthermore, colonial officials, ideas of authority, capital, labor, and goods were always circulating throughout this global empire. The study of Trinidad and Fiji allows for a critical understanding of such exchanges and this dissertation uses both to explore bureaucratic offices, law, financial systems, governance, protest, medicine and health, and global agitation in Indian indenture.

“The Currents of Restless Toil” is an in-depth study into the nature of colonial governance in the indenture colonies of Trinidad and Fiji. It explores the nuances of colonial power, providing a window into the theory and practice that shaped the restless toil of Indians across the world.
## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... ii  
List of Abbreviations ........................................................................................................ iv  
List of Illustrations ............................................................................................................ v  
Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1  
Chapter One *Groundwork* .............................................................................................. 38  
Chapter Two *All that’s Fit to Punish* ............................................................................. 60  
Chapter Three *Money Sent Home* ................................................................................ 86  
Chapter Four *Settling the Land* ................................................................................... 109  
Chapter Five *Changes: Arthur Hamilton-Gordon in Trinidad* ..................................... 134  
Chapter Six *On to Fiji* .................................................................................................. 163  
Chapter Seven *In the Lockup* ......................................................................................... 182  
Chapter Eight *Protest, Response, Violence* ................................................................. 204  
Chapter Nine *Controlling the Infected* ......................................................................... 237  
Chapter Ten *Global Movements* .................................................................................. 264  
Conclusion *The Many Mahabirs* ................................................................................... 286  
Bibliography ....................................................................................................................... 292
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List of Abbreviations

BFASS: British Foreign Anti-Slavery Society
CDA: Contagious Diseases Acts
CO: The Colonial Office
CSO: Colonial Secretary’s Office
EIC: The East India Company
INC: The Indian National Congress
MP: Minute Paper
NAF: The National Archives of Fiji
NATT: The National Archives of Trinidad & Tobago
NYPL: The New York Public Library
PMB: Pacific Manuscripts Bureau
PP: Parliamentary Paper
TNA: The National Archives of the United Kingdom
List of Illustrations

Figures

Fig. 1: Workers gathered around the pay table at the Perseverance Estate in Trinidad .......86
Fig. 2: People at work in a cane field during the period of harvesting ..........................109
Fig. 3: Newspaper clipping of Arthur Hamilton-Gordon as Governor of Fiji .....................163
Fig. 4: Certificate of Industrial Residence of Summir .......................................................182
Fig. 5: Workers raising a tazia during the Hosay festival on St. Augustine Estate in Trinidad, ca. 1891 ..................................................................................................................204
Fig. 6: Indian immigrants employed at Makogai Leper Asylum, Fiji ..............................237

Tables

Table 1: Remittance Data for Fiji and Trinidad, 1882–1918 .................................................104
Introduction

To cross an ocean, to leave behind a home to labor far from the comforts of home, to become a migrant—all this required a measure of fortitude in the face of loneliness and exile. And yet, when the migrant landed upon the new shore, life once again began anew. The old world drifted into memory. The new world occupied all attention.

It was easy to forget the life left behind. On July 25, 1908, E.C. Hughes, the Chief Clerk of the Protector of Immigrants in Trinidad, sent a letter to the Inspector of Immigrants of the colony’s Southern Division asking about an Indian immigrant named Buxi. Buxi, indentured to the Annandale Estate in Erin, had arrived in Trinidad on the ship Avon on January 12, 1903. His relatives in India had not heard from him since his departure. Curious about his fate, they asked the Emigration agent in Calcutta to ask the authorities in Trinidad “whether he is alive and well.”¹

The Inspector of Immigrants asked the manager of the Annandale Estate of any news of Buxi, insisting, “His people are anxious to hear of or from him.”² The Manager found Buxi laboring on the Annandale property. Though Buxi’s indenture had expired the previous January, he was still working on the Annandale Estate and was “quite well.” And as for a message for his worried family? The manager wrote, “He begs to convey his ‘salaam’ to his relatives.”³

Buxi’s experience was one repeated by many others. They were those who left India, crossed oceans, and took great measures to adjust to a new life so far from home. Buxi was an

¹ National Archives of Trinidad & Tobago (hereafter NATT) Letters from India: No. 393a/1908, Hughes to Gibbon, 25 July 1908.
² NATT Letters from India: Gibbon to Manager of Annandale, 29 July 1908, enclosure in Ibid.
³ NATT Letters from India: Manager of Annandale to Gibbon, 30 July 1908, enclosure in No. 393a/1908.
indentured Indian immigrant to Trinidad. He was one of many Indian immigrants sent to labor under indenture contracts across the British Empire.

The history of coerced labor on plantations across the British Empire did not end with the abolition of slavery in 1834. In fact, it took only four years following slavery’s end for colonial administrators and plantation owners to devise a system for the transportation of contracted Indian laborers to Mauritius and the West Indies.

The quick transition between emancipation and indenture was partly due to successful lobbying in London by the Empire’s sugar planters. The planters desired a cheap, guaranteed, and pliant labor force as the open labor market was too risky for their tastes. Their arguments were well received in London due to the sheer size and profitability of the sugar industry. Only years before, the Emancipation Act of 1833 had been editorialized in newspapers along as an advantage because free labor could infuse millions of pounds of profit into the sugar islands. Now the pendulum swung the other way.

Sugar production required ample working hands. Even with the technological changes in sugar production that occurred in the nineteenth century with respect to grinding capacity, increased use of machinery, and changes in transportation, sugar production still required ample hands to plant, weed, harvest, transport, press, boil, and dehydrate sugar cane. The indenture system was a boon for the industry.

Indenture provided a source of labor for colonies in the British Empire for almost eighty years. Men, women, and children left their homes in India on ships bound for Trinidad, British Guiana, Jamaica, Mauritius, Natal, East Africa, and Fiji, among other colonies. Other workers, in

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more informal labor migrations, went to Malaya, Burma, Ceylon, and other parts of Southeast Asia. By the time of its abolition in 1917 amidst the guns of World War I and the cries of Indian nationalist agitation, almost two million Indians had been recast as coolies or *girmaiyas* and sent to labor on plantations around the globe.7

Indenture was not new to the British Empire. Prior to the introduction of African chattel slavery, indenture was an important part of the workforce in the British Americas. In the seventeenth century, for example, half of the immigrants to the North American colonies were indentured servants, redemptioners, or convicts.8 As we will see in a later chapter, the connection between seventeenth and eighteenth-century indenture and its nineteenth-century Indian variety hinged upon slavery and emancipation.

The Indians under indenture contract labored in ceaselessly under conditions that many formerly indentured servants described as *narak*—hell.9 This was a sentiment often reflected by outside observers. Hilda Mary Steadman, born in Australia and married to a Methodist minister,  

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7 Indian indentured laborers often referred to themselves as *girmaiyas*. This was a term derived from the English word for “agreement”—a direct reference to the contract under which they labored. The British referred to the laborers as “coolies,” a term used for Indians throughout the indentured world. With regard to the number of migrants, Kingsley Davis estimated that there were 30.2 million migrants and 23.9 million who returned back to India, leaving a net migration of 6.3 million. Another estimate put the number at 9.0 million migrants. These estimates included migration within Asia (to Sri Lanka, Burma, or Malaysia, for example). The generally accepted number for Indian migration out of Asia to colonies in the British Empire hovers around 1.5 million. See Dirk Hoerder, “The Asian Contract Labor System (1830s to 1920s) and Transpacific Migration,” in *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 366–405.


9 This was a viewpoint that was seen in most personal accounts of life under indenture. Farzana Gounder, for example, used a sociolinguistic analysis to determine to see how indentured laborers took their own subjectivity and performed it within a “master narrative.” One such master narrative was how indentured life was *narak*. See, for example, Farzana Gounder, *Indentured Identities: Resistance and Accommodation in Plantation-Era Fiji* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), chap. 9.
was active in missionary work with the Indian community in Fiji. She wrote in her recollections on Indian indenture that it “was really slavery and a disgrace to a British Colony.”

Indenture was more than the hellacious labor conducted on islands far from home. It was always a demonstration of the nature of colonial rule. From its inception to its conclusion, Indian indenture was a process of turning mainly rural peasants from India into indentured laborers. If we were to imagine an Indian indentured immigrant as arriving on the *Fatel Razack*—the first boat carrying the indentured to Trinidad—and toiling on the sugar fields until 1917, we would see that his experience of indenture changed as the Empire wrestled with how to turn this peasant from India into a laborer on sugar plantations far from the Raj.

It may go without saying that Indian indenture was not an isolated project of empire—it was never as simple taking a laborer from one colony, placing him under contract, and shipping him off to an island. Nor was indenture a system dependent on the whims of various imperial administrators in London or in colonial capitals. Instead, indenture was always contingent upon the global apparatus of empire. The currents of colonial rule ensured that what happened in one part of the globe was reflected in Indian indenture.

But what does this type of global history look like in practice? It is the contention of this dissertation that the colonial experience in South Asia was of deep importance to the mechanisms of indenture throughout the British Empire. This kind of global history is an extension of the provincialization of Europe as a model for the Empire and the World. Rather

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than seeing the basis for ideas of rule as central to London, we must deeply interrogate the colonial experience in South Asia to see the basis for ideologies of rule in Indian indenture.

To make this point clearer, let us turn to the protagonist of this dissertation. This dissertation will try to follow an indentured migrant from the beginning to end of indenture. Let us, for the sake of clarity, call this indentured migrant Mahabir—a common name among Indians in the indenture colonies. By following Mahabir through the history of indenture, we will find that his labor upon the sugar fields of faraway colonies was in fact dependent on the currents of global empire.

But who was Mahabir? Where did he come from? What can we find out about him and his brethren on these plantations? For this, we can put our ideas of a South Asian-centric global history into action. Let us turn towards South Asia. Here—and with some degree of accuracy—we can tabulate caste statistics of Indian indentured servants.

For the most part, those who immigrated to the indenture colonies came from North India, initially from the districts of Bihar, then from the eastern regions of the United Provinces. For example, between 1880 and 1889, 36,505 Indians emigrated as indentured laborers to British Guiana. Of these, the majority (17,505) was from modern-day Uttar Pradesh, with a remaining plurality from Awadh, Bengal, and Bihar (note that these statistics reflect recruitment rather than embarkation—attrition between recruitment and departure meant that more laborers were recruited than those who boarded the ships). During the same period in Trinidad, 23,902 emigrated with a similar regional breakdown: 11,385 from Uttar Pradesh, and a remaining

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plurality from Bengal and Bihar.\textsuperscript{13} In Fiji, the United Provinces provided 80 percent of the immigrants, with Bihar and Bengal providing 13 percent.\textsuperscript{14}

When determining caste origins, K.O. Laurence, for example, based his analysis upon a random sample survey of Indians who arrived in British Guiana between 1865 and 1917 conducted by R.T. Smith. From the Smith survey, we may find that of the 8,979 surveyed (7,507 Hindus, 1,465 Muslims, and 7 Christians), 2,241—nearly 25 percent—were of “menial and labouring castes.” Of these “menial and labouring castes” the majority were Chamar (1,220), Kahar (343), and Pasi (225), with the remainder coming from a variety of \textit{jatis}.\textsuperscript{15} A further plurality came from those labeled “Subra Varna (cultivator castes)”: 1505 (16.8 percent); Grazier castes came in at 1,216 (13.6 percent); and artisans at 778 (8.7 percent). Brahmans (identified as “Brahman, Bunihar, Gaur, and Gosai”) made up only 1.8 percent of those surveyed—165 individuals.

What are we to discern from this information? We can surmise that the majority of the indentured servants coming from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to Guyana were Hindu—approximately 84.7 percent of emigrants, per Laurence’s data. 15.2 percent were Muslim and 0.1 percent Christian.\textsuperscript{16} Of those who identified with a caste, a plurality—but by no means a majority—came from low caste laboring backgrounds. According to the Calcutta Immigration Register, which recorded people into four groups: High Castes, Low Castes, Artisans, and Agriculturalists, out of the 143,920 recorded in 1874-5 and 1879-1917, 33.84 percent were of


\textsuperscript{14} Lal, “The Odyssey of Indenture: Fragmentation and Reconstitution in the Indian Diaspora,” 170.

\textsuperscript{15} Laurence, \textit{A Question of Labour}, 112–14.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 110.
“low caste” background. 11.84 percent were Brahman and high caste, 31.38 percent were agriculturalist, and 7.63 percent were artisan.\(^\text{17}\)

These statistics seem to be typical amongst other sites of indentured labor. In Fiji, for example, of the 60,537 indentured workers in 1919, 85.3 percent were Hindus, 14.6 percent Muslims, and 0.1 percent Christians. The Hindus were of a variety of caste backgrounds: of the workers who boarded ships in Calcutta, 16.1 percent were Brahmans or other “high castes,” 31.1 percent were of the agricultural castes, 6.7 percent were of the artisan castes, and 31.2 percent of the “low castes.”\(^\text{18}\) For the most part, the classification of indentured workers as Brahmans/high caste, agricultural, artisan, and “low caste,” seems to be a consistent feature of Immigration Registers.

For comparative purposes, let us briefly examine another site of indenture. From the limited data available on Mauritius, we may find that the 275 men and women on the “Belle Mare” estate in Flacq identified with nearly 49 different sub-castes and castes.\(^\text{19}\) Other data show that, of the migrants to Mauritius from Calcutta (year unknown), 338 were Chamar, 146 Rajput, and 113 Brahman.\(^\text{20}\) In a data-driven analytical social history of ship data for immigration to Natal (South Africa) from 1860–1911, Surendra Bhana found that of the 152,184 immigrants surveyed, 60,000 were from Madras, with the remaining number from North India. This is consistent with the migration history inside indenture in that many immigrants were recruited from both North India and from the Madras area. However, most the immigrants to Natal came

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 111.


\(^{19}\) Richard Blair Allen, Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Laborers in Colonial Mauritius (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 166.

from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Most of these were immigrants from the agricultural castes as well.  

21

The available statistics thus show a remarkable consistency of caste experience in indenture. We can say, with some confidence, that most laborers in indenture came from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. A plurality, but by no means a majority, were what the Immigration Register dubbed “low caste.” A sizeable (if equal) amount came from the agricultural castes, and a minority was from the high castes and artisan castes. Put bluntly, these were poor peasants.

This information raises several questions: why Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar? Why the agricultural castes? Why was a peasantry from North India migrating to work as indentured servants in another part of the British Empire? The answers to such questions come from land tenure reform and the subsequent problem of peasant debt. Colonial policy in the British Raj would create problems that would later reverberate from shore to shore in the British Empire.

*The Permanent Settlement and Indebted Peasants*

In 1781, Lord Cornwallis was handed a painful defeat by French and American forces at the Battle of Yorktown. The results of the battle eventually led to the demise of the British campaign and the end of the American War of Independence. Cornwallis’ career did not end with the American War, however. By January 1782, Cornwallis arrived back in Britain. By 1786, he was named the Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief of the East India Company (EIC) in India. He proved to have learned from his past military failures and achieved an impressive victory over Tipu Sultan in the Third Anglo-Mysore War. However, he also focused his eyes

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beyond the horizons of military prowess and onto the larger questions of taxation and land reform. In 1793, he established the Bengal Permanent Settlement.\(^\text{22}\)

It is worth remembering that when Cornwallis came to the EIC, he brought with him a new set of assumptions about rule and authority in colonial governance. The British still acutely felt the sting from the loss of the Thirteen Colonies in North America. This loss would not be repeated. In the shift to from a focus on British North America to EIC holdings in South Asia in the years following the American War, the British determined that they would not repeat the same mistakes of the past. India would not be a settler colony. Instead, they would rule with an idea that disobedience in any part of the British Empire was a threat to the whole. Cornwallis brought to South Asia a new emphasis on authority and force. South Asia was to be ruled with a firm hand.\(^\text{23}\)

With this background in mind, one of the first developments in this new world occurred in the reformation of land tenure policy. This was known as the Permanent Settlement.\(^\text{24}\) As described by Ranajit Guha in his *Rule of Property for Bengal*, the first inclinations towards


reformulating land tenure through a Permanent Settlement in Bengal began in the 1770s with the ideas of Alexander Dow.\textsuperscript{25} Dow had been influenced by theoreticians known as physiocrats. The physiocrats, exemplified by the French economist François Quesnay, believed land to be the source of all wealth and that the value of land was based on agricultural production. Furthermore, they believed that stable ownership of land yielded maximal revenue. If land changed hands too frequently, agricultural improvement could decline, thereby decreasing the land revenue the state could collect. Dow designed a revenue-generating apparatus for the EIC with these ideas in mind.

He believed that the East India Company could create a market for landlords (the zamīndār class) to purchase permanent titles to land parcels. Permanent titles meant that land could be bequeathed to and divided by male heirs. Furthermore, rents (land-value taxes) were to be fixed values set by the EIC. The Permanent Settlement set a fixed amount of tax for each estate. This tax would remain the same in perpetuity. Since each zamīndār was able to alienate proprietary title, this also meant that the fixed-revenue obligation could also be alienated.

Henry Pattullo, another EIC official and author of \textit{An Essay upon the Cultivation of the Lands, and Improvements of the Revenues, of Bengal}, seconded the idea of the importance of a landowning class.\textsuperscript{26} To Pattullo, the EIC could build an agrarian economy only if they supported a landowning class. In fact, one of the most compelling parts of the Permanent Settlement scheme was that it alleviated British anxieties about having to manage agricultural production at the micro level. Those who owned the land parcels—the zamīndārs—would supervise agricultural production.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{25} See Guha, A Rule of Property for Bengal.
\textsuperscript{26} Henry Pattullo, \textit{An Essay upon the Cultivation of the Lands, and Improvements of the Revenues of Bengal}. (London: T. Becket and P.A. De Hondt, 1772).
\textsuperscript{27} Dirks, Castes of Mind, 112.
Philip Francis, a member of the Supreme Council of Bengal, later put such ideas together by developing a land-tenure system known as the Permanent Settlement. However, the remaining members of the Council elected not to move forward with his idea in 1776. Only in 1793 would Lord Cornwallis (who did not credit Francis) put the Permanent Settlement into action. After the Permanent Settlement was put into place, India saw vast changes in both land and society.

As Karl Marx put the British intervention in *Capital*:

> In Bengal they created a caricature of large-scale English landed estates; in the south-east they created a caricature of peasant smallholdings; in the north-west they did all they could to transform the Indian economic community with common property in the soil into a caricature of itself.\(^{28}\)

By the early nineteenth century, the ideas of the physiocrats were losing ground to those of the liberals and utilitarians. As Eric Stokes pointed out in his classic *The English Utilitarians in India*, figures such as Thomas Munro, John Malcolm, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and Charles Metcalfe began an assault on the Permanent Settlement after 1818.\(^{29}\) Their critiques led to the development of the Madras System of land tenure. This system, developed in detail by Thomas Munro (governor of Madras, 1814–1827) was based around the idea of a *ryotwari*.\(^{30}\)

*Ryotwari* was based around the idea that land revenue and taxation could be collected directly from the peasant-farmer, or *ryot*, rather than the landholding *zamīndār*.\(^{31}\) *Ryotwari* established private property at the cultivator level, with the state reserving proprietary rights to sale. This was quite similar to the principle behind English freehold property.\(^{32}\) As Nicholas Dirks argued, *ryotwari* played a major role in establishing the EIC as a bureaucratic state system.


\(^{29}\) Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*. See also Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*.

\(^{30}\) See Stein, *Thomas Munro: The Origins of the Colonial State and His Vision of Empire*.


It allowed the EIC to extend its power into the Indian countryside and introduce new forms of social and economic relations.33

Land tenure reform was not, in theory, filled with bad intentions. The British needed a landowning class to settle the land in perpetuity. Physiocratic ideals saw the stable ownership of land as a prerequisite to maximal land revenue. If land changed hands too often, it would not achieve its theoretical maximum in revenue. Colonial occupation, however, would take the logic of liberal activity to very illogical (and perhaps illiberal) heights.

The more the British tried to fix the land through settlement schemes, the more they created peasant itinerancy. As Gyan Prakash showed in his history of bonded labor in south Bihar, land tenure reform led to drastic changes for the peasant community. Prior to British rule, peasants (or kamias) had been dependent land cultivators working under what can be thought of as lords of village units. Permanent Settlement and other land tenure programs created a market for land parcels. These parcels were assessed at invariable rates by the British (unlike the Mughals, who used variable land taxation rates). Near the beginning of the Permanent Settlement, zamīndārs had yet to adjust to a system of maximizing income and were as such unable to meet assessment demands.34

In light of this, land parcels rapidly changed hands. Zamīndārs had to pay their fixed assessment in monthly installments and were to face imprisonment upon default. Those who could not afford their assessment sold their land. But by 1799, the British abolished imprisonment upon default and changed the laws to allow zamīndārs to take the property of

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33 Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 114.

those peasants and land cultivators who had defaulted in their upward payments to the zamīndār.\textsuperscript{35}

What came out of land tenure reform was a situation whereby the zamīndār became a maximal income-seeking landlord and the peasant into his tenant farmer. These peasants more or less abandoned the cultivation of subsistence crops for cash crops. Chief among these cash crops were opium poppy, rice, and sugarcane.\textsuperscript{36} In order to meet the revenue demands of their landlord, peasants had to try to maximize their own revenue through the cash crop economy. However, irrigation facilities also diminished as a result of zamīndār control. Zamīndārs were unwilling to risk capital on repairs for irrigation works, thus once again placing an undue burden upon crop production for peasants.\textsuperscript{37}

What was the result of land tenure reform? In the chaos that followed the establishment of the Permanent Settlement in 1793 with its changes in ownership and title, the peasant transformed from a dependent land cultivator into a debt-serf.\textsuperscript{38} The exploitative trio of the sarkār, sahukār, and zamīndār (state, money-lender, and landlord) seemed to work in tandem to establish the peasantry as permanently in a state of debt.\textsuperscript{39}

Even if peasants held small parcels of lands, they often were forced to sell their property to pay off debts. In fact, debt obligations were often the principle vehicle for land transfers. These debts were taken on not necessarily to increase productivity on small landholdings. Instead,

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 102.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 132–33.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 137.
peasants took out loans to either to pay rent to the zamīndār or maintain a minimum subsistence level during more lean times.\(^{40}\)

As could be expected, the cash crop economy did not insulate peasants from the cycle of debt. Even if peasants were raising cash crops such as jute, rice, opium poppy, or sugarcane, they still required cash advances from the village money-lender in order to have access to cash in the very lean times before the yearly harvest. These loans often came with usurious rates. For example, yearly rates of interest on these types of loans in Burdwan (modern-day West Bengal) ranged from 19 percent to 37 percent in the early-twentieth century. Even with these interest rates, there were often few barriers to obtaining credit.\(^{41}\)

Debt was an incredibly burdensome share of income for peasant proprietors. Attempts at estimating debt burdens did not occur until the early-twentieth century.\(^{42}\) However, according to one early-twentieth century source, debt was a fact of life for peasants in Eastern India (Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, and Assam). 77 percent of peasants in this study had some share of debt. Of that, 17 percent were nearly insolvent. Another 17 percent had a debt-burden equal to less than four years of income. The remaining 43 percent had a debt-burden equal to less than two years of income.\(^{43}\)

As previously stated, debt obligations shaped the yearly incomes and food budgets of rural peasants. Farmers required food loans during the dry months before the harvest. Declining agricultural improvement by the landowning classes meant that loans were also used for


\(^{41}\) Ibid., 144–48.

\(^{42}\) Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal since 1770*, 105.

irrigation, fertilizers, machinery, in addition to equipment, animals, and extra field hands. The system of debt and credit also had a large role in maintaining peasant life. Not only could credit replenish capital for expenses, but it also kept families alive during the lean months between harvests. This fact was born out by the fact that cash and in-kind borrowing tended to peak between April and the autumn and winter harvests. This meant that peasants were typically borrowing just before, during, and just after the monsoon.

Troubles with the monsoon could prove deadly for peasants. A late or smaller-than-expected monsoon could lead to crop failure and ballooning debt. What were peasant options in these situations? Anand Yang’s study of the Saran district in western Bihar is quite informative in this regard. Saran district, along with Shahabad district, contributed the largest number of Indians to indentured migration.

Indeed, one of the responses to the landscape of rural debt was to move away. Migration was often motivated by economic necessity. This meant that ballooning debt obligations, landlord relations, or ecological factors (or some combination thereof) often acted as “push” factors for peasants to seek out some relief from their indebted lives.

Some of these migrants went to adjoining districts, including Shahabad, Muzaffarpur, Patna, or Champaran in Bihar or Gorakhpur, Azimgarh, and Ballia in U.P. The majority of migrants internal to India, however, went to what was referred to as the “East.” Most often, this meant Calcutta, but it could also include destinations as far as Darjeeling, Jalpaigura,

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46 J.C. Jha, “The Indian Heritage in Trinidad,” in *Calcutta to Caroni and the Indian Diaspora*, ed. John Gaffar La Guerre and Ann Marie Bisessar, 3rd ed. (St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago: The University of the West Indies, School of Continuing Studies, 2005), 2.
Mymensingh, Rangpur, and Dinajpur (cities in modern-day Bangladesh and upper West Bengal).\textsuperscript{48} In the east, they often worked in the mills, factories, docks, coal mines, or upon the roads and railways of the districts and cities in the east. Migration offered former agricultural laborers a chance to work in unskilled position in factories at a much higher wage.\textsuperscript{49} Some too went to work harvesting crops in these eastern districts. Rangpur, for example, offered significantly higher wages in jute harvesting and retting.\textsuperscript{50}

Thus, we may conclude that some peasants stayed in their ancestral villages and hoped against hope that their tides would turn. These peasants lurched from one harvesting season to another, and felt the burden of debt grow upon their shoulders. Others, however left their districts to seek better fortunes. Some of these migrants sought relief from their debt by going to adjoining areas or districts. Still others went further, to the cities and districts of the east. And this migration made a huge difference in their lives. Remittances made by internal outmigrants from Saran, for example, totaled 15 lakhs rupees annually. In famine years, this amount rose to 34 lakhs.\textsuperscript{51}

Given this, it’s no surprise these debt-laden peasants were lured by recruiters to set sail across the \textit{kala pani} into the indenture colonies. In Trinidad, for example, an indentured laborer stood to make 25 cents, or 1 ½ shillings per day.\textsuperscript{52} This was almost triple the daily wage offered in any setting, factory or agricultural, in Eastern India. Migration to the indenture colonies offered a chance to be freed from the shackles of debt.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 192–93.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 196–97.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 197.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} The National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter TNA) Colonial Office (hereafter CO) 318/267: Murdoch to Hubert, 19 June 1872.
The peasants from Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh left India because of the cycle of debt created by colonial land tenure policy.\footnote{These were not the only reasons for leaving. Other reasons included natural disaster (particularly drought), war and strife, as well as personal reasons. See Lomarsh Roopnarine, *Indo-Caribbean Indenture: Resistance and Accommodation, 1838-1920* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2007), 17–25.} Those peasants, like Mahabir, were only able to escape their lot by shedding their identity as a peasant and becoming a laborer in a global colonial system. But, as this dissertation will demonstrate, the crisis sparked off by a debt calamity would not come to an easy conclusion. The issues surrounding turning peasants into laborers would confront colonial officials at every turn.

*Moving Beyond Slavery and Free Labor*

Before moving from peasants into laborers, it is worth considering the state of the literature on Indian indenture. Much of the scholarship on Indian indentured labor in the British Empire has consisted of a debate on whether indenture was closer to slavery or free labor. This was a question that occupied the attention of many observers in the nineteenth century as well. Before he became Prime Minister and disastrously managed the Great Irish Famine, Lord John Russell served as the Colonial Secretary under Lord Melbourne. It was in 1840 when Lord Russell uttered his oft-quoted words against indenture: “I am not prepared to encounter the responsibility of a measure which may lead to a dreadful loss of life on the one hand, or, on the other, to a new system of slavery.”\footnote{Russell to Light (No. 25), 15 February 1840, in *Correspondence between Secretary of State for Colonies and Governor of British Guiana, respecting Immigration of Labourers*, Parliamentary Paper (hereafter PP) 151 (1840), 43.}

His words were turned into the title of Hugh Tinker’s influential *A New System of Slavery*. Tinker’s argument, summed up quite neatly in the title of his book, was that on the continuum between slavery and free labor, indenture landed on the side of slavery. Indentured labor was like slavery in that labor recruiters in India often used deceitful tactics that amounted to forced
recruitment, workers were abused and overworked on their plantations, contractual terms were often on the side of the employer, and Indians were more often than not in a state of penury.\textsuperscript{55}

His argument came at a time when few texts considered the nature of Indian indenture. Prior to the publication of Tinker’s work, there had been some interest in indenture, primarily in the early 1950s. This was perhaps a result of interest in Indian immigration following India’s independence in 1947. I.M. Cumpston’s \textit{Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834–1854}, published in 1951, faithfully recapitulated archival details on the early debates around Indian indenture.\textsuperscript{56} C. Kondapi’s \textit{Indians Overseas, 1838–1949}, published in the same year, took a different route by emphasizing the difficulties Indians faced in overseas emigration as well as the lackluster conditions experienced during indentured labor migration.\textsuperscript{57}

In the early 1960s, K.L. Gillion published a canonical social history of Indians under indenture in Fiji.\textsuperscript{58} Besides his book, there seemed to be little interest in the history of indenture. There were, however, several studies by anthropologists and sociologists on Indian society and culture in newly-independent (or soon-to-be-independent) indenture colonies. These ethnographic works were ultimately concerned with cultural continuity and change. Some examined the extent to which immigrant Indian societies in post-indenture colonies reflected the cultural values of India. Others tried to locate cultural changes that developed in a new place. These texts included Adrian Mayer’s work on Indian peasant culture in Fiji, Chandra

\textsuperscript{55} Hugh Tinker, \textit{A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920} (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).


\textsuperscript{58} Gillion, \textit{Fiji’s Indian Migrants}.
Jayawardena’s studies on Indians in Caribbean, and Morton Klass’ work on Indians in Trinidad, among others.\(^59\)

But above and beyond these works on indenture and post-indenture societies, Hugh Tinker’s book stood out in its influence. His book was perhaps born out of a combination of his biography, as well as the landscape of British immigration policy in the years following Conservative MP Enoch Powell’s “Rivers of Blood” speech.

Following a career in the Indian Army (1941–1945) and the Indian Civil Administration (1946), Tinker embarked on an academic career as a historian. During this time, he was active in the Liberal Party, having stood as a candidate for Barnet in 1964 and 1966, and for Morecambe and Lonsdale in 1979. The publication of *A New System of Slavery* followed his time as Director of the Institute of Race Relations (1970–1972) and his work on the Liberal Party’s Immigration and Race Relations Panel (1971–1973). Tinker’s book should be seen as a part of the landscape of thinking through the antecedents of what would be known in the 1960s and 70s as “Commonwealth migration.”\(^60\)

His book inspired others to understand indenture either as an extension of slavery, or as a form of free labor in the British Empire.\(^61\) Other scholars including Brij Lal and Lomarsh Roopnarine have revised the Tinker hypothesis. Both have seen Indians as capable decision


\(^{60}\) Biographical information on Hugh Tinker adapted from the summary guide to Hugh Tinker’s papers. See ICS87: Hugh Russell Tinker Papers, Institute for Commonwealth Studies Library.

makers reacting to political and economic conditions in India by bettering themselves through immigration.⁶²

Of course, there were books that went beyond the binary of free labor and slavery. In her work on Mauritius, Marina Carter found how migrants who had returned back to India played a key role in motivating new recruits.⁶³ Madhavi Kale concluded that Indian indentured migration emerged as a strategy for some of Britain’s sugar colonies to deal with abolition of slavery and emancipation. Such a strategy was inflected by a colonial understanding of labor that was structured in a constellation of discourses on race, ethnicity, and gender.⁶⁴

Other scholars have investigated how indenture was part of other larger processes in the British Empire. Rachel Sturman, for example, located how Indian indenture was integral in the history of international labor regulation and workers’ rights.⁶⁵ Clare Anderson saw that indenture was quite closely related to convict transportation.⁶⁶ Radhika Mongia, seeing that indenture and its concomitant abuses produced a large quantity of colonial inquires, found how the colonial state could produce discourses of truth and impartiality in such contexts.⁶⁷ There has too been a recent interest in connecting indenture to Indian nationalism. Mrinalini Sinha’s research has


⁶³ Carter, Servants, Sirdars and Settlers.


⁶⁵ Sturman, “Indian Indentured Labor and the History of International Rights Regimes.”


shown, for example, that anti-indenture agitation was a kind of precursor to mass protest under Gandhi.68

But, let us return to the issue of indenture and slavery. Tinker’s work conceptualized indenture as a continuation of slavery in a different form. While there is a case to be made that slavery and indenture cannot be separated, this dissertation attempts to move beyond that form of argumentation. Instead, this dissertation integrates the study of indenture with the study of empire rooted in an understanding of South Asia. This dissertation begins with the idea that peasant debt forced peasants out of South Asia and into the British Empire as indentured laborers. This fundamental point—that colonial policy in South Asia provided the basis for a labor supply in the indenture colonies—allows us to comprehend the mechanics of transimperial imperial policy. Debt created the landless peasant who became the indentured laborer. But what did this process look like? The experiences of colonial rule in South Asia influenced law and regulation in the indenture colonies.

That being said, the literature on slavery is incredibly vast and there is much that can be learned for almost all aspects this dissertation will be dealing with. For example, there have been a plethora of texts that have dealt with the complexities of the Atlantic Slave Trade, including its development, its relation to capital, and its reliance on communities in Europe, the western coast of Africa, and the New World.69 Also important are texts that consider the nuances of slave

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societies, as these allow for an understanding of relations between the planter class and the enslaved (including ways to control movement), as well as how slaves were able to resist the society around them through protest or other means.⁷⁰ Some of these texts also provide a window

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into how new cultures and societies developed in the African diaspora. And of course, there are a number of texts that interrogate the relationship between liberal thought and the abolition of slavery.
However, this dissertation finds that a colonial and South Asia-centric understanding of the indentured laborer allows us to grasp the nuances of indenture policy. This is not to say that there were other connections between indenture and the wider project of empire as well. The on-the-ground mechanics of early indenture, for example, were indebted to slavery, amelioration, and emancipation. This dissertation will attempt to piece some of these connections together in Chapter One. However, it remains that the linkages between colonialism, South Asia, and

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indenture combined to produce a social structure that was obviously connected to slavery, but cannot be considered identical to it.

For example, indenture must be seen as subject to trends in colonial governance. This could mean the liberal universalism that swept through the British Empire as a progressive civilizing mission. Or it could have meant what happened later: the mid-nineteenth century challenges to imperial rule led to vast changes in governance in every corner of the British Empire.

Karuna Mantena argued that rebellion and discontent in the mid-nineteenth century British Empire led to the adoption of a conservative vision of imperial rule based upon Henry Maine’s ideas of culturalism and native society. In theory, this form of governing was dependent upon native rulers and custom. That is, native society had a cohesive cultural logic based upon custom. This type of rule did not attempt to “civilize” or “progress” society, as native society was seen as capable of resisting the logic of the modern.⁷³ In practice, it was a way to consolidate power under British colonial rule.

Indenture colonies lacked a native society. Mass migrations—slavery, indenture, and the movement of free whites—rendered these colonies a pastiche of empire. This meant that the rule of law was not contingent upon the illusion of sloughing off rule to the natives, but instead upon securing the colony by enacting control over the lives and bodies of indentured workers.

Colonial rule in the latter part of the nineteenth century involved the use of many forms of power. At times, this power was rooted in ethnography and colonial knowledge. At other times, it was rooted in questions of medicine and health. And still others, the repressive mechanisms of the state. All of these were forms of power informed by the colonial experience.

In making such an argument, this dissertation subordinates the planter interest to the relationship between the state and labor. The planter interest tended to have one interest: cheap, dependable, and controllable labor—an unadulterated profit motive. As the chief supplier of labor, the state positioned itself in between the Indians and their employers to ensure agricultural production as well as law and order. Thus, this dissertation remains interested in the practices of governance that resulted from the relationship between the state and the worker. By doing so, this dissertation moves beyond ideas of material interest and class analysis in the study of indenture (as well as the study of the British Empire) to center the historical realities of colonial expansion and rule.\textsuperscript{74}

But what might we take from this kind of understanding? This dissertation began with the indebted peasant, forced by colonial policy to abandon his ancestral lands for the shores of the indenture colony. Inherent in this process was a tension: the transformation of a landless peasant into a laborer. This dissertation seeks to understand the colonial response to creating laborers out of debt-ridden peasants.

The peasants from India were the byproducts of a failed land tenure policy in South Asia. But they were not doomed to this fate. Instead of forever being consigned to the role of indebted peasant in South Asia, the British Empire offered them a chance to become a laborer elsewhere. Indeed, these peasants were an ideal labor force. Freed from the deep history of African slavery and also free of the stereotypes and caricatures of certain Indians (for these were no effeminate Bengali Babus, but instead hardy workers), these laborers were seen as comprising a nearly-infinite supply of plantation labor.

But the transformation they underwent was rife with cultural issues. How could the British mold these peasants into laborers? This dissertation will seek to understand the colonial legacies of this problem. It will use the background of liberal universalism and post-Rebellion conservatism to engage with the South Asian indentured laborer. What were the cultural problems created and managed in this process? What did on-the-ground colonial governance look like?

*Trinidad and Fiji*

This dissertation focuses on the indenture colonies of Trinidad and Fiji. In doing so, it moves beyond the model of studying indenture by focusing on indenture throughout the British Empire (such as Tinker’s work) or in specific regions of the empire (such as the literature on Mauritius, the British Caribbean, Fiji, or South Africa). The former model of studying indenture neglects the ways in which imperial regulation was inflected by colonial rule as a colony’s administration provided the contested grounds for the ideologies of rule of the greater empire.

While scholarship on indenture in specific regions of the empire have acknowledged the importance of colonial administration, they have neglected the fact that indenture was global due to both labor migration and governance. Case in point, the transition away from some of the ideals of liberal universalism can be found in the governorships of Arthur Hamilton-Gordon. After serving as governor of Trinidad from 1866–1870, Gordon went on to become Fiji’s first governor in 1875 (in between he served as governor of Mauritius, another indenture colony). Understanding indenture requires a recognition of rule at the colonial and imperial level.

However, this dissertation is not the first to suggest connections between Fiji and the Caribbean. The anthropologist Chandra Jayawardena first proposed a comparison between the two parts of empire. In looking at questions of culture in Fiji and Guyana, he noted that indenture
in both locations shared recruitment patterns, administration by officials who had experience of managing immigration in other parts of the empire, and demographic similarities between Indians and non-Indians.\textsuperscript{75} Some of these shared administrators included Arthur Hamilton-Gordon, governor of Trinidad, Mauritius, and Fiji. It also includes figures such as Sir George Des Voeux, Gordon’s successor in Fiji. He had served as a magistrate who was a magistrate in immigration reform in Guyana and was later the Administrator of St. Lucia.\textsuperscript{76} More recently, Amitava Chowdhury used an analysis of indenture in the Caribbean basin and the Indian Ocean to locate global processes of identity formation.\textsuperscript{77}

This dissertation examines indenture in its early and later forms. Trinidad can be used to examine colonial rule and liberal imperialism from indenture’s outset, as the colony began to import Indian indentured labor in 1842. An analysis of Trinidad and Fiji, on the other hand, allows for an analysis of a more mature phase in indenture. Fiji was among the last British colonies to institute Indian indenture in 1875. As such, it can be seen as an apogee in the development of indenture’s regulations.

This analysis requires recognition of inter-connected colonial governance in the British Empire. Beyond the movement of officials, it would do well to recognize how policy-making and information circulated among the various administrators in indenture colonies.

For example, in 1888, when faced with the fact that there was no law to govern the marriages of Indians in Fiji (the only marriages recognized by the state were those conducted in India prior to immigration), colonial administrators turned to Trinidad and Guyana’s marriage

\textsuperscript{75} Chandra Jayawardena, “Culture and Ethnicity in Guyana and Fiji,” \textit{Man} 15, no. 3 (September 1980): 431–32.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 432.
\textsuperscript{77} Amitava Chowdhury, “Horizons of Memory: A Global Processual Study of Cultural Memory and Identity of the South Asian Indentured Labor Diaspora in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean” (Ph.D. diss., Washington State University, 2008).
law for inspiration. In the process, one stipendiary magistrate weighed the pros and cons of both laws: “I incline to think that the British Guiana law is preferable to that of Trinidad (also enclosed), although the latter is of much more recent date. The only point which might be regarded as a shortcoming in the B.G. [British Guyana] ordinance is that it makes no provision for the divorce of the parties married.”

In another instance, government officials were tasked with considering the arrival of unindentured Indians into Fiji. As officials debated how to curtail the immigration of those they called “undesirables,” the Colonial Secretary for Fiji wrote to the Calcutta-based Emigration Agent for Fiji to gain insight on passing an ordinance to prohibit their entry. In his reply, the Agent reflected on his history throughout the empire:

Before taking over my present duties in Calcutta, I spent a number of years in East Africa where we were overrun with undesirable people flooding the country . . . It was not until we drew up an Immigration Ordinance making the landing of undesirable passengers illegal . . . I have telegraphed to the East Africa Protectorate to forward me a copy of their ‘Immigration Ordinance’ and when it is received, I will transmit it to you.

Viewing each colony in isolation prevents the historian from seeing the unity of all the moving parts of colonial governance. In this case, locating the interactions between colonies allows one to see the ways in with colonial officials grappled with similar problems and issues in thinking about Indian labor in distinct indenture colonies.

**Historical Background of Indenture in Trinidad and Fiji**

Trinidad (later known as Trinidad & Tobago) was an island colony situated just off the northeast coast of Venezuela. Originally a Spanish colony, the island received an influx of French

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78 National Archives of Fiji, Colonial Secretary’s Office Minute Paper (hereafter NAF CSO MP) 2344/1890 (enclosed in NAF CSO MP 2554/1891).

79 NAF CSO MP 3686/1911.

80 Tobago was a French colony until the signing of the First Treaty of Paris in 1814. Thereafter, it was an independent British colony reliant on sugar production. In 1847, a hurricane destroyed most of the plantation economy, leaving most of its inhabitants reliant on subsistence farming. In 1899, the island was made a ward of Trinidad.
planters and slaves during the French Revolution. As the historian and Trinidadian Prime Minister Eric Williams put it, the island was “Spanish in name, French in fact, African at its base.”

Following the end of the War of the First Coalition in 1797, Spain allied itself with Revolutionary France. This, in turn, led to a British blockade of the Spanish Caribbean. The Anglo-Spanish War began. During the war, British naval forces under the command of Sir Ralph Abercromby captured the island. Following the takeover, both London and the West Indian planter elite transitioned the economy of the island into a plantation slave economy.

Between its annexation and the emancipation of the slaves in 1833, sugar exports increased from 5,920 tons in 1812 to 10,334 tons in 1833. Cocoa was viewed as a second source of profit, and its total exports of cocoa increased from 96,000 pounds (approximately 43 imperial tons) to 3,090,526 pounds in (1,380 imperial tons) in 1833. Despite this level of production, Williams (using compensation amounts to planters after emancipation) found there only to be 17,439 slaves in Trinidad in 1833. This compares to 254,310 in Jamaica, 23,350 in Antigua, and 28,442 in St. Lucia and St. Vincent combined. Using The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, we may discern a slightly higher figure at 20,772 slaves arrived in Trinidad between 1797 and 1833. This, however, does not take into account deaths, manumissions, or marronage.

Nevertheless, this number, small in comparison to other slave colonies, led to many planters fearing a labor shortage following the collapse of the apprenticeship system. Scholars

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81 Eric Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), 47.
82 Ibid., 78.
83 Ibid., 83.
such as Madhavi Kale have challenged the reality of the labor shortage. In her reasoning, the shortage must be viewed through the lens of a small planter class agitating for a pliant labor force, rather than reflecting the actuality of a shortage of individuals willing to work on sugar plantations. The positive reception of a discourse of shortage reflected two contingent factors. First, Indians were seen as racialized in an imperial hierarchy and were thus fit for “improvement” via labor. Second, there was a pressing concern for the viability of plantation estates due to the falling price of sugar in 1840. Both concerns allowed London as well as anti-slavery groups to capitulate to the creation of a system of indenturing Indians to work on sugar plantations in Trinidad, Jamaica, and British Guyana in the West Indies.

Indians were not the only “choice” for imported labor. Indeed, approximately 14,000 Portuguese Madeirans immigrated to Trinidad from 1841 to 1842 and from 1846 to 1848, mainly to escape a famine. Those who survived the journey were malnourished and quickly succumbed to malaria and yellow fever. The few who were fit to work generally abandoned plantation labor.86 Chinese workers were recruited, though their numbers declined in the face of Indian immigration, leaving a workforce in British Guiana, Trinidad, and Jamaica that was only 3.5 percent Chinese.87 However, the experience of Chinese contract labor in the Caribbean, Australia, and South Africa can provide an instructive comparison, especially when examining recruitment in Chinese territories in which the British lacked direct control.88 Furthermore, the transnational

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86 Laurence, A Question of Labour, 2.
87 Hoerder, “The Asian Contract Labor System (1830s to 1920s) and Transpacific Migration,” 396.
nature of Chinese contracted labor makes it ideal to conduct a comparative study of historical variation and change.\textsuperscript{89}

The first shipload of Indian laborers arrived in British Guiana in 1838 on a private venture. This export of labor became the subject of a vociferous campaign by the British Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS). The BFASS had been adamant about preventing slavery from remerging in other forms following emancipation. Their campaign led to the prohibition of Indian emigration for five years.\textsuperscript{90}

Declining sugar production rates allowed planters to negotiate with colonial officials.\textsuperscript{91} By 1842, colonial officials in London sanctioned the transportation of Indian labor to Mauritius. By 1844, this was extended to British Guiana, Trinidad, and Jamaica. Indian labor importation briefly came to a halt in Trinidad from 1848–1851 due to a financial crisis.\textsuperscript{92} It began again in 1851 and continued to 1917. Between 1845 and 1917, nearly 400,000 Indians were imported as labor under indentured contracts to the West Indies.\textsuperscript{93} The transportation of Indian workers via indentured contracts would end in 1917 due to an Indian effort to end indenture.\textsuperscript{94}

Let us now turn to Fiji. After Fiji became a Crown Colony in 1874, Arthur Hamilton-Gordon was appointed its first governor. Drawn to the sugar plantation economy as well as an ostensible “protection” of the indigenous population, he encouraged the migration of Indians as indentured workers. It was hoped that Indian labor would be the means by which an indigenous


\textsuperscript{90} Laurence, A Question of Labour, 3.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{94} See Chapter Ten for more on the end of indenture.
population would be protected from the harms of harsh plantation conditions and disease. The task-based industrial agricultural labor of plantation life would thus be reserved for Indians, a population that merited no such protection.⁹⁵

On May 15, 1879, the ship *Leonidas* set sail for Fiji, carrying 463 Indian laborers in its hold. In total, 60,965 workers were brought to Fiji between 1876 and 1916. Of that, 60,553 survived the sea voyage.⁹⁶ By 1921, the total population of Fiji was 157,266. Of this, Europeans numbered 3,878, “part-Europeans” 2,781, Chinese 910, indigenous Fijians 84,475, Indians 60,634, with the rest coming from various islands in the Pacific.⁹⁷

Most of the indentured workers labored for the Fiji Sugar Company, the Rewa Sugar Company, the Vancouver Sugar Company, or the Colonial Sugar Refining Company—the largest and most influential sugar company.⁹⁸

Those who came to Trinidad and Fiji came under contract. The contract regulations for indenture were remarkably similar amongst all Indian indentured migrants. The Indian workers referred to themselves as *girmitiyas*, a term derived from *girmit*, or contract. The contracts for these *girmitiyas* provided a free passage to their destination in exchange for five years of paid work under indenture. Those who wished to return were required to labor for another five years to qualify for a “free” return passage to India. This point in particular was subject to wide-ranging debates on cost and the necessity for a return passage during the era of the authoritarian-paternalist state.⁹⁹ Though this option was available, many of workers chose not to return to

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⁹⁵ See Chapter Six for more on this point.
⁹⁹ This point is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.
India. Instead, they elected to take a third path and settled wherever they could find land to cultivate. One historian estimated that of the 500,000 Indians who arrived in the Caribbean between 1838 and 1920, only 175,000 chose to return back to India. In Trinidad and Fiji, Indians were numbered nearly half the population at the time of each nation’s independence.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation examines the contours of the relationship between Indian indentured labor and colonial governance. How did colonial officials navigate the process of turning indebted peasants, the floatsam of land tenure policies in India, into imperial indentured laborers? This dissertation looks at various aspects of the relationship between the state and laborer. It begins in an era of liberal universalism and ends in the late-nineteenth century colonial state. It shows how colonial officials were constantly grappling with the cultural issues produced by this transition from peasant to laborer. It uses the figure of Mahabir—a fictitious historical actor followed throughout the history of indenture—to understand the personal ramifications of colonial rule.

Chapter one looks at the transition from emancipation and apprenticeship to Indian indentured labor. This chapter offers a basis for understanding the transition to indenture and finds that indenture was not created ex nihilo. Instead, it finds a temporal connection between indenture and the wider empire. Much of the regulation and oversight in the early years of Indian indenture was a product of the structures of power laid out in amelioration, emancipation, and apprenticeship.

100 Chandra Jayawardena, “Farm, Household and Family in Fiji Indian Rural Society,” in Overseas Indians: A Study in Adaptation, ed. George Kurian and Ram P. Srivastava (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1983), 118. See also Chapter Four.

Chapter two begins in earnest the attempt to grapple with the transition from peasant to laborer. In doing so, it looks at the structures of law and order during the first era of Indian indenture. It looks towards the development and decline of liberal imperialism in the British Empire to find out how were Indians treated under the law. It also seeks to understand how and why were they punished for vagrancy and absenteeism—the two most commonly cited crimes. Did British officials believe they could successfully convert peasants into laborers without the encountering the bulwark of cultural difference? Perhaps, but this approach was rife with problems and discontent.

Chapter three examines the process for remittances. This chapter finds that colonial officials developed a system for remitting money from the indenture colonies to India. Why would Indians remit their money back to India? It is worth remembering that these Indians came to the indenture colonies as indebted peasants. Remittances offered a chance for indentured Indians to better their own lives as well as the lives of their families back in India. The remittance system predated the development of remittances of wide-scale remittances by Western Union Corporation by five years. It was also the first known way laborers could remit their money worldwide. What began as a way to encourage thrift by developing a way for migrants to carry their earnings on their person back to India had, by the 1850s and 60s, morphed into a way for Indians to stay in their indenture colonies while still being able to send their money abroad.

Chapter four looks at the rise and fall of land settlement schemes. Land tenure and land settlement were integral issues for a global empire. How could the British organize settlement and collect land taxes? These were exactly the types of questions asked in South Asia that led to the creation of a surplus population of indebted peasants. Unable to settle the land in their
ancestral lands, they were given a chance to turn into landholders in the indenture colonies. That is, the schemes in the indenture colonies were initially used to turn Indians from migrant laborers into settled landholders. However, the transition from peasant to laborer always hit the bulwark of culture. In the face of changing assessments of the capabilities of Indians to become adept landholders, as well as changing assumptions regarding the nature of landholding and labor, these schemes fell to the wayside by the late-nineteenth century.

Chapter five and six offer a chance to look at major changes in British governance throughout the Empire as well as in the indenture colonies. Chapter five looks at Arthur Hamilton-Gordon’s governorship of Trinidad from 1866–1870. It begins with an assessment of the British Empire following challenges to its rule in the 1857 Indian Rebellion, the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion, as well as other uprisings. In this context, Gordon is the first postliberal governor (though he was a member of the Liberal Party) in the milieu following the challenges to British rule. The chapter then goes on to discuss how governance in the British Empire changed as a response to rebellion. The transition from peasant to laborer was now to be surmounted by force. While some colonies moved towards a model of indirect rule, this chapter explains how and why the indenture colony was at times authoritarian and at other times paternalist.

Chapter six continues the history of Arthur Hamilton-Gordon. Here, it looks at Gordon’s tenure in Fiji, where he served as the colony’s first governor from 1875–1880. In Fiji, Gordon was able to start and set up the system of Indian indenture. As such there was no transition from liberal imperialism—peasants were to be forcibly made into laborers from indenture’s outset in Fiji.

Chapter seven reconsiders questions of law and order. Even in the face of top-down policies, colonial officials still encountered major issues in transitioning a peasant population
into a laboring one. In this milieu, the indenture colony picked up on the impetus seen in other colonies to use jails and convict transportation as a tool for social control and drafted ordinances that used the force of law to always keep Indian workers on their plantations. These ordinances also were designed to prevent social unrest and protest.

Chapter eight examines the discourses around potential rebellion and uprising. Mirroring the discourses found in South Asia, colonial officials in Trinidad and Fiji found to rebellion to be a function of an inherent Indian sensibility. In this case, uprisings were caused by Indian religious belief combined with an innate irrationality. In essence, colonial governments were attempting to come to grips with the bulwark of culture in their laboring population. The chapter looks at discontent in Trinidad and Fiji, most notably the Trinidadian Muharram Massacre of 1884.

Chapter nine examines how laws relating to public health and disease were used to police the bodies of indentured workers. By the late-nineteenth century, the British Empire was using public health to control colonized subjects. This chapter conducts a close reading of laws relating to hookworm, sexually transmitted infections, and mental illness. It finds that the economic security of the indenture colony depended on controlling the heath of the indentured.

Chapter ten looks at the connections between indenture and the nascent anticolonial movement in South Asia. The end of indenture in 1917 was not a process dependent on colonial or imperial rule. Instead, indenture was one of the first instances wherein Indian nationalism and the Indian public determined the future of imperial policy. This chapter looks at how mass protest, the Indian public sphere, and an emergent Indian nationalism ended indenture.

From such an analysis, the tensions inherent in Indian indenture become clear. Turning a peasant into a laborer was always to be rife with the problems of colonial governance.
Chapter One
Groundwork

Mahabir had yet to arrive in Trinidad. It was 1824 and the colony was filled with those who were free and those who were bound by chains in slavery. The colony was dotted with sugar plantations where the work was unceasing and brutal. To grow sugar cane first required the slaves to work from dawn to dusk digging holes to prepare the soil for the cane. Next came months of weeding and tending to the cane with a manure-based fertilizer. The cane grew for about sixteen months before it could be harvested.

Work was constant during the harvesting season. First, the cane was cut down in the fields and taken to the mill. There, the collected canes were crushed in large rollers to extract cane juice. Once the juice was extracted, slaves had to move quickly, as the juice would ferment in twenty-four to forty-eight hours. Using the leftover bits of cane (known as bagasse) from the crushing process as fuel, slaves fired huge cauldrons twenty-four hours a day to concentrate the juice. This, in turn, allowed the sugar to crystallize out of the cane-juice solution. The juice went through a series of boiling and cooling processes until it finally became a thick and syrupy molasses. The molasses could be shipped and sold, fermented into rum, or placed into one-ton containers called hogsheads to allow the solution to further dry and crystallize into brown muscovado sugar.

The field was backbreaking labor. The mill was too. The inside of the mill hall was unbelievably hot due to the many boiling cauldrons of cane juice. Slaves were often accidently drawn into the mill and crushed to death. Those stirring the cauldrons risked being scalded by the superheated juice, or worse, boiled to death if they fell into the solution.
The world Mahabir was about to enter was deeply informed by the work of slaves. Not only was he to work the sugar fields, but so too was his day-to-day life to be informed by laws and regulations first drawn up near the end of slavery.

Indenture was not new to the British Empire. Prior to the seventeenth-century introduction of African slavery in the New World colonies, the British Empire was confronted with the question of how to fill its plantations with working hands. The answer came, in part, from indenture. Take, for example, migration to early North America. The historian Richard Hofstadter once argued, “If we leave out of account the substantial Puritan migration of 1630–40, not less than half, and perhaps considerably more, of all the white immigrants to the colonies were indentured servants, redemptioners, or convicts.”¹

At times, indentured servitude could mean apprentices—young men and children (usually orphans) bound by contract to learn a trade. Some of these indentured servants, belittled as “paupered apprentices,” were bound for a little under a year, while others were bound for four-to-seven years, a time period to similar those indentured servants bound to work on plantations or in households.²

Indenture could also mean convict transportation. Transported prisoners comprised a sizeable part of labor in the early American colonies. From 1718 to the start of the American War in 1775, 36,000 convicts were transported from Britain to the Chesapeake Bay. However, these convicts were not indentured upon their departure from Britain. Wealthier convicts often bought their liberty (the price of their voyage) upon landing, while the rest were sold into bonded

¹ Hofstadter, America at 1750, 34.
labor. Convict transportation should not be seen primarily as a system of indenture, but rather form of punishment for larcenies and property crimes that bypassed the hangman’s noose.³

Nevertheless, indenture did feature prominently in early labor for British colonies in the seventeenth century. By the time Virginia had transitioned to a tobacco colony in the 1610s, planters had become reliant upon cheap labor, such as apprentices, wage laborers, and indentured servants.⁴ But the demand for ever-cheaper sources of labor was immense. The growing trans-Atlantic trade required ever-more laboring bodies. As Eric Williams made so clear, slavery played a key role in the growth of the Atlantic commercial economy and the development of merchant capitalism.⁵

Richard Dunn found the transition from indenture to slavery to be an “unthinking decision.” What began as a process of exploiting the laboring poor finally reached its fruition in enslaving Africans. Slaveholders in the seventeenth-century West Indies never paused to stop and think about this transition—it was merely a slide into further labor exploitation. Enslaved Africans were “attractive to the Englishman as a fixed possession, like a horse or a cow.”⁶

Other scholars, such as Christopher Tomlins, have argued that indenture in the eighteenth-century Americas was limited in legal and economic influence. He went on to note that migrant indentured servitude was not significant in supplying labor en masse, nor did it

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⁶ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 74.
determine the structure and culture of the early work force in the British Americas. However, others have determined that, while the use of indentured servitude declined with the rise of slavery, it remained an important part of the eighteenth-century workforce and was inflected by the power relations of class, gender, and race. Barbara Fields saw the introduction of slavery as based on the fact that English indentured servants could not be forced to become slaves. This had little to do with race, but more with the fact that these servants could effectively resist the transition to slavery. Not only did they outnumbered their masters, but their enslavement could have caused future immigrants from England to refuse to come to the North American colonies. Africans provided a *tabula rasa* to many of these problems—they could serve as a nearly infinite laboring source in perpetuity.

There existed a practice known as indenture in the New World, and that this included a variety of forms of bound labor. The question remains whether there was to be found any connections between Indian indenture and its early American instantiation. It may be apt to recall Reinhart Koselleck’s reminder to the historian: the new concept “can never be so new that it was not virtually laid out in the pre-given language at the same time and even drawing its sense from its conventional linguistic context.”

There was a measure of continuity in indenture: it existed, in some form, in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Americas. It was brought back again in the nineteenth

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century. However, it is not early indenture that sheds light upon Indian indenture.\(^{10}\) Instead, it is what came in between: African chattel slavery.

As a system, Indian indenture can be understood in the context of policies that were developed during amelioration, emancipation, and apprenticeship—the final years of slavery. This kind of analysis requires an exploration of some of transformation of some of the offices meant for the amelioration of slavery. It also requires tracing some of the similarities between the ideologies of post-emancipation apprenticeship and indenture.\(^ {11}\)

This chapter begins by locating the continuities between the Amelioration Proclamation of 1824 and the beginnings of indenture. The Amelioration Proclamation was an attempt to create a new slave code in Trinidad. It was seen as a measure designed to alleviate what London saw as some of the worst features of chattel slavery without actually calling for its abolition. The continuities between amelioration and indenture did not appear the indenture’s “first” appearance from 1836–1838—an era marked by planter interest in cheap labor. Instead, only after indenture was reinstated in the early 1840s did there appear to be a more evident continuity between the liberal impulses around the end of slavery and the establishment of Indian indenture.

*The Amelioration Proclamation and the Protector of Slaves*

In 1824, colonial officials in Trinidad and London began to take up the issue of the amelioration of the slave laws. These laws intended to change some of the fundamental ways in which slave

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\(^{10}\) This is not to say that legal scholars have not located connections between seventeenth-century indentured servitude and free labor. Robert Steinfeld, for example found that indentured servitude played a “structurally integral role in defining the shifting content and boundaries of normal contractual employment.” Robert J. Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350-1870* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 9–10.

\(^{11}\) In *Fragments of Empire*, Madhavi Kale explored the connections between slavery and indenture. Her argument was based around the idea that Indian indentured migration emerged as a strategy for some of Britain’s sugar colonies to import a pliable labor force following emancipation. This, in turn, shaped the terms in which indenture was represented in governmental policies and regulation, as well as the work of the British Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS). Her work focused on the discursive aspects of the labor market: the relationship between free and slave, the creation of an idea of labor shortages, and the representation of Indians in a labor market inflected by ethnic, religious, and gender markers. See Kale, *Fragments of Empire*.  

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owners were to treat their slaves without actually going as so far as rendering slavery illegal. In short, the law was to act as a new slave code. Its development in Trinidad confirmed that colony’s status as the empire’s legal laboratory.\textsuperscript{12}

In hindsight, the Amelioration Proclamation seems to have been a midpoint between two systems of labor extraction: chattel slavery and wage labor. The law attempted to establish new norms in plantation discipline for slave and master. It also tried to create new customary civil rights for the enslaved. Finally, the law introduced a new fulltime civil servant: The Protector of Slaves. It would be the Protector’s responsibility to implement the law.\textsuperscript{13} These were piecemeal solutions to the intense brutality of slavery, but the bureaucracy the Proclamation created would later be essential for the workings of indenture.

The Amelioration experiment was a synthesis of Spanish law and British moral incentive. Trinidad was chosen to be the site for the amelioration experiment because, at the time, British anti-slavery advocates saw Spanish slave laws as a humane alternative to the laws of the British. This was, of course, an incorrect assumption. Spanish law featured its own aspects of terror and coercion. The Amelioration Proclamation codified these in a new form.\textsuperscript{14}

Many of the tenets of the Amelioration Proclamation of 1824 were concerned with amending the system of punishments. In an initial version of the Proclamation, for example, the whip or the cat-o-nine-tails were no longer allowed to be used for “the purpose of coercing any Slave or Slaves to perform any labour of any kind whatever.” Lashings were to be limited to

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twenty-five in total. Finally, slave owners or overseers were no longer allowed to lash female slaves at all.\textsuperscript{15}

However, slave owners retained full control over the bodies of the enslaved. Punishments for women still included solitary confinement (up to three days), field-stocks (for confinement up to thirty minutes), house-stocks (for confinement up to six hours), and bed-stocks (for confining feet at night), among other forms of confinement.\textsuperscript{16} While this may seem to be an improvement from flogging, it was actually a deployment of a new range of torture technology. Case in point, slave owners were more likely to use the treadmill as punishment for female slaves after the passing of the Amelioration laws. Stocks, limited to bedstocks prior to 1824, were equally cruel, inflicting a similar amount of pain, discomfort, and shame as treadmills.\textsuperscript{17}

Slave owners caught with two violations of these laws would have all their forcibly slaves discharged from their ownership. This clause was hated by the planter interest. The colony’s governor agreed with their sentiments. Such violations, the governor noted, included “\textit{any} unlawful punishment, which now extends to the correction of any female Slave, except it be by imprisonment or stocks &c.” These were deemed to be a “severe penalty.”\textsuperscript{18} Unsurprisingly, enforcement of this portion of the law was spotty at best. In 1830, the Protector of Slaves reported that Ross, an enslaved man, had died of hunger after seven days of confinement in the stocks. The estate owner, Mrs. O’Brien, was found not guilty of extreme cruelty.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] Proclamation, 23 June 1824, enclosure in Woodford to Bathurst (No. 7), 24 June 1824, in Ibid., 154–155.
\item[18] Woodford to Bathurst (No. 11), 6 August 1824, in Ibid., 169.
\end{footnotes}
Beyond controlling punishments, the Amelioration Proclamation also established a new office with the Protector of Slaves. On one hand, The Protector of Slaves was a magistrate and held all the powers and duties therein for domestic and industrial matters. On the other, he was to be the sole attorney for all slaves. For example, the Protector was to be a slave’s attorney if the slave was to bring a formal complaint against a master for unlawful punishment, such as the use of the whip. Furthermore, the Protector was required to be given notice of all actions, suits, and prosecutions involving any slave or slaves and had to be present at all trials, hearings, and prosecutions. In short, he had to act “in such manner as may be most conducive to the benefit and advantage of any such Slave.”

This dual role as prosecutor and defense caused some confusion. Trinidad’s judges initially denied the Protector the jurisdiction to prosecute, as they saw him primarily as a magistrate. The problem was later fixed by a supplementary Proclamation explaining the Protector’s jurisdiction.20

The Protector was also to be independent from the plantation system. He was not allowed to be the owner or proprietor of any plantation, nor was he allowed to own slaves or have any financial interest (shared by him or his wife) in them. He was also not allowed to have any duties on plantations, including, but not limited to: trustee, executor, overseer, manager, agent, or attorney. He was to be appointed by the Governor or Acting Governor, and if he ever chose to leave the island, he would have to obtain a special license that only allowed up to a three-month leave.21


Governor Woodford appointed Henry Gloster to be the first Protector of Slaves. Gloster, a young lawyer, was the only individual to occupy the post during the time of Amelioration. After assuming the position, slaves almost immediately began to petition his office. The law allowed them to lodge complaints with the Protector of Slaves, his Commandants, or directly with the Governor without harassment from their masters or police. The Protector’s powers were expanded in an 1831 Order in Council, which allowed him to make criminal investigations on complaints made by slaves, transitioning (in theory), the Protector from a limited legal guardian of slaves into an active prosecutor with respect to their complaints.

Unfortunately, the office never functioned in the way it was imagined to function. Besides the aforementioned jurisdictional problems, it remained a government position enmeshed in a slave society. Most judges, as well as the Commandants who were to act as the Protector’s deputies, were slaveholders themselves. And even though the Protector was responsible for cases involving slaves’ complaints against their owners, officials in London were flabbergasted when they learned that the Governor and the protector devised punishments for those slaves who had lodged complaints.

Beyond the position of Protector, the Amelioration Proclamation established several other rights for slaves: they were allowed to marry (and sales that separated slaves were

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considered to be null and void), they were allowed to purchase land, and finally, they were allowed to deposit money in a newly created savings bank.\textsuperscript{26}

The Amelioration Proclamation enshrined in law what had been wrested by slaves in practice. They were now given a place to legally deposit the money they had earned in tending provision grounds. They could choose their own partners. But the transition from \textit{de facto} to \textit{de jure} created a precedent. Many of these tenets were seen as essential features of plantation labor and would be used as slavery gave way to apprenticeship.

\textit{A Brief History of Apprenticeship}

By the 1830s, abolitionists began to push against amelioration and called for emancipation. However, emancipation in 1834 did not bring about freedom. Newly emancipated slaves over the age of six were bound by a forced contractual agreement requiring six more years of labor as apprentices—a concession developed by a coalition of liberal and Christian reformers in the British parliament. This coalition rose to prominence in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century and achieved their first success with the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. By the 1830s, imperial reform was indebted to Christian universalist notions of the equality of man, as well as liberal ideas of a free labor market.\textsuperscript{27} This blend of religious and liberal ideologies reached its apogee in 1834 with the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{26} Proclamation, 23 June 1824, enclosure in Woodford to Bathurst (No. 7), 24 June 1824, in \textit{Papers in Explanation}, PP 008 010 (1825), 131–134.


\textsuperscript{28} While the abolition of slavery was this alliance’s most visible campaign, it was by no means the only one. Recent scholarship has shown that reformist initiatives usually seen as projects of liberal imperialism—including the 1829 banning of widow immolation (\textit{sati})—were in fact reliant on support from Christian lobbyists throughout the Empire. See Penelope Carson, \textit{The East India Company and Religion, 1698-1858} (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2012).
Officials in London and the colonies believed that an apprenticeship could placate plantation owners and abolitionists by providing for a guaranteed labor force, while also setting hours for work and safeguarding standards of protection.

But what were these former slaves apprenticing for? An elderly former slave mused, “children were put out as apprentices to learn trades, but what was he to learn?” As Thomas Holt argued, the comparison between apprenticeship and the paternal drive to train a child was not too far off. “Drafters of the apprenticeship system,” he wrote, “did regard the slaves as children needing to be reeducated as wage laborers and resocialized as citizens.”

When Parliament passed the Emancipation Bill in the summer of 1833, it included a stipulation that freed slaves would become apprentices on August 1, 1834. Children under the age of six were freed immediately. Domestic workers, trade laborers, and field workers, on the other hand, would see their freedom deferred to August 1, 1840. Between 1834 and 1840, these apprentices were to work forty to forty-five hours per week for their (former) owners on the plantations they had labored on when the bill was passed. They could, however, negotiate their remuneration with the planter owner for any hours worked during their “free time.”

Special magistrates chosen by colonial officials in London were to monitor the system. These magistrates were to adjudicate between planters and ex-slaves. These special magistrates were one of the principal actors in mediating labor relations between these “new” workers and

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31 Ibid., 56–57.
their employers. In Jamaica, they monitored the system to ensure the payment of overtime wages.\textsuperscript{32}

Apprenticeship was a half-step towards both freedom and the ideals of an economy built upon free labor. Former slaves were guaranteed wages, but not freedom of choice. Former masters were now quasi-employers on sugar plantations. What remained were the plantations: labor-intensive sites with racial divisions that were firmly entrenched.

Beyond these half-measures, apprentices had the option to quit the estates and become small-scale cultivators growing provisions for sale in small markets. They too had the option to buy land and become peasant proprietors. Some stayed on the plantations and become waged workers.\textsuperscript{33} For those who stayed to work on plantations, the relationship between owner and former slave had wisps of the relationship employer and employee: half the apprentices in Trinidad engaged in waged labor and whippings fell to an average of twenty-nine per month.\textsuperscript{34}

Nevertheless, apprenticeship, like amelioration, provided a backdrop to Indian indenture. Scholars, including Holt, have pointed to the possibility of connecting apprenticeship and indenture, but few have interrogated their overlap. Apprenticeship, which lasted from 1833 until its early demise in 1838, had many legal features in common with both amelioration and indenture. By reading through some of the details of the system, including its ideological background and its legal features, it becomes clear that indenture was indebted to the liberal theories and practice in amelioration and apprenticeship.


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 458.

\textsuperscript{34} William A. Green, \textit{British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment, 1830-1865} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 135.
As previously stated, special magistrates were appointed to protect the apprentices against issues related to overwork, treatment, and abuse. They were to be the only arbiters in disputes between plantation owners and apprentices. Additionally, they inspected plantations, lock-ups, and public prisons. They sat on tribunals and reviewed complaints. The fair treatment of apprentices fell on the shoulders of these magistrates. Unfortunately, the number of magistrates appointed by London was woefully inadequate. Only half of the allotted magistrates arrived in the West Indies. Two magistrates served in Trinidad, and one was besotted by illness to the point of incapacitation during his entire tenure.35

Jamaica employed more special magistrates than other colonies. There, they were required to go to various estates to inspect the apprentices. They were paid a pittance—a £300 yearly stipend. Moreover, these were not all selfless workers seeking to protect the former slaves. Magistrates often punished apprentices with whippings for “crimes” such as insolence—such were the possibilities when the magistrate was in league with the local planters.36

The role of the special magistrate should seem quite familiar. While the special magistrate was not synonymous with the Protector of Slaves, the ways in which the magistrates interacted with former slaves were quite similar. Both positions adjudicated between Master and (former) slave. Unlike the Protectors, the special magistrates were not prosecutors, but they were able to charge plantation owners with crimes if they were caught punishing their apprentices as they did slaves. They occasionally fined plantation owners. In general, they provoked the ire of the planter class.37

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36 Ibid., 136.
Apprenticeship reached an early end. By 1838 anti-slavery proponents in the United Kingdom, the colonies, and the House of Commons found apprenticeship to be unconscionable. There was, however, a fear on the part of the colonial governments and the planters that the end of apprenticeship would lead to the wholesale flight of laborers from the plantations. This fear, for the most part, never came to pass.\(^{38}\) On August 1, 1838, the system of apprenticeship was terminated—slavery had finally been abolished in the British Empire.

Plantation owners continued to argue that labor was scarce. Of course, they did not mean that there was a scarcity of laboring bodies. Instead, they feared a lack of cheap and pliable labor. They could not argue against notions of free labor and market wages—ideas that held currency in London. Instead, they argued that there was a wholesale shortage of those willing to work the cane. Their arguments, both in the West Indies and in the United Kingdom would soon fit into the project of indentured migration.\(^{39}\)

*Amelioration and Apprenticeship in Indenture*

The ideas present in the Amelioration Proclamation and the apprenticeship system were reflected in the development of indenture. Indeed, the idea that the colony of British Guiana was to experience a labor shortage following the abolition of apprenticeship was one of the reasons John Gladstone attempted to set up a system of migration in that colony in 1836. At the time, there were some concerns on the part of the East India Company government in India that this new system could quite easily backslide into slavery. These concerns quickly were shushed the planter class. Securing labor quickly and easily was more important. Nevertheless, the system designed by Gladstone was brought to a halt by 1839 following protests by abolitionists. When

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\(^{39}\) Kale, *Fragments of Empire*, 49.
indenture was reestablished in 1841, it was done so with a logic that went beyond planter desires. It was in this iteration where the ideological antecedents of amelioration and apprenticeship became readily apparent.

It would be helpful to briefly recount the history of indenture in its first instantiation. Two years after Parliament abolished slavery in British Colonies, John Gladstone (the father of the future Prime Minister William Gladstone) sent a letter to Gillanders, Arbuthnot, and Company, a shipping agency in Calcutta. Gladstone was of incredible influence. Besides having served in parliament and having a son in parliament, he had served as chairman of the West India Association. He had owned nearly 2,000 slaves and had been compensated close to a present-day amount of $10 million for losses (in property, i.e., slaves) in Guiana following emancipation.40

He noted that in 1834, planters (operating under a private initiative) had started importing labor from India. Gladstone was interested in exploring the possibility of formally expanding such a system to his sugar plantation in British Guiana.41

Gladstone was able to secure all the arrangements for procuring indentured labor. This included an exception granted to him by Lord Glenelg at the Colonial Office. Labor contracts were traditionally limited to three years. Gladstone, however, wanted five-year contracts. His exception was granted.42 This was soon enshrined in law in India under Act V of 1837. The Act required an emigrant to appear before an officer to produce a written statement of the term of contract. The length of service was set at five years, renewable for another five years following

42 Mongia, “Impartial Regimes of Truth,” 753.
completion. The emigrant was to be returned after his service to his port of departure. The vessel carrying the emigrant had to conform to requirements of space, diet, and medical care.\textsuperscript{43} The response among the abolitionist community was swift: by January 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 1838, the \textit{British Emancipator} found the exception noisome and later, debate in House of Lords resulted in an inquiry regarding the “Gladstone Coolies.”\textsuperscript{44} Despite the debate, 437 Indians departed Calcutta aboard the ships \textit{Whitby} and \textit{Hesperus}. Sixteen died during the journey, including two who were thrown overboard by a “violent gale.”\textsuperscript{45} Their arrival brought a torrent of criticism from abolitionist circles around the empire. Like Lord John Russell, many were fearful that indenture was tantamount to creating a new system of slavery.

By July 1838, the East India Company government commissioned an inquiry into the system of recruiting and transporting Indian indentured laborers. Known as the Dickens Committee, the group included J.P Grant (member of the Bengal Civil Servant), Major E. Archer (military officer), W. Dowson (merchant involved in the “coolie trade”), Rev. James Charles (member of a Calcutta reform movement), and Theodore Dickens (advocate of the Supreme Court in Calcutta). The committee also included one Indian member, Russomoy Dutt (Commissioner in the Court of Requests).\textsuperscript{46} The committee submitted its evidence to government officials in India in 1839. The committee reached an impasse and was unable to deliver a final recommendation on what to do regarding the transportation of Indian immigrants. However, the evidence was sufficient enough for Indian officials to take action. By the end of May 1839, the

\textsuperscript{43} Tinker, \textit{A New System of Slavery}, 64.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 64–65.
\textsuperscript{45} Light to Normandy (No. 6), in \textit{Reports or Despatches of Governor of British Guiana, respecting Hill Coolies introduced into Colony}, PP 77 (1840), 14.
\textsuperscript{46} Tinker, \textit{A New System of Slavery}, 66.
Governor-General’s Council passed Act XIV—a ban on the overseas emigration of manual labor.\footnote{Ibid., 69.}

The planter class wrote this first chapter in the history of indenture. When he argued for the need for indentured laborers, Gladstone wrote, “we are very particularly situated with our Negro apprentices in the West Indies, and that it is a matter of doubt and uncertainty how they may be induced to continue their services on the plantations after their apprenticeship expires in 1840.”\footnote{Kale, \textit{Fragments of Empire}, 13.}

This was a plea for a pliant workforce. Planters wanted a new form of labor that would allow for an unimpeded flow of cheap plantation workers bound to the land they agreed to till. This argument was supported by the fact that the price of sugar had risen dramatically by the end of the 1830s. Sugar sold for less than £30 a ton near the end of slavery, but went for £40.16s. in 1836. This led to an escalation in wages as plantation owners in Trinidad and British Guiana struggled to attract and keep black labor.\footnote{Look Lai, \textit{Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar}, 9.}

However, there were continuities that went beyond the planter interest for labor. Both the Protector of Slaves and the special magistrates share a striking similarity to the head of the immigration department in Trinidad (and other colonies). However, these offices would only be established after indenture’s reinstatement in 1841.\footnote{For more on the establishment of the immigration department offices see Chapter Five.} For example, the laws developed in the 1840s for governing immigration in Trinidad called for a Superintendent of Immigrants. The Superintendent held the power to enter any estate and inspect the conditions of the immigrants.\footnote{Enclosure 2 in Harris to Grey (No. 15), 18 February 1847, in \textit{Correspondence relative to Supply of Labour to W. Indies and Mauritius}, PP 325 (1847), 119.}

\footnote{47}{Ibid., 69.}
\footnote{48}{Kale, \textit{Fragments of Empire}, 13.}
\footnote{49}{Look Lai, \textit{Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar}, 9.}
\footnote{50}{For more on the establishment of the immigration department offices see Chapter Five.}
\footnote{51}{Enclosure 2 in Harris to Grey (No. 15), 18 February 1847, in \textit{Correspondence relative to Supply of Labour to W. Indies and Mauritius}, PP 325 (1847), 119.}
Prior to the 1840s, the clearest continuity between amelioration, apprenticeship, and indenture can be seen in the establishment of the office of the Protector of Emigrants in Calcutta.

In 1838, just before Act XIV passed and indenture came to a halt, Parliament debated the East India Labourers’ Bill. The Bill was an attempt to regulate Indian indenture. However, after Act XIV passed, the Bill stalled. At the bill’s third reading, Robert Peel argued that Parliament should wait two years in order to form a more mature consideration as to whether the prohibition of indentured labors should be made permanent.  

In 1840, Lord Russell took up the question of indenture again. While drafting the Colonial Passengers’ Bill, he reintroduced the possibility of emigration from India to Mauritius by attaching four clauses to the Colonial Passengers’ Bill. The Passengers’ Bill would not be debated, however, until the next government took power.

When Robert Peel was elected Prime Minister in 1841, Lord Stanley supplanted Lord Russell in the Colonial Office. Stanley took seriously the cries regarding labor in the sugar colonies. Between the end of apprenticeship and the early 1840s, plantation owners and officials in sugar-producing colonies bemoaned a lack of (cheap) labor. Indeed, one of the primary arguments was that labor immigration could help the sugar colonies stay prosperous in the post-emancipation world. In this formulation, what had sustained sugar production in Trinidad after slavery was its high price. Thus, new labor could sustain a high standard of living for all, from the ex-slaves to the planters.  

52 HC Deb 20 July 1838, vol 44, col 382–383.
53 Bill to extend to British Colonies in W. Indies Act for regulating Carriage of Passengers in Merchant Vessels (Clauses proposed by Lord J. Russell), PP (0.30) (1840).
54 Cumpston, Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834-1854, 44–64.
55 Drescher, The Mighty Experiment, 213.
56 Ibid., 161.
to hear. He successfully pushed for the passage of Russell’s Passenger Bill in 1842, thus allowing emigration to Mauritius. In 1844 this was extended to British Guiana, Trinidad, and Jamaica. These bills bypassed the power of Act XIV in India. Stanley had sidestepped the Government of India’s authority to manage the affairs of Indian indentured laborers and gave plantation owners direct access to the Indian labor market.57

Stanley’s measures passed due to a change in heart. By the early 1840s, Parliament had become more sympathetic to the cause of indentured labor. Supporters of indenture used an image of passage to the indenture colonies as a chance for Indian men and women to escape the hunger, poverty, and stagnation of British India. Such a rhetorical strategy seemed to work.58

Even though the East India Labourers’ Bill never passed in 1838, it remained influential in devising a system for protection upon Indian indenture’s reintroduction in 1842. The Bill provided for the creation of an office of a Protector. The Protector would be present on the ship from India and would first and foremost collect and examine all the contracts for the laborers.59 Upon arrival in the colony, the Protector was to disembark with the laborers and “act as the Protector of the said Natives, taking care to exact on their behalf the strict execution of the said contract or contracts entered into them.” 60 Upon the termination of their contracts, the Protector was to accompany the laborers on their journey home.61

When Lord Stanley bypassed Indian officials to resume emigration from India to Mauritius, he also passed an Order in Council to govern emigration law in Mauritius. The Order

57 Kale, Fragments of Empire, 86.
58 Ibid., 36.
59 §8 in Bill, intituled, Act for Protection of Natives of H.M. Territories in E. Indies contracting for Labour, and for regulating their Passage by Sea PP 559 (1837–38), 4.
60 §21, in Ibid., 9.
61 Ibid., 10.
first and foremost provided for emigration agents at the Indian ports of embarkation, as well as a
Protector of Immigrants in Mauritius. The emigration agents were to ensure that Indians
recruited went to Mauritius knowingly and willingly. The Protector was to ensure the health and
register of immigrants in Mauritius.  

The Protector was an office first conceived of during amelioration. Though it may have
been a failure, its purpose was clear: The Protector of Slaves was envisioned as an office that
could leverage governmental authority to protect enslaved men and women. A less forgiving
interpretation of the Protector of Slaves would see it as an alibi. The Protector allowed officials
to maintain (in theory) that they had a man on the ground looking after the best interests of the
enslaved, even if in practice the man never cared for the life or health of those in shackles.

This idea, or alibi, was kept in the transition from slave labor to indentured labor. The
idea that indenture had to have some sort of supervision from the British Empire was also
pointed out in the Dickens Committee inquiry. Though the Dickens Committee submitted its
evidence in 1839, its recommendations were marked by a split decision when the report was
submitted in 1840. Dickens, Charles, and Dutt opposed indenture, while Dowson, Grant, and
Archer wished for indenture to resume again. Dickens, Charles, and Dutt’s opposition was
grounded in the idea that Indians lacked consent in their departure. They found that
“misrepresentation” and “deceit” characterized the Indians voyage out of India.  

They further recommended that if indenture were ever to continue, it could only do so under a system of state
control.

62 James Geoghegan, Note on Emigration from India (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1873), 10–15. A copy of Geoghegan’s Note is also available as Copy of Mr. Geoghegan’s report on Coolie emigration from India PP 314 (1874).
64 Ibid.
The alibi could continue again: planters could have access to cheap labor, and the Empire could say that it had a man on the ground looking after the best interests and consent of the Indians. This had the effect of quelling abolitionist critiques of indenture. As long as there was someone ostensibly looking after the consent of the Indians (and sugar remained cheap), abolitionists would halt their protests against indenture.\(^6^5\) This too was similar to the ideas behind apprenticeship. The presence of the protector silenced indenture’s critics and also made indenture into a training ground for civilization, much like apprenticeship had been for freed slaves.

Furthermore, protest was quieted by the idea that indenture could be used to save Indians from a backwards India. Once brought to the indenture colony, indentured Indians could become productive workers. This too was an echo from the past. Apprenticeship was designed, in part, to resocialize slaves into subjects. Indenture was an imperial extension of such a concept. It could turn backwards peasants from India into good plantation workers.

Mahabir was to arrive into a world built upon the continuities between amelioration, emancipation, apprenticeship, and indenture. His life, like the lives of the enslaved, was to revolve around the production of sugar. He spent countless hours laboring, as his work was measured in the number of tasks he completed, rather than hours he spent laboring. Both he and the slaves before him were forced to live in barracks on the plantations. His life too would be limited to the property lines of the estate: indentured laborers, like slaves, were not allowed to leave the plantation without explicit consent.\(^6^6\)

\(^6^5\) Kale, *Fragments of Empire*, 132.
Mahabir would share many of the same miseries as the slaves of Trinidad. It is worth dwelling upon whether these similarities were due to conditions inherent in plantation labor, rather than an idea that indenture was a “new system of slavery.” Nevertheless, the offices meant for the so-called protection of slaves would remain for Mahabir. There was supposedly a government official looking after his best interests. Supposedly. For the most part, Mahabir’s daily life was defined by two things: sugar cane and the long arm of the law.
Chapter Two
All that’s Fit to Punish

On May 10, 1845, the first Indians arrived in Trinidad aboard the ship *Fatel Razack*. The journey from India took five months. These five months were spent upon the *kala pani*—the black waters, the endless stretch of ocean that alternated between deadened quiet and fierce calamity. Most of these men and women were in their twenties. Though they were separated into gendered quarters, there were about eight men for every woman, a mathematics that most likely left the women’s quarters filled with unease and fear. There too was the fear of death. Though 225 departed India, only 217 arrived. Even in the calmest of seas, trepidation and nostalgia filled the minds of these travelers, the questions *where have I come from? Where am I going?* filtering through their thoughts.

Let us imagine one among those 217. Let us call him Mahabir. His name was never featured on the list of those on the ship, for this Mahabir never came to Trinidad. He will be, however, the key to understanding Indian indenture. We will follow him from 1845 through 1917 to see how the policies and actions of the colonial state filtered down to his daily life and experience. It is his toil that we seek.

Not two months after the 217 disembarked from the *Fatel Razack*, the Governor of Trinidad, Henry MacLeod, sent to a report to London. The report covered the conduct and behavior of these indentured laborers. In it, he touched upon law and order. “I think your Lordship will concur with me,” he wrote, “that, having embarked in the measure of Coolie immigration, it is the duty of the colony to guard, by every possible means, against the chances of a failure or of any injustice towards the Coolies.”
He recommended setting aside £500 as salary and £200 as travelling expenses “for an officer to be designated ‘Coolie magistrate,’ giving him the power of a stipendiary justice in all cases regarding masters and servants.”¹ While MacLeod stressed the need to guard against injustice, others found law and order useful for agricultural production. V.G. M’Lennan, manager of the Union Estate, said that “They [Indians] are infinitely superior to the Creole and African at any kind of field work . . . needing only a judicious, but adequately stringent superintendence, restricting them in the ruinous habit of wandering through the country.”²

As soon as Indians began to arrive in Trinidad, questions reverberated throughout the plantation houses and halls of government: how could the colony ensure that the Indians would behave as labor should and work dutifully on the plantations? How could the colony protect the basic rights to the indentured laborers? As will be seen, these questions were quite different from those taken up in the later nineteenth century. That era featured colonial officials using the blunt force of criminal law to punish breaches of contract.³ This era was different due to some of the tensions found in the colonial project. The British were, at the time, grappling with the ideas of what is now known as imperial liberalism—using the force of Empire to make the colonies look a bit more Western.

We will focus on law and order, including jurisdictional issues, laws relating to Masters and Servants, and most importantly, and laws relating to vagrancy. The transition from peasants to laborers in Trinidad was rife with problems. Lawmakers would always have to keep a few questions in the back of their mind. Were these peasants capable of plantation labor? What

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¹ MacLeod to Stanley (No. 1), 15 July 1845 in Returns relating to Labouring Population in British Colonies; Part II. Immigration of Labourers, PP 691-II (1846), 88.
² “Indian Immigration!” Port of Spain Gazette, 21 March 1848, reprinted from the Royal Gazette, 13 March 1848.
³ See Chapter Seven.
would their transformation from peasant into laborer look like? And perhaps most crucially: what was more important, sugar or freedom?

_Liberal Imperialism: A Primer_

The intellectual tradition and political ideology known as liberalism was never wholly of Europe. From the 1820s to the rebellions and uprisings of the mid-nineteenth century, liberal thought and ideology were cornerstones in the building of the British Empire. This was perhaps most clearly seen in the debates on policy, governance, and the rule of law in British South Asia.

Countless scholars have seen imperial liberalism as being most clearly distilled in the writings of Thomas Babington Macaulay. Macaulay served as Law Member in the Governor-General’s Council from 1834–1838. In his formulation, colonialism could mold the minds of the colonized—it could turn Indians into Englishmen. As he wrote in his 1835 “Minute on Education”:

> We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern,—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.

Perhaps because of this, scholars of South Asia have picked up on the connections between imperial rule and liberalism for some time. As early as 1959, Erik Stokes in _The English Utilitarians and India_ highlighted this trend. Stokes found that British administrators were influenced—and were influencing—utilitarian thought in law and political economy. Moreover, Indians themselves were in constant relation with liberalism due to the expansion of global capital and commerce. As Andrew Sartori found in Bengal, the expansion of global capital

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5 Stokes, _The English Utilitarians and India_.

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allowed for Indians to respond to and challenge colonialism through the language of liberal individualism.\footnote{Andrew Sartori, \textit{Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). For Sartori’s take on Lockean liberalism in colonial rule in South Asia, see Andrew Sartori, \textit{Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014). However, this is not to say that Indian liberalism was necessarily predicated upon a relationship between capital and colonialism. For its other contexts, see C.A. Bayly, \textit{Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).}

When put into practice, liberal thought in the British Empire was predicated upon seeing the colonial subject as fundamentally different. As such, liberal idealism in South Asia never involved “the simple transplantation of English values onto Indian soil.”\footnote{Metcalf, \textit{Ideologies of the Raj}, 42.} Take for example the debates around the prohibition of \textit{sati} (widow immolation). In these debates, colonial officials more or less agreed that Indian society was organized around religion and Indians themselves were in blind submission to religion’s dictates.\footnote{Lata Mani, “Production of an Official Discourse on ‘Sati’ in Early Nineteenth Century Bengal,” \textit{Economic and Political Weekly} 21, no. 17 (1986): 34.} In this formulation, women were never the subjects of their own destiny; instead, they were seen as passive objects for colonial reforms.\footnote{Lata Mani, “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India,” \textit{Cultural Critique}, no. 7 (1987): 153, doi:10.2307/1354153.} This led Gayatri Spivak to once describe the relationship between colonizer and colonized as “white men are saving brown women from brown men.”\footnote{Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in \textit{Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture}, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL.: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 297.}

The emphasis on difference was not a process limited to colonial South Asia, as scholars such as Catherine Hall and Thomas Holt have shown. In her examination of Baptist missionaries in Jamaica, Hall demonstrated that while abolitionists in the Baptist Missionary Society were attached to the idea of a Christian universalism predicated upon the equality of white and black in the family of man, their actions were firmly entrenched in hierarchies of race and gender.\footnote{Hall, \textit{Civilising Subjects}.}
Thomas Holt’s work on post-emancipation Jamaica is particularly striking in that the emphasis on difference became more prominent over time to the point where the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica was the “demonstration of the failure of British emancipation policy” and the “evidence of the ex-slaves’ incapacity for responsible citizenship.”¹²

Racial difference was part and parcel of liberal imperialism. To return to Thomas Macaulay, his Minute characterized all Indians as having the capability of becoming Englishmen, he elsewhere characterized Bengalis as naturally timid; blacks as gibbering; Celts as impetuous; and Saxons as hardworking, ambitious, and energetic. He argued that some of this difference could be erased by cultural assimilation, but in the end, some races were incapable of assimilation.¹³

The interplay between improvement and difference led to a sense of disillusionment. As Metcalf argued, liberalism in the British imperial mission grew less sweeping over time, but continued with half-hearted steps into 1850s. There, it rallied around the less-sweeping idea of the “semi-reformed constitution.”¹⁴

These global debates around the limits of the possibility of improvement of the colonized subject were also a part of indenture. It is apt to remember that law and policy were sites where power, ideas of domination and subordination, and the very nature of being a colonial subject could be defined.¹⁵ Indeed, the law was what provided the terms and conditions for the transformation from an indebted Indian peasant into an indentured laborer.

¹³ Catherine Hall, Macaulay and Son: Architects of Imperial Britain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 333.
¹⁴ Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj, 42–43.
To explain this point, let us return to MacLeod’s letter. He wrote, “For its [indenture] non-success would not only entail upon us disgrace, but likewise cause our ruin, inasmuch as the enormous outlay in bringing these people here, would be a charge upon the colonial funds.”\footnote{MacLeod to Stanley (No. 1), 15 July 1848, in \textit{Returns relating to Labouring Population Part II}, PP 691-II (1846), 88.} Law and policing was key keeping indenture valuable to the colony. If the immigrants were not properly policed, the entire system could be a disaster. Trinidad would be left in financial ruin.

Indians were made to fit a racial mold before they even arrived in Trinidad. Arguments in favor of using Indian labor migration suggested that Indians were somehow innately capable of agricultural labor and were able to do so under low wages. These arguments were, of course, also strategies and justifications for securing a readily accessible pool of labor in the British Empire.\footnote{Kale, \textit{Fragments of Empire}, 146–147.}

Perhaps too they could be made into little Englishmen. As John Stuart Mill argued, colonial administration, characterized by well-intentioned and legitimate despotism, could lead to the uplift of colonial subjects.\footnote{Jennifer Pitts, \textit{A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 160.} And while John Stuart Mill’s more explicit opinions on this subject would not be published until 1861 with \textit{Considerations on Representative Government}, his views were in circulation in the 1840s. As he wrote in his 1836 essay “Civilization,” the advance of civilization allowed for power to “pass from individuals to the masses.”\footnote{John Stuart Mill, “Civilization,” in \textit{Essays on Politics and Society}, ed. J. M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 126.} Even in 1836, he was unsure of whether non-European societies were capable of democracy. In the same essay, he wrote that “there is no danger of the prevalence of democracy in Syria or Timbuctoo.”\footnote{Ibid., 127. See also Pitts, \textit{A Turn to Empire}, 252.} There was a tension in global empire. Thinkers and lawmakers found a promise in the capabilities of a global liberal empire, and yet at every turn, their visions were hamstrung by
their belief in difference, inferiority, and the impossible chasm of race. This tension was brought
to Trinidad in the first years of indenture.

*Masters and Servants*

What were the characteristics of a well-intentioned despotism in Trinidad? Its most prominent
feature was perhaps the clause that any breach of contract involved punishment by imprisonment.
In the 1845 ordinance for the Rights and Duties of Masters and Servants, it was determined that
“if any servant shall contract with any other person . . . or in any other manner whatsoever, and
shall not enter into or commence his service . . . [or] shall willfully absent himself from his
service, or shall refuse to fulfill the same before the term of his contract shall be completed . . .
every such offender, on conviction thereof, shall suffer such punishment by fine or imprisonment
in the Royal gaol.”

This was benevolent despotism in action. Bound labor was defined by penal code.

Indentured servants lacked the right to quit, leaving breach of contract a criminal matter. Any
violation of the contract led to a stint in jail.

However, this was not unique to the indenture colonies. Until their repeal in 1875, British
Master and Servant law allowed for the criminal prosecution for breach of contract. This was
used quite widely. There were over 10,000 Master and Servant prosecutions in Britain between

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21 Trinidad, No. 6, 1845, enclosure in MacLeod to Stanley (No. 2), 3 February 1845, in *Returns relating to
Labouring Population in British Colonies; Part III. Stipendiary Magistrates; Laws of Masters and Servants; Courts
of Appeal; Tariffs* PP 691-III (1846), 81.

22 Some scholars have come to see indentured servitude, both in its early-American and Indian contexts, as a part
of the field of master and servant relations that governed labor relations in Britain and its empire. It is also interesting
to note, as a point of comparison, that Master and Servant laws were mostly a dead letter in the United States by the
early 1820s. See Douglas Hay and Paul Craven, eds., *Masters, Servants, and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire,
1562-1955* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor*;
1858 and 1875. The majority of these cases occurred in industrializing northern England.\(^{23}\) Master-Servant law shaped British industry prior to 1875. Employers could file a complaint for breach of contract against workers. The worker would be arrested and brought before a justice of the peace. The justice would arrange for a settlement and threaten jail time if he did not go back to his employer.\(^{24}\)

Master-Servant prosecution was thus a part of the larger project of using coercive power to govern the labor relations between laborer and employer. In the nineteenth century, this meant that workers in Britain and its colonies had to comport to their contracts or face the threat of imprisonment. The force of the law was quite simple. If a worker did not abide by the tenets of his labor contract, he would be sent to jail.

However, there were some key differences between its usage in Britain and the colonies. In Britain, the use of Master and Servant laws had been specific to time and place. That is, it was a part of the processes of trade organization, social structure, and negotiation via legislation as well as between laborers and masters. It offered a way to govern the relations inherent in specific cultures and locations of work. In the nineteenth-century, these laws—especially the feature of imprisonment—were used to obstruct and control labor during a time of industrialization and trade-union organization.\(^{25}\) However, it may be inferred that their use in industrializing Britain was related to disciplining new workers into the logics of factory labor.


The fact that the Master and Servant laws were repealed in Britain in 1875 is important to keep in mind, as their tenets would continue to be used quite forcefully in the indenture colonies.\textsuperscript{26} Their use in the indenture colony highlighted the contradictions inherent in this form of labor. Indenture was often showcased as a form of labor involving two freely-contracting parties. However, Master and Slave law rendered freedom a moot point. It allowed the planter class to bind the majority of the laboring force to the plantation and thus allowed the planters to control the labor market.\textsuperscript{27} This denial of freedom was not inherent to the indenture process, but as we will see, came out of the tensions of transitioning peasants into laborers.

\textit{Contracts}

Some of the concerns on the part of colonial administrators in Trinidad were contractual. This meant ensuring the sanctity of the contract made with the laborer in India. The initial version of the Trinidadian Masters and Servants ordinance updated for indentured labor made it such that “no contract for service not made within shall be a contract within the meaning of this Ordinance,” unless the indentured laborer signed the contract in the United Kingdom, the United States, British colonies in North America and the West Indies, or “within the limits of any part of Asia from which Her Majesty may be pleased to allow of immigration into this colony.”\textsuperscript{28}

London was alarmed at the stipulation, as it allowed for contracts made in Asia to be legal in Trinidad. Lord Stanley (later known as the Earl of Derby) referred Governor MacLeod to similar regulations in Jamaica, which prohibited contracts from “any port or place on the continent of Asia, or from any island adjacent thereto” unless “the same shall have been made

\textsuperscript{26} See Chapter Seven.


\textsuperscript{28} Trinidad, No. 6, 1845, enclosure in MacLeod to Stanley (No. 2), 3 February 1845, in \textit{Returns relating to Labouring Population Part III}, PP 691-III (1846), 82.
within this colony.” 29 When questioned, Trinidad’s Attorney General Charles Warner argued that “contracts for service are for the benefit of both parties” but thought that any contract entered into with immigrants in India would be “under the entire and exclusive control of Government officers.” He thought the Indian government would supervise all contracts. “It did not occur to me,” he wrote, “that it would be in practice be possible to enter into such a contract, except under the supervision and with the sanction of the Government agent.” 30 In the end, the statement was removed. 31

This regulation was indicative of the legal concerns of the indenture colony. What was important that Indians were bound only by the contract signed at the point of embarkation in India. No other contract could be deemed valid. This was an example of how the concept of difference was used in legal thinking.

Before he came to Trinidad, Mahabir was processed in Calcutta. A recruiter had likely been sent to Mahabir’s village to convince him to leave for the indenture colonies. In Calcutta, he was held in an immigration depot while he was checked for health and soundness of mind. While there, he would also sign a contract stating the terms of his indenture. The contract signed in the immigration depot was the only one deemed to be legal and valid.

Colonial officials felt that Indians such as Mahabir could not be trusted as knowledgeable enough to enter any other contracts on their own. The colonial state had to supervise any contracts into which Indians could enter. Recall that Warner had believed that government officials in India watched, supervised, and reviewed all contracts in India. The implicit argument in Stanley’s response was that such an assumption was too risky. There was no guarantee that

29 Stanley to MacLeod (No. 4), 30 April 1845, in Ibid., 88.
30 Warner to MacLeod, 3 June 1845, enclosure in MacLeod to Stanley (No. 5), 30 May 1845, in Ibid., 91.
31 No. 17, 1845, enclosure in MacLeod to Stanley (No. 6), 5 August 1845, in Ibid., 95.
Indians were not going to be duped into entering fraudulent or abusive contracts. The only contract that Mahabir could sign was the one deemed sacrosanct by the state.

The contract acted as a way to introduce a form of bonded labor in the post-emancipation era. By definition, the contract allowed for two free and rational economic actors to enter an agreement with one another. As previously noted, these contracts would, in time, be guided by principals inherent to bonded labor (the Master and Servant laws that used penal sanctions to bind labor to a specific work site). Moreover, colonial officials determined Indians not to be capable of being rational economic actors. That point of view was born out by the fact that the British had to supervise Indians as they entered into their indenture contract. This led to the contract occupying an ambiguous ideological space. On one hand, it was a testament to liberal economic relations. On the other, it was a signed document that ensured bonded labor.

This ambiguity was what defined indenture. Indian indenture was simultaneously bonded and “free” labor. These kinds of contradictions would only grow as colonial officials came to realize the true ramifications and difficulties of trying to convert Indian peasants into indentured plantation laborers.

_Enforcement: Disillusionment in Action_

In Trinidad, the terms of these contracts were to be supervised by stipendiary magistrates given jurisdiction over the immigrant population. However, these magistrates seemed to only insist upon keeping Indians working on the tasks for which they were recruited to complete—an echo of some of the failures of the Protectors in the emancipation era. Almost immediately, Indians were seen as innately being unable to stay on the plantations. Take for example, the _Port of Spain Gazette_’s opinion on the drawbacks of Indians: “a spirit of exaction on the part of Coolies, to have the veriest trifle of their desires fulfilled, and to permit of no substitute. The identical
items of food must be produced, and no others. One batch actually left an Estate to come to Town to complain that they had no peppers to eat their food with.”32 In this case, workers seemed to have a complaint about available provisions and rations. Though they had a right to complain to a stipendiary magistrate about their provisions, their choice to make an inquiry was viewed as a defect. They had the gall to leave the plantation.

Such perceived defects could be righted by imprisonment due to breaches in the Master and Servant Ordinance as well as regulations developed specifically for the Indian population. In 1847, Trinidad passed an Ordinance “For promoting Immigration into the Colony of Trinidad, and the Industry of Immigrants.” It provided that if any immigrant was absent from work “without any lawful excuse,” he would “forefeit his claim to all wages and allowances for the time during which he shall have so absented himself.” There would too be an additional penalty, as he would have to “forfeit and pay to his employer the sum of two-pence for every day during which he shall so absent himself.” If the absence was for more than a week, it would be reported to the Agent-General of Immigrants and such time “shall not be allowed as part of his term of five years’ industrial residence.”33 In summary, the law dictated that an indentured worker would forfeit any claim to wages during the time of his absence. On top of this, he would have to pay a penalty of two pence per day during his absence. If his absence lasted for more than a week, he would be reported to the Agent-General of Immigrants. The time he spent away from plantation would be added to the duration of his indenture.

Let us imagine that Mahabir needed to leave his plantation, perhaps to make a complaint to the authorities or to look after a sick relative. Perhaps he was exhausted from the toil of the

33 No 3—Trinidad—1847, enclosure in Harris to Grey (No. 15), 18 February 1847, in *Correspondence relative to Supply of Labour*, PP 325 (1847), 118.
sugar mill and needed time to recuperate. Maybe he was ill and his illness was not recognized by the plantation manager as being severe enough to warrant time off from work. These all counted as being absent without an excuse.

Penalties were enforced upon the pain of imprisonment. Stipendiary magistrates, acting on behalf of the employer, could recover all fines. Perhaps Mahabir did not have the two pence per day for his absence. If any Indian was in default, “such immigrant shall be imprisoned in the royal gaol with hard labour for twenty-four hours for every sixpence of the amount so recovered.”34 That is, if Mahabir lacked the funds to pay for his fines, he would be sent to jail with hard labor for twenty-four hours per every sixpence fine. In a later addition to the ordinance, any imprisonment was limited to a total amount of thirty days.35 Thus, a three-day absence could result in twenty-four hours in jail with hard labor.

This kind of regulation did not appear out of nowhere: it evolved out of debates on liberal policy and various ways of thinking about Indian behavior. Key in this process was Liberal Party member George Harris (Lord Harris). He had served as governor of Trinidad from 1846 to 1854, leaving the colony to take up the governorship of the Madras Presidency. It is worth considering both Harris and Grey in the development of the 1847 Ordinance.

A year prior to the passing of the 1847 Ordinance, Harris forwarded to London a draft of the “Trinidad Cooly Regulations.” The law determined that “no manager should allow coolies to go on leave without furnishing them with a ticket signed by himself, specifying the name, period of leave, and locality to be visited.” That is, plantation managers could not allow workers to leave the plantation without a ticket of leave. The ticket would specify the name of the worker, the period of his leave, and where he was going. Police constables would enforce this

34 Ibid.
35 No 9—Trinidad—1847, enclosure in Harris to Grey (No. 26), 12 June 1847, in Ibid., 134.
rule and were required to “take charge of, and send back to their respective estates, any coolies they may find wandering over the country unprovided with the above-mentioned tickets of leave.” They were required to check Indians found walking on the roads. If the constable found that the Indian laborer lacked a ticket, the laborer would be held and sent back to his or her estate.

There were nominal protections for due process. The Inspector of Police was directed to “give instructions to the sub-inspector, serjeants [sic], and police constables” that if an Indian did not have a ticket of leave he or she “should be conducted or forwarded to the nearest police station in order to make any statements should they so wish, and then be directed to return to the estate upon which they are employed.” If an Indian did not have a ticket of leave, he could be taken to the nearest police station to make a statement before he would be sent back to his estate.

Imperial officials in London were quick to put a stop to this regulation. Though the regulations were sent to London in care of William Gladstone, then the secretary in the Colonial Office, the reply came from Earl Grey, Gladstone’s successor. Earl Grey, born Henry George Grey was the son of the Whig Prime Minister Charles Grey (2nd Earl Grey). He became Secretary of State for War and the Colonies after Lord Russell’s 1846 election as Prime Minister. Grey was committed to the idea free trade and was credited as bringing both the Russell administration as well as the Whigs in general to a free trade policy.

Grey had “grave objections” to the Trinidadian regulation, especially to the notion of a ticket of leave. Grey later sent a circular dispatch to all the governors of the West Indian colonies regarding the “unsteady habits of certain classes of immigrants.” He included a letter

36 Trinidad Cooly Regulations, enclosure in Harris to Gladstone (No. 11), 30 July 1846, in Select Committee on Sugar and Coffee Planting in E. and W. Indies and Mauritius: Seventh Report, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix PP 245 (1847–48), 266.

37 White to Inspector of Police, 25 July 1846, enclosure in Harris to Gladstone (No. 11), in Ibid., 267.


39 Earl Grey to Harris (No. 12), 15 September 1846, in Ibid., 267.
sent first to the governor of Mauritius detailing how regulations for Indian immigrants should proceed.\textsuperscript{40}

In the original missive to Mauritius, Grey argued that the provisions in Ordinances passed in Mauritius (and by extension, other indenture colonies) proceeded “upon the principle of endeavouring by law to enforce upon the immigrants the due performance of the obligations to labour which they have contracted by accepting a free passage to the colony.” In short, indenture colonies had passed laws that were light on the carrot and heavy on the stick. These kinds of laws were distinct from those that were based upon the premise that laborers were placed “in a situation in which they might be acted upon by the same motives by which men are impelled to labour in countries in which industry flourishes.” These were the laws that were more or less heavy on the carrot and light on the stick. It’s worth mentioning too the universalism Grey’s statement: Indians were seen as potentially being equal to the men in industrial countries.

Law could only fall short if acted upon the premise of force. “All experience tends to prove,” he wrote, “that no legal regulations, however severe, if they stop short of the extreme compulsion which is the characteristic of slavery, can succeed in enforcing really efficient labour.” Law that took the “motives of self-interest” upon considerations of conduct would result in nearly all the “various races of mankind” to be “stimulated to industry.”\textsuperscript{41}

He was essentially arguing that instead of using regulation as a repressive tool, its power of coercion should be subtler. Trying to enforce repressive regulation was not the answer to countering unsteady habits and ensuring labor security. Instead, policy should “adopt regulations

\textsuperscript{40} Grey to Governors of the West Indian Colonies (No. 2), 23 October 1846, in \textit{Correspondence relative to Supply of Labour}, PP 325 (1847), 1.

\textsuperscript{41} Grey to Gomm (No. 3), 29 September 1846, in Ibid., 143.
of which the effect should be to make it the decided and obvious interest of the immigrants to work steadily and industriously for the same employers for a considerable time.”\textsuperscript{42}

It is worth noting that the anti-slavery lobby in the United Kingdom protested the 1846 regulations that Grey had replied to. Given the various opinions against the ordinances—Earl Grey’s insistence upon free labor and free trade and the Anti-Slavery lobby’s insistence against laws that restricted freedom of moment—attempts to force the laboring population to remain on their plantations did not initially succeed.\textsuperscript{43}

The idea of a penalty for absence was first developed by Grey himself in the same letter. In an enclosure, he presented a mock ordinance containing regulations for Indian immigrants. In it, he surmised that every immigrant absent from work would “forfeit his claim to wages and rations” and would further have to pay “the sum of 1s. a week, or 2d. a day, to his master during the time of his absence.” If the immigrant were absent for a week or more, the absence “shall be made known to the Registrar of Immigrants, and shall not reckon as part of his five years’ industrial residence.”\textsuperscript{44} We have arrived in Mahabir’s world. He may not have needed a ticket of leave, but he would be punished for any attempts to leave the plantation.

We cannot be certain if his attempts to absent himself from work were a form of protest against the harsh working conditions that characterized plantation life. We also cannot be certain whether his absence was a part of his attempts to conduct the necessities of daily life. What we can be certain of was the ways in which debates about the nature of imperial liberalism came to roost in Trinidad. Perhaps these Indian peasants could be placed into indenture and turned into the workingmen and laborers of the industrializing nations. Perhaps law could be used to create

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{44} “Heads of an Ordinance for promoting Immigration into the Island of Mauritius, and the Industry of Immigrants,” enclosure in Earl Grey to Gomm (No. 3), 29 September 1846, in Ibid., 148.
workers. But the law first and foremost used penal sanctions to keep Indians at work. These penal sanctions were quite familiar as well. Vagrancy acts had been used immediately after emancipation and apprenticeship to keep freed African laborers on the plantation in hopes of creating a disciplined free-labor workforce.\textsuperscript{45} Old habits were dying hard.

The Trinidadian ordinance based on Grey’s liberal principles, Ordinance No. 9 of 1847, was quickly deemed to have been a failure. Harris found that “many of them [Indian immigrants] left the estates within a week of entering into the contract, but no pains were taken to give the government any information.” Harris argued that his regulations, including the initial idea of tickets of leave and passes, were a successful model. During the operation of the Harris ordinance, “the Coolies were healthy, well clothed, generally contented, and improving daily in habits of industry.” Upon the substitution of those rules with Grey’s rules, Indians were “seen wandering about the country in bands.” In fact, two public hospitals were founded to deal with their “wandering habits.” Harris said that he was “induced, from numbers being found destitute, sick, and starving in the roads, to establish two hospitals for their reception.”\textsuperscript{46}

There was little reflection in this analysis. It was simply not possible that the work on the plantation had made these workers sick and starving. It was not possible that the work was so grueling that these Indians risked fines and imprisonment to escape.

In a response to Grey’s point from the Mauritius letter that all the races of mankind could be turned towards industry, Harris countered that he had “great doubts whether the Cooly and the African are morally or mentally capable of being acted upon by the same motives in this island


\textsuperscript{46} Harris to Grey (No. 17), 21 February 1848, in \textit{Select Committee on Sugar and Coffee} PP 245 (1847–48), 274.
on their first arrival as labourers are in more civilized countries.” In a damning conclusion, he found “that one which urges the mere support of animal existence will not induce them to continuous and skillful labour.” In his point of view, Indians lacked a fear of the law and only desired a life of idleness.47

This was perhaps one of the clearest distillations of the disillusionment felt by colonial officials with the liberal project. Mahabir had too many defects inherent to his character as an Indian to be treated as anything more than an animal. Turning a peasant into a laborer was a nearly impossible task.

Change was possible—with caveats. In an apparent contradiction to his earlier claim, Lord Harris argued that Indians could move beyond their animal existence. “The immigrant has been looked upon too much as a mere animal whose labour is valuable,” Harris wrote. “Whereas I would endeavor to make him eventually a useful colonist, an industrious and worthy citizen.” How would this process of assimilation and cultural change be possible? “To attain this,” Harris concluded, “he must be subjected to a discipline and to education.”48 This was a half-hearted Macaulay. Discipline first, then education, then perhaps a life as a useful colonist.

In his reply, Earl Grey wrote that “It is exceedingly painful to me to learn that this law . . . has been ineffectual, and has not succeeded in preventing the Coolies from falling into fatal and dissolute ways of life.”49 What followed was a handwringing between the ideals of free labor and the need for coercion to keep indentured Indians on sugar plantations.

Grey first concluded that immigrants who resembled vagrants and wanderers should not be recruited. Beyond that, he seemed vacillate between his feelings regarding free labor and his

47 Ibid. 275.
48 Ibid., 276.
49 Grey to Harris (No. 5), 15 April 1848, in Despatches relating to Distress in W. India Colonies and Mauritius PP 399 (1847–48), 200–201.
dislike of restrictive regulation. Should workers to be kept on their estates? Should their movement between employers be curtailed? Should uniform rates of wages to be established in order to prevent workers from moving between employers? These were the tenets he could not countenance. They were rules that went against his beliefs in the liberal policies of free labor.50

His vacillation soon gave way. A system built upon bondage ran the risk for abuses, but “they would have been a far less evil than the vice and suffering on the part of the Coolies, to which their unrestrained condition has given birth.” Thus, in a spirit of protecting Indians from their own incapability, Grey moved away from his previously unfettered belief in free labor. One had to develop laws for the “treatment of immigrants belonging to savage or half civilized races, whose unfitness for unrestrained liberty is not generally understood or acknowledged.”51

In the end, Grey supported Harris in his decision to place the immigrants under a new set of regulations based on strict discipline. The catch? The power to enforce such regulation would be placed “in the hands of the magistracy and not of the masters.”52

The laws relating to freedom of movement in the Indian population seem to have come full circle. But what was visible in this back and forth were the tensions of indenture. On one hand, there was a belief that indentured labor could utilize the liberal policies of free labor. On the other, indentured labor was a process of binding racialized laborers to a plantation economy. Indians were of a “savage or half civilized” race. As such, they were not capable of being part of a liberal labor market without discipline being enforced through the rule of law. The global debates on liberal empire reached a West Indian conclusion. Indenture was beginning to look a

50 Ibid., 201.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
lot like apprenticeship. Indians would be taught how to become wage laborers. They were to be forced into the ways of wage labor. And they would still be forced to work the land.

It is worth noting that in the Caribbean, there were doubts among Europeans about the capacity for Africans to be anglicized well before this debate. Ideas of ethnic difference were at times part of the language of emancipation and freedom. These views often questioned the ability for Africans to become integrated members of Western society. Indeed, some of these assumptions had developed long before the nineteenth century. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospels, for example, did not proselyte among African communities in the New World in the eighteenth century. After finding some resistance to the idea of conversion in these communities, the Society assumed there to be a gulf of civilizational capability between Europe and the remainder of the world. In the immediate aftermath of emancipation, these views were quite foregrounded. Emancipation brought forth questions about power and dominance that utilized the idioms and language of a fundamental racial difference. That being said, these doubts were brought to the Indian community not via a direct path, but through the circuacious ways imperial liberalism spread through the British Empire as a whole.

The new law in Trinidad, passed as Ordinance 3 of 1849, made it such that no indentured immigrant could leave the plantation he or she was employed on without a written pass from a supervisory official. There were exemptions for those on their way to or from religious services.

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on Sundays, Good Friday, or Christmas day, and from attendance at school after noon on Saturdays.\textsuperscript{56} These were exemptions borne out of Trinidadian experience and were quite similar to those measures passed during Amelioration.

There were more caveats for punishment. If Mahabir had left his plantation and was also found to be guilty of disobedience of any order from his plantation manager, he could be imprisoned up to two months. The imprisonment would not have counted as a part of the term of contract service, and would thus add to his time of indenture.\textsuperscript{57} Force was to rule the day.

\textit{Was Vagrancy a Problem?}

It is worth checking to see how often such laws were enforced. The first Superintendent of Immigration (later to be called the Agent General of Immigration), Henry Mitchell, was appointed in November 1850.\textsuperscript{58} Only with the passing of Ordinance No. 24 of 1854 was each plantation required to submit to the Superintendent a quarterly abstract of deaths, births, as well as names of all immigrants who may have left the plantation estate.\textsuperscript{59} At the end of the year, the Agent General compiled these quarterly abstracts into a compendium laid before the Council of Government.\textsuperscript{60} It remains difficult to ascertain any hard information on the number of vagrancies and absences before this requirement was passed.

Alexander W.T. Anderson submitted the first report in 1856. The report covered immigration for the year 1855. He was acting as Agent General due to Henry Mitchell’s absence because of an injury. Anderson reported little on vagrancies and absences. He did note that he

\textsuperscript{56} TNA CO 297/4: No. 3—1849, “An Ordinance For Promoting the Industry of Immigrants brought into the Colony of Trinidad, at the Public Expense,” 3.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{58} Harris to Grey (No. 30), 9 November 1850, in \textit{Despatches on Condition of Sugar-growing Colonies. Part III. Trinidad} PP 936 (1852–53), 48. For more on Henry Mitchell, see Chapter Five.

\textsuperscript{59} TNA CO 297/5: No. 24—1854, “An Ordinance to amend and consolidate the laws with regard to Immigration,” 3.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
sent every immigrant who applied for hospital treatment to the public hospital in Port of Spain, sending a total of forty-one immigrants to the hospital. Those cases “generally speaking, have been abandoned characters who have brought sickness themselves by laziness, uncleanliness, and wandering habits.”61 He concluded his report by stating that, “On the whole it affords me pleasure to report favourably on the state of the immigrants generally.”62

Low numbers of reported vagrancies were again seen in the report on 1856. In a statistical abstract appended to his yearly report, Henry Mitchell tabulated that only 49 immigrants were recorded as absconding in 1856.63 These, however, were those who had absconded completely from their plantations and could not be found.

The report for 1857 presented a clearer picture on arrests for vagrancy. In noting the decrease in commitments to the Royal Gaol from 1856 to 1857, Mitchell wrote, “the diminution in favour of the latter year is upwards of 200 on 600, or 33 per cent.”64 That is, there were 400 imprisonments—200 fewer than the previous year. We can thus surmise that in 1856, there were approximately 600 Indians imprisoned. In 1856, there were 3,195 Indians under indenture.65 In 1857, there were 3,931 Indians under indenture.66 These numbers give us an imprisonment rate of approximately 19 percent in 1856 and 10 percent in 1857. These numbers exist in a vacuum: on their own they tell us very little about changes in incarceration rates among Indian immigrants.

61 Anderson to Elliot, 24 January 1856, enclosure in Elliot to Labouchere (No. 16), 21 February 1856, in Papers relating to Immigration to W. India Colonies PP 2452 (1859 Session 1), 320.
62 Ibid.
64 “General Immigration Report for 1857,” 20 January 1858, enclosure in Keate to Labouchere (No. 19), 11 February 1858, in Correspondence between Colonial Office and Governors of W. Indian Colonies and Mauritius, with respect to Condition of Labouring Population and Supply of Labour PP 31 31-I (1859 Session 2), 332.
66 “General Immigration Report for 1857,” in Correspondence between Colonial Office and Governors of W. Indian Colonies and Mauritius PP 31 31-I (1859 Session 2), 333.
Though there are no reports prior to 1856, there do exist other ways of finding rates of imprisonment. In 1852, the ship *Clarendon* carried return immigrants from Trinidad to Madras. On board were immigrants who chose to return to India rather than stay in Trinidad following the end of their indenture. Also on board the were “porters, servants, and idlers in Port of Spain, San Joseph, and suburbs” as well as “the convalescents from the Colonial Hospital, and delinquents from the Royal goal [sic].” They had been told that this was their last chance to return to India without having to pay a dime.⁶⁷

No exact number of these added individuals was given. However, the ship’s records indicate that 208 adults returned to India on that ship.⁶⁸ Of those 208 adults, fifty-six of them had deposited savings to be remitted back to India.⁶⁹ We can assume that those who had been imprisoned in the Royal Gaol had little to no savings to remit. That leaves 152 individuals. If even half of them had been from the Royal Gaol, that would amount to seventy-six immigrants. One may argue that it is too speculative to say that not having savings meant this individual was not jailed. However, it remains that there exist no other ways to tabulate statistics on incarceration. The Water Riots of March 23, 1903 destroyed the Red House—the home of the Executive and Legislative Council of Trinidad.⁷⁰ With the destruction of the government building came the complete decimation of all archival material in Trinidad prior to 1903.

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⁶⁷ Mitchell to Johnston, 1 April 1852, enclosure in Harris to Pakington (No. 66), 19 May 1852, in *Despatches Part III* PP 936 (1852–53), 139–140.

⁶⁸ TNA CO 318/199: “Names of Coolies returning to India per ship “Clarendon,”” in Biden to Montgomery, 6 July 1852.

⁶⁹ TNA CO 318/199: “List of Coolies returning to India in the ship ‘Clarendon’ who have deposited money in the Colonial Treasury for the purpose of being remitted to them in India,” in Ibid. For more on remittances, see Chapter Three.

such informed techniques of deduction remain the only way we may ascertain details about the facts of Trinidadian governance not sent to the Colonial Office in the United Kingdom.

Now, the numbers supplied for 1856 and 1857 were the total number of individuals incarcerated over the whole year. Nevertheless, other numbers from the early 1850s point to the idea that there were fewer documented cases of punishments for absenteeism and vagrancy. In 1852, the Esperanza Estate reported of one immigrant who repeatedly tried to leave his plantation. In Curepe, five were reported as leaving. Two other estates reported having small numbers of absconded workers.\textsuperscript{71} It can be reasonably concluded that, while the move away from a labor doctrine partially rooted in liberal policy occurred in the late 1840s, it was not until the mid 1850s when enforcement of vagrancy laws began to take force. This also coincides with a general decline in the belief of the superiority of free labor. By the 1850s, the question was no longer whether free labor was superior or not, but whether free and unfettered labor was even practicable in Trinidad.\textsuperscript{72}

This type of enforcement was mirrored in other colonies. In Mauritius, for example, colonial officials began to worry about vagrancy as the number of Indians who had completed their indenture increased. Individuals who had left plantation work were deemed to be “do-nothings.”\textsuperscript{73} Officials began to see vagrancy as a social evil and a drain on the colonial economy. These laws were not new—vagrancy laws were used as far back as fourteenth-century England. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, they were used to control labor in the British Empire.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{71} Harris to Pakington (No. 73), 24 September 1852, in \textit{Despatches Part III} PP 936 (1852–53), 154.
\textsuperscript{72} Drescher, \textit{The Mighty Experiment}, 201.
\textsuperscript{74} Yoshina Hurgobin and Subho Basu, “‘Oceans without Borders’: Dialectics of Transcolonial Labor Migration from the Indian Ocean World to the Atlantic Ocean World,” \textit{International Labor and Working-Class History} 87 (March 2015): 13, doi:10.1017/S0147547915000071.
In 1861 for example, 23,371 Indians in Mauritius were arrested for vagrancy, totaling 15.7 percent of the male Indian population.\textsuperscript{75}

Something began to change by the mid-to-late 1850s. As this dissertation finds, what changed were the ideologies of colonial rule. Imperial liberalism, underpinned by the ideas of free trade and the mutability of individual characteristics, gave way to a newfound authoritarianism born from various challenges to colonial rule.\textsuperscript{76} With that change would come a new way in which law and order would be meted out to the indentured workers. But such regulation was never guaranteed from the outset of indenture.

Mahabir’s world was filled with regulations and restrictions from the days of slavery and apprenticeship, when those who toiled on sugar plantations were forcibly kept at their place of work. However, his world was also one mired in debates on the human condition. Earl Grey, who had been committed to liberal tenets with respect to labor policy, had been leading the Colonial Office. It was his belief that Mahabir should be treated as someone who could be convinced (through the power of the law) that working for his employer was in his best interest. The transition from peasant to laborer was to be quick, if not easy, in this formulation.

Earl Grey’s views on laws and regulation show that law was always a way to exert power, a way to create certain ideal types of workers and colonial subjects. In this case, it was thought that the coercive power of law should not have a restrictive capability. The law was not to restrict the freedom of movement of indentured workers.

\textsuperscript{75} Mishra, “Indian Indentured Labourers in Mauritius Reassessing the ‘New System of Slavery’ vs Free Labour Debate,” 240.

\textsuperscript{76} See Chapters Five and Six for more on this point.
However, Lord Harris reported vagrancy and absenteeism to be a dire problem. He gave no statistics as to how severe the problem was, but it was enough of an issue to create a Colonial Hospital for the housing of vagrant workers. These peasants would not give up their native ways so easily. After describing the issue to Earl Grey, London relented, and restrictive laws were put in place. Force would now be used to turn them into laborers.

Mahabir now required a ticket or pass to leave his or her plantation. He was bound to his site of labor. His freedom of movement had been curtailed to a bare minimum. And yet, the liberal ideology that saw a capacity to learn and change did not die out. Mahabir could learn to be a good worker, but he first had to be restrained until he did. This benevolent viewpoint took hold in the late 1840s. In the early 1850s, there were scattered reports of absent workers and vagrants.

However, by the mid-1850s, this began to change. There was an uptick in imprisonments among the Indian population nearing 19 percent of the total indentured population in 1856. While it cannot be assumed that all of these were related to vagrancy or absenteeism, this was a significant increase in imprisonment. Was the liberal project being abandoned? Perhaps. But first we must explore more parts of Mahabir’s life.
On May 31st, 1851, the ship *Eliza Stewart* left Trinidad for Calcutta. Upon its decks were twenty Indians. Five years earlier, 217 Indians had arrived “in good order and condition” aboard the *Fatel Razack*—the first ship that had arrived from India in Trinidad.\(^1\) After those 217 completed their terms of indenture, only the twenty who boarded the *Eliza Stewart* wished to return to India. According to the Governor of Trinidad, Lord Harris, those twenty left with “high characters” and

\(^1\) “Arrival of Coolies,” *Port of Spain Gazette*, May 30, 1845.
their departure was “greatly regretted by their employers.” He added, “They had all saved money.”

With that, colonial officials attempted to create a system whereby Indians could remit their savings back to India. This system allowed for workers to carry their savings across the globe back to India. By the 1860s, the remittance system transitioned to a method that allowed for workers to transmit their money without leaving the shores of Trinidad.

This was perhaps one of the first systems devised for sending remittances abroad. The World Bank estimated that in 2014 remittances by foreign workers to their home countries totaled approximately $583 billion. Remittances remain one of the key financial instruments for international migrants to save and provide for their families.

Perhaps Mahabir was able to save money from his years working the cane. He did not forget his family back in India. He did not forget the debt that shuttled him off the shores of his native home in the first place. Given the fact that his indebtedness drove him to leave India for the indenture colonies, his desire to remit his savings was almost a given. He wanted to ease his own debts, provide for his indebted brethren and maybe even let his people share in some of the bounty he had received. But how could he send his money abroad?

This chapter will trace the history of remittances in Trinidad. It will do so in great detail, as there exists little scholarship regarding indenture and remittances. It ends by bringing in data

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2 Harris to Grey (No. 51), 6 June 1851, in Despatches on Condition of Sugar-growing Colonies. Part III, PP 936 (1852–53), 108.


from Fiji to demonstrate how widespread the use of remittances had become. While other parts of indenture allows us to see how the global colonial processes came to the shores of the indenture colony, remittances provide a different view. In this case, indenture provided a model for the world.

**Moving Money on the Eliza Stewart**

On its way back to Calcutta, the *Eliza Stewart* stopped in Greenock, a customhouse port branch of Port Glasgow in the west central Lowlands of Scotland. The local newspaper, curious about these visitors, made note of their arrival and a more astonishing fact: their savings. In an article from the *Greenock Advertiser* reprinted in the *Port of Spain Gazette*, it was reported that

Ee-nan-Baccus, the sirdar, or chief of the party, came forward with a silk handkerchief, well loaded with ten dollar gold pieces, to the amount of upwards of £100. On taking a receipt for the amount, he put them into Captain Henderson’s hand, to take care of till required. This personage, while in Trinidad, was an overseer on an estate, and has saved fully £150. The others have saved from £60 to £70 each, and have in cash and Treasury bills along with them fully £1,700.5

There were perhaps a few embellishments in this account. In the official record of deposits, for example, Ee-nan-Baccus (or Emanbocus, as his name was spelled in the ship’s manifest) was recorded as only saving £41.19s.7d.6 Furthermore, the process of depositing was quite different from men and women supplicating a ship’s captain with silk handkerchiefs.

Nevertheless, the group passed their time in Greenock. “Ee-nan-Baccus,” they wrote, “who is dressed in a long white gown and white turban, was with a party of his friends visiting town on Saturday, and caused considerable attention as he passed along the streets.”7

While there, colonial officials also took note of the returnees. The Colonial Land and Emigration Board was told by the Greenock Emigration Officer that “great care was taken of

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5 “Ship ‘Eliza Stewart.’ Return of Coolies from Trinidad,” *Port of Spain Gazette*, August 12, 1851.
6 Enclosure 1, in Harris to Grey (No. 49), 31 May 1851, in *Despatches Part III* PP 936 (1852–53).
7 “Ship ‘Eliza Stewart,’” *Port of Spain Gazette*. 
them throughout their voyage from Trinidad.” Although two children had died en route of whooping cough, “the people have been very healthy and have expressed themselves perfectly contended and thankful for the kind treatment they have experienced since their arrival at Greenock.” From Greenock, the ship sailed to Calcutta. When they arrived, they were the handful who had completed a journey that began five years earlier: India, to the Fatel Razack, to Trinidad, to the Eliza Stewart, and finally back to India. The return of these twenty Indians, however, presented a new problem for colonial officials. What to do with their savings?

Encouraging savings went as far back as the 1824 Amelioration Proclamation in Trinidad. Recall that the Proclamation created a savings apparatus for slaves. It provided for the establishment of eight savings banks throughout Trinidad. This was seen at the time as being a convenience that even the colony’s white population did not enjoy. Unsurprisingly, it was hoped that Indians could also become thrifty savers. This was part of the desire to change the very nature of those like Mahabir. First, he would be disciplined into being a workingman. Then, he would be encouraged to save.

Of the seventeen adult Indians on board the Eliza Stewart, sixteen had taken this advice quite seriously. Between them, they had saved £1073.13s.11d. This averaged to approximately £67.0s.10d. per person, with a median savings of £51.9s.9d. Savings were not limited to men: one woman listed as “Surrowe” was able to save £16.13s.4d. This was a significant amount of money. Accounting for changes in purchasing power, £67.0s.10d. would be worth approximately

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10 Harris to Grey (No. 49), 31 May 1851, in Despatches Part III PP 936 (1852–53), 107.
11 Enclosure 1, in Ibid, 107. Calculations of mean and median savings by author.
£6,620 or about $8,200 in 2016. Given these savings, colonial officials had to devise a system for remittances—something completely novel in the mid-nineteenth century.

With the departure of the *Eliza Stewart*, colonial officials developed a rudimentary plan for remittances. It is important to remember that at this point in time, remitting savings referred to the process of transferring money to another *place* and another *currency*, but not to another *person*.

This process required each of the sixteen returnees with savings to deposit their money into the Colonial Treasury. The Treasury was to lodge the amount and note a credit under the names of the depositors. The funds were then to be remitted through the Commissariat to London, and then forwarded on to India, where they were to be available to the laborers upon their arrival.\(^\text{12}\)

This transfer of money, which seems simple to anyone with a modern bank account, required some balance on the part of colonial officials in London. What was required was a measure of coordination between the Colonial Office (which oversaw the rule of Trinidad) and the Court of Directors of the East India Company (which oversaw the rule of the East India Company in India). The Colonial Office first asked the Court of Directors whether there were any problems or objections with transmitting the indentured workers’ savings from Trinidad back to India.\(^\text{13}\) Such transactions were to be pegged at the exchange rate of 2s. to the Company’s rupee.\(^\text{14}\)

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\(^{12}\) Harris to Grey (No. 49), 31 May, 1851, in *Despatches Part III* PP 936 (1852–53), 107.

\(^{13}\) TNA CO 318/192: (East India Board) Dickinson to Elliot, 4 September 1851, enclosure in Plowden to Merivale, 9 September 1851.

\(^{14}\) TNA CO 318/192: (East India Board), Draft paragraphs proposed by the Court of Directors to be sent to the Governor General of India in Council, enclosure in Plowden to Merivale, 22 September 1851.
J.D. Dickinson, Deputy Secretary at East India House, replied that all was required for this to take effect was a copy of the names and savings balances of the returnees. If furnished with those, “the arrangement proposed can be carried into effect without difficulty.”

Upon receiving confirmation that the list of names had been sent, the Court of Directors drafted a message to the Governor-General of India, the Marquess of Dalhousie. This letter detailed the actual financial process for transferring money. Basically, the total savings had to move from the Colonial Treasury in Trinidad to the treasury of the East India House. The Assistant Secretary to the Treasury, Charles E. Trevelyan, later described in detail how this process worked. The Paymaster General in London would deposit in the East India Company’s account at the Bank of England the total sum deposited into the Commissariat Chest of the Colonial Treasury of Trinidad. With the money in the Company’s accounts, it could be paid upon arrival in India to those returning from Trinidad.

From the point of the accountant, this all seems quite simple: all that was used was a bill of exchange.

A bill of exchange was a written authorization of payment from one individual (or in this case, a branch of a government) to another. In South Asia, these were known as hundis. Hundis

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15 TNA CO 318/192: (East India Board) Dickinson to Elliot, 4 September 1851, enclosure in Plowden to Merivale, 9 September 1851.

16 TNA CO 318/192: (East India Board) Dickinson to Elliot, 18 September 1851, enclosure in Plowden to Merivale, 9 September 1851.

17 Charles Trevelyan is perhaps more famously known for his role in holding back relief during the Irish Famine. He later went on to become Governor of Madras and a member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council.

18 TNA CO 318/192: (Treasury) Trevelyan to Merivale, 27 September 1851.

were used both domestically and globally. For example, South Asian merchants in Central Asia used *hundis* to move capital from the fifteenth century onwards.\(^{20}\)

Merchants used *hundis* to weave together a network of goods, capital, as well as the communities of merchants themselves. Its benefits were clear: it alleviated the need to carry specie across the long and dangerous stretches of terrain that characterized caravan routes. It also could be used as a promissory note, as the commercial agents of the East India Company even accepted *hundis*. They often did so from certain families, and thus had the effect of socially elevating certain merchant groups.\(^{21}\) Finally, merchant groups also used *hundis* as a remittance tool to transfer money unrelated to goods and capital expenditures.\(^{22}\)

Thus, the use of bills of exchange to move money over large geographical areas has quite a deep history. However, *merchants* used these bills of exchange as financial instruments. Their usage by the general population for needs unrelated to the merchant trade was quite limited.\(^{23}\) It is important to remember that those who left India for Trinidad were often peasant cultivators. The formal banking sector was out of reach for these individuals in India. It becomes striking then, that within the five years of their indenture, these individuals were not only able to save, but used formal banking practices to transfer those savings.

When colonial officials developed a system for the remittance of savings, they created something entirely novel. Never before had bills of exchange or promissory notes been available


\(^{22}\) Habib, “Banking in Mughal India,” 8.

\(^{23}\) This differs from the modern use of the *hundi*. In the postcolonial era, the *hundi* is often used as an informal or alternative system for transferring money. It is also used in money laundering and the black market.
to the cultivating class—or any regular person for that matter—for their goals of saving and remitting. This was new territory.

Issues with the System

This method of moving money globally worked quite well and was used again. By September of the same year, 271 men, 49 women, 16 boys, and 18 girls were ready to return to India on the ship *Eliza* (this ship was unrelated to the *Eliza Stewart*). On the *Eliza*, 230 returnees had saved and deposited £3532.3s.3d. into the colonial treasury. In March 1852, 251 returnees on the ship *Clarendon* deposited £1626.3s.2d into the colonial treasury. This system was later adopted throughout the West Indies, thus avoiding the dangers of allowing returnees to carry their savings on their person. However, before (and even during) the adoption of a formal system for remittances, some Indians, perhaps feeling wary of trusting another with their life savings, chose not declare their savings and hid it in the form of silver specie with their belongings.

The ease with which money transfers were conducted through bills of exchange came to a halt in 1857. In May 1857—interestingly, the same month that the 1857 Rebellion began—the Colonial Land and Emigration Office received word that the returnees on the ship *Arabia* were, according to the Emigration Agent in Calcutta, dissatisfied with the authorities for taking possession of their savings against their wishes. The returnees further claimed a loss of Rs. 2320.3a.10p.—an amount equal to what their savings would have been if they had been allowed to bring their money as specie when returning to India.

24 Ward to Grey (No. 56), 26 September 1851, in Despatches Part III PP 936 (1852–53), 135.
25 Ward to Grey (No. 61), 13 March 1852, in Ibid., 134–135.
26 Geoghegan, *Note on Emigration*, 50.
28 TNA CO 318/215: Caird to Walcott, 8 April 1857, enclosure in Murdoch and Rogers to Merivale, 29 May 1857.
29 Ibid.
Returnees from British Guiana on the ship *Empress Eugenie* claimed a similar issue. These returnees were reported to have prevented officials from taking possession of their savings until they were promised that “they should receive in India the full value of the Dollars they deposited, according to the rate of exchange in India at the time of their arrival.”\(^{30}\)

The returnees were to be compensated for the loss they received, but in the meanwhile, the Emigration Agent’s letter was to be forwarded to Trinidad and British Guiana to help figure out how to transfer money without issues with exchange rates.\(^{31}\)

The problem at the heart of this confusion was that the returnees were carrying several currencies, including silver dollars. Thus, the issue lay in the discrepancy between the value of silver in Trinidad versus its value in India. In Trinidad, the silver dollar was pegged to 4s.2d. However, in India, selling the silver dollar could net more (or less) than 4s.2d. The Indian Rupee was a silver-backed currency. If the value of silver in India was more than its value in Trinidad, the returnee stood to make a profit.

What remains surprising about this exchange is the degree to which the returnees had become savvy financial actors. Not only had they been able to save some of their earnings to take back with them to India, but they also had the wherewithal to take advantage methods of exchanging money. Their complaint rested upon a calculation of exchange rates and they felt that something did not add up. They felt wronged, lodged complaints with colonial officials, and were able to receive compensation for their loss.

In response to this issue, the Governor of British Guiana devised a solution, which was then forwarded to the Governor Keate of Trinidad via London. His idea was to always peg a

\(^{30}\) TNA CO 318/215: Murdoch and Rogers to Merivale, 29 May 1857.

\(^{31}\) Keate to Labouchere, 6 August 1857, in *Correspondence between Colonial Office and Governors of W. Indian Colonies and Mauritius*, PP 31 31-I (1859 Session 2), 304.
dollar to 4s.2d. However Governor Keate went further. He determined that all payments to Indians were to be in Pounds Sterling “and if by any accident a coolie receives a silver dollar in payment from his employer, he receives it at its legal value of 4s. 2d.”

He then went on to complain that “should a coolie from that predilection for silver dollars which distinguishes his class, become a purchaser of them [silver dollars], he generally suffers a loss; why is the Government to make up the loss to him if he afterwards chooses to pay into the treasury those very dollars which he has purchased, and on which, by his own act he suffered a loss . . . ?”

There would be no celebrations regarding evidence of a successful social experiment. These indentured laborers, after all, had demonstrated incredible financial savvy. Instead of recognizing this, they were blamed for having a faulty character. There would have been no problem to deal with in the first place if they did not innately desire silver specie. With such a conclusion, Governor Keate made it clear that there would be no more attempts by the colonial government to subsidize currency speculation.

However, issues with exchange rates and silver speculation were not the only problems that beset the new system of remittances. In 1858, following the return of the ship *Eveline* back to India, it was discovered that the bill sent from Trinidad via London was for the amount of £5389.5s.5d. However, officials in Trinidad found that only £5142.16s.1d. was paid out in India. The difference was due to two returnees. Those two claimed to the Protector of Immigrants in India that they had lost their deposit receipt en route. One, Shibram, claimed he had deposited

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
£21.1s.8d. and another, Narainer, claimed £2.0s.0d. Due to the authorization granted in the *Arabia* incident, the Protector simply paid them out their due without question. 34

The real issue at stake was that offices in India had no way of double-checking amounts in a timely manner. However, every indentured immigrant was assigned a number upon arrival in Trinidad. This was known as his or her registered number. The number corresponded to the number next to their name in the register of arrival of immigrants and could be cross-referenced to the laborer’s emigration pass. The pass was given to the laborer upon departure from India to the indenture colony. Importantly, each pass detailed personal and ethnographic information indentured workers. 35

In the future, it was decided that in addition to deposit receipts, (which were “were of no value to the coolie whatever, as they were neither numbered nor otherwise entered in the Treasury in a manner that might admit of their being verified by the holder in case of his paper

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34 Mitchell to Johnston, 12 October 1858, enclosure in Keate to Lytton (No. 39), 12 October 1858, in *Correspondence between Colonial Office and Governors of W. Indian Colonies and Mauritius* PP 31 31-I (1859 Session 2), 367.

35 The use of the registered number marked a shift in colonial rule. By cataloging indentured workers with their registered number, colonial administrators put to work a form of governance based upon cataloging and enumeration. Each worker could be called up based upon a number. That number would detail ethnographic minutia about that individual.

This kind of thinking was a hallmark of colonial power after the mid-century rebellions. Challenges to British rule, such as the 1857 Rebellion in South Asia created a turning point in the liberal imperial project. From that point on, difference was not merely a challenge to a liberal order. Instead, it was what defined colonial subjects. Difference became the basis for colonial rule and it was systematized through science, archeology, language, and gender.

It led to new practices as well. As Arjun Appadurai found as he examined the enumerative practices of the state, “there is of course no easy generalization to be made about the degree to which the effort to organize the colonial project around the idea of essentialized and enumerated communities made inroads into the practical consciousness of colonial subjects in India.” More importantly, he noted that “while certain components of the colonial state were active propagators of the discourse of group identity, others such as those involved with education, law, and moral reform, were implicated in the creation of what might be called a colonial bourgeois subject, conceived as an ‘individual.’”

Here, the state was not necessarily creating the colonial bourgeois subject. Instead, it was using the registered number to catalogue individuals as indentured laborers to ensure that they adhered to the normative standard of the law. The indentured laborer became a number.

being lost”) the Colonial Treasury in Trinidad would also furnish a list of all savings received cross-checked to the returnee’s registered number. With that, we can see the establishment of a more or less uniform system of transmitting money as an immigrant returned back to India. Uniformity allowed for the ground to be laid for the next phase of remittances.

*Sending Money Across the Sea*

A modern system of remittances involves not simply bringing money back on a return voyage, but rather sending money back at any time. By 1860, we can see the beginnings of this kind this system. In the “Report of the Agent General of Immigrants for the Year 1859,” Henry Mitchell, the Agent General of Immigrants, noted the success of a novel means of remitting money. In the Report, he wrote

> The arrangements entered into between the Colonial Bank here and the Oriental Bank Corporation in Calcutta are such as must in future tend greatly to the convenience and satisfaction of immigrants wishing to transmit money to their friends in India; it will also preclude any misunderstanding in remitting the savings of return Coolies—a matter of some consequence, as scarcely a ship has sailed hence to India without creating on arrival there, both discussion as to the amounts deposited here and delay in settling them.

Mitchell was referring to a relationship formed with the Oriental Bank Corporation (OBC). The OBC was founded in 1842 as the Bank of Western India. In 1845, it changed its name to the Oriental Bank, and in 1851, reorganized itself as a chartered bank and changed its name yet again to the Oriental Bank Corporation. The bank operated in India, Ceylon, and China and was one of the pre-eminent financial operations east of the Cape of Good Hope. Indeed, it was at the center of financial transactions in South and East Asia due to its credit-worthiness for bills of exchange drawn up in both its London and its Eastern branches.

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36 Mitchell to Johnston, enclosure in Keate to Lytton, 12 October 1858, in *Correspondence between Colonial Office and Governors of W. Indian Colonies and Mauritius* PP 31 31-I (1859 Session 2), 368.


38 Toshio Suzuki, “The Rise and Decline of the Oriental Bank Corporation, 1842–84,” in *The Origins of International Banking in Asia*, ed. Shizuya Nishimura, Toshio Suzuki, and Ranald C. Michie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 92. As recounted by Suzuki, the actual transactions involving the OBC were a bit more
The new relationship with the OBC had two immediate impacts on the system of remittances. The first was that immigrants were now able to send money to India at any time. They no longer had to wait until their indentures were completed to send their money back home. Secondly, this new system removed from the equation using bills drawn from the East India Company in India House in London. This most likely had to do with the disestablishment of the Company following the 1857 Rebellion. Without the Company, the Colonial Treasury in Trinidad needed a new method of sending remittances abroad. By cutting out the middleman, colonial officials hoped that the system of remittances could proceed without the confusion seen in the cases of the return ship *Arabia* or *Eveline*.

There were also some fringe benefits to this arrangement. By establishing a method of sending savings abroad without having to lose laborers to a return passage, the indenture colony had devised a way to prevent the depletion of its labor reserves.

By the 1860s, indenture colonies in the West Indies had established a uniform system for sending remittances. The regulations for British Guiana mirrored that of Trinidad (minus one difference in terms of exchange—British Guiana continued to make remittances in dollars, while Trinidad used Pounds Sterling). The instructions on sending money from British Guiana required that savings remitted to India could be deposited with sums no less than $10 and no more than $100. Each deposit had to have an accompanying form specifying the name, sex, caste, registered number, ship, year of arrival, residence, relationship to the payee, and occupation of the remitter and the name, father’s name, caste, *zilā* (division), *parganā* (district), *thānā*

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complicated due to its charter. The OBC in London was allowed to receive money from customers, but not pay across the counter. Thus, when the OBC paid bills of exchange drawn on its London office, it did so through the offices of the Union Bank of London (UBL). When they received bills of exchange, they were paid to the credit of the OBC account at the UBL.
(subdistrict), mauza (village), and occupation of the payee in India. The instructions noted that the payment would be located at the zilā treasury in India.\textsuperscript{39}

However, these remittances were rife with problems. Very often, payees in India failed to acknowledge or respond to remittances and letters sent to India.\textsuperscript{40} Possible reasons for such lack of response could have included illiteracy in British Guiana, resulting in remittance slips filled out incorrectly. Other reasons could have included a lack of awareness in India that a relative that had departed, or even internal migration and displacement in India.\textsuperscript{41}

**Money Orders and Remittances**

Officials in India also had problems with paying out remittances. In a Home Department circular sent to the West Indian colonies, Indian officials bemoaned the fact that they were to pay out remittances within one month of receiving them in India. They complained that it was extremely difficult in figuring out which district or village the remittance was to be sent to.

Even the method used to transfer money was time consuming. As described in the circular: “the Agent gets his letters of advice he has to pay the money order to the Accountant-General, while the Accountant-General has to test each amount and then remit the letters of advice to the Mofussil Treasury.” Both issues led them to ask for two changes: to increase the time to pay out remittances from one month to two months and to require “special care” in recording the remittance’s beneficiary.\textsuperscript{42}

The system described above was known as the money order system. It was developed in 1866 by Stephen Walcott, who at the time was the Secretary in the Colonial Land & Emigration


\textsuperscript{40} Roopnarine, “The Other Side of Indo-Caribbean Indenture,” 666.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 666–68.

\textsuperscript{42} TNA CO 318/251: Bayley to the Under-Secretary to the Government of India, 8 February 1867, enclosure in Merivale to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 11 April 1867.
Office. He modeled it on the system of domestic money orders in use in the United Kingdom. In 1792, members of the British Postal Service operating under a private firm developed the domestic system of money orders. In 1838, the money order system became a branch of the post office. By 1859, there were nearly seven million money orders sent throughout Britain through the postal service. In that same year, the money order was extended to Canada. Thus, while a codified system for labor remittances was developed in the context of those returning to India from their indenture contracts, its further development and perfection was tied to an increasing circulation of people around the world in the context of the British Empire.

However, this was still a monumental development and was perhaps the first time working people were able to send money abroad. The Western Union Corporation was established in 1871 and the Imperial Postal Order Service in 1904. Indenture remittances predated other forms of mass global remittances.

Walcott’s plan was soon sanctioned by the Colonial Office and was put into effect in the West Indian and other indenture colonies. However, unlike the other West Indian colonies, Trinidad initially hesitated in using the money order system as the primary means for remitting money abroad.

In 1873, the Commissioner of Patna informed the Government of Bengal that the Colonial Bank of Trinidad was receiving money from Indian laborers for remittance to India. However, instead of giving bills drawn upon Indian Banks, they gave sets drawn upon the

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43 TNA CO 384/105 no 92: Minutes of Stephen Walcott, 25 August 1875.
45 Ibid.
47 TNA CO 384/105 no 92: Minutes of Stephen Walcott.
Colonial Bank of London. To explain: a bill in a foreign currency tended to be drawn in multiple parts. To ensure the safety of the bill, these parts were sent via separate mails. This was known as drawing a bill in a set—one bill of exchange was made up of several parts or sets. In this case, the problem was that while a bill drawn on an Indian bank could be cashed in full when only the first set was offered, a bill drawn on a London bank could only be cashed when all sets were received and offered by the payee. Many remittance recipients only received the first bill in the set, rendering the remittance worthless.

This represented two steps backwards for Trinidad. Not only were the eschewing the use of the money order remittance, but they were also continuing to use a London-based bank, even though they had proclaimed a relationship with the Oriental Bank Corporation thirteen years prior. Why the sudden about face? The manager of the Colonial Bank in Trinidad wrote in response that Trinidad still maintained a relationship with the various branches of the Oriental Bank Corporation. However, he had found that most Indians in Trinidad rarely made use of remittances. They instead preferred to take their money with them back to India. However, the issue was more complex than that for those who wished to remit money overseas. As he described it:

… the applicant has been informed and apparently not able otherwise to understand, this has frequently been done through the instrumentality of an Interpreter from the Emigration Office here, that the Bank would give him a Bill on Calcutta, or elsewhere in India, but subject to a rather a heavy charge, say one of not less than 4 per cent which necessarily has to be made to cover the risks of Exchanges between the two places and other charges, and thereupon the applicant has preferred to take the Bills on the Colonial Bank in London which he could procure at a lower rate.

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48 TNA CO 318/269: Mackenzie to the Secretary to the Government of India, 2 October 1873, enclosure in Merivale to the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 28 November 1873.

49 Ibid.

50 TNA CO 384/102 no 61: Hicks to Bushe, 24 February 1874, enclosure in Longden to Kimberley, 25 February 1874. Emphasis in text.

51 Ibid.
The indentured laborer once again proved his financial knowledge. When faced with the prospect of dealing with an exchange fee of approximately four percent, those who wanted to remit used an alternative system so they could save on fees. Nevertheless, colonial officials in London wished for Trinidad to adopt, for ease of use across colonies, the money order system created in 1866. As a series of errors would show, this would be harder than they thought.

Less than a year later, another deposit had been made through Trinidad’s use of what was increasingly viewed as an antiquated system of remitting money. In this case, an indentured immigrant sent a small sum of money to India for a friend. The Agent-General of Immigrants and the Receiver General in Trinidad could not figure out the closest Treasury Office to the remittance’s recipient. So, they decided to simply remit money through the Emigration Agency in India, which were located in Calcutta and Madras.

They recommended the same after a mix up in 1877. Bahadur, an immigrant in Trinidad, tried to send Rs.145.13a.4p. to Jowaheer, his friend in, India. Jowaheer was unable to receive the money. In response, officials in Trinidad recommended a system whereby money could be simply transmitted through the Emigration Agency.

This time, London was more forceful in its reply. It recommended that Trinidad should clearly and regularly adopt the regulations set forth in 1866. In his minutes on the dispatch from Trinidad, Stephen Walcott argued against using the Emigration Agency because “the object the present Regulations have in view is not the convenience of Capitalists, but to provide the Coolies a safe, uniform, and less expensive mode of remitting their savings to India with as little interference as possible on the part of the Government with ordinary banking and mercantile

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52 Others too noted the lack of use of remittances to friends at any time. See also Geoghegan, Note on Emigration, 50.
53 TNA CO 384/105 no 92: Irving to Carnarvon, 24 July 1875.
54 TNA CO 384/114 no 15: Bushe to Carnarvon, 26 January 1877.
business.” An extraordinary statement—Walcott made claim to creating a system that would guarantee indentured workers the ability to safely and easily transfer their savings around the globe.

From then on, there seemed to be little problem in remitting money from indenture colonies back to India. Indeed, from the start of indenture in Fiji, immigrants were able to remit money through local offices of the Bank of New Zealand (the premier banking institution in the colony) to friends in India, and did so every year.56

By the 1860s and 1870s, colonial officials developed a modern system for remitting money worldwide. This system shows a remarkable similarity to remittances made through Western Union or MoneyGram today (or a post office remittance in days past): a worker living abroad used gave their money to an overseas branch (here, the colonial offices in Trinidad) and filled out a form. After the money was received in the home country (in this case either at the Emigration Agency or the local Treasury Office), the money was given to the recipient of the remittance.

By amassing remittance data from various annual reports on immigration from Trinidad and Fiji, it becomes possible to calculate how much money immigrants were sending annually, as well as how many remittances were being sent. Above all, the table shows that, with little exception, immigrants began using remittances in increasing numbers year after year (in both the number of remittances and the amount of money remitted to India). It was clear that by the late-nineteenth century, the remittance system had developed into a financially reliable way for individuals to send money back to India.

55 TNA CO 384/114 no 15: Minutes of Stephen Walcott, 23 February 1877.
56 NAF CSO MP 1883/564.
Table 1: Remittance Data for Fiji and Trinidad, 1882–1918

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Fiji</th>
<th>Trinidad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>£13</td>
<td>£1,276.8s.4d. by 222 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>£2,087.3s.11d. by 459 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>£2,206.11s.8/10d. by 524 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>£84.4s.6d. by 10 immigrants</td>
<td>£2,052.14s.10d. by 482 immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>£282.4s.8d. by 30 immigrants</td>
<td>£1,899.1s.3/10d. by 479 immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>£324.8s.0d. by 54 immigrants</td>
<td>£2,030.11s.2d. by 515 immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>£242.15s.0d. by 47 immigrants</td>
<td>£1,818.3s.3d by 505 immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>£349.0s.0d. by 65 immigrants</td>
<td>£1,965.19s.0/10d. by 560 immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>£426.19s.0d. by 61 immigrants</td>
<td>£2,213.10s.5d. by 608 immigrants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount Paid</th>
<th>Number of Immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>£546.10s.0d. by 102 immigrants</td>
<td>£1,468.10s.2½d. by 382 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>£677.1s.3d. by 132 immigrants</td>
<td>£2,074.12s.7½d. by 559 immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>£447.0s.0d. by 119 immigrants</td>
<td>£2,512.17s.2½d. by 382 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>£1,292.17s.8d. by 230 immigrants</td>
<td>£2,030.11s.2½d. by 683 immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>£1,022.4s.10d. by 196 immigrants</td>
<td>£2,829.17s.5½d. by 879 immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>£1,553.5s.0d. by 308 immigrants</td>
<td>£4,542.18s.11d. by 1,853 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>£2,650.7s.4d. by 590 immigrants</td>
<td>£3,616.11s.2d. by 1,213 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>£1,920.11s.0d. by 444 immigrants</td>
<td>£2,781.16s.7d. by 998 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>£1,595.10s.0d. by 374 immigrants</td>
<td>£2,910.12s.0d. by 903 immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>£1,716.1s.0d. by 383 immigrants</td>
<td>£2,960.3s.9d by 1029 immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>£1,718.16s.4d. by 386 immigrants</td>
<td>£2,314.4s.5d. by 883 immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>£2,113.9s.10d. by 452 immigrants</td>
<td>£2,416.0s.2d. by 853 immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>£2,336.13s.0d. by 446 immigrants</td>
<td>£2,478.18s.0d. by 905 immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>£1,968.19s.0d. by 389 immigrants</td>
<td>£3,013.14s.3d. by 1208 immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>£2,516.16s.7d. by 473 immigrants</td>
<td>£3,413.7s.10d. by 1,053 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>£1,882.1s.0d. by 388 immigrants</td>
<td>£2,872.16s.10d. by 888 immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>£2,996.12s.4d. by 587 immigrants</td>
<td>£3,227.0s.2d. by 1003 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>£3,027.12s.0d. by 684 immigrants</td>
<td>£3,491.13s.4d. by 1072 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>£3,534.14s.0d. by 761 immigrants</td>
<td>£3,800.7s.4d by 1056 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>£3,146.5s.6d. by 721 immigrants</td>
<td>£3,990.0s.4d. by 1116 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>£3,364.17s.6d. by 762 immigrants</td>
<td>£3,624.18s.3d. by 936 immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>£3,834.16s.0d. by 844 immigrants</td>
<td>£3,731.19s.6d by 845 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>£3,876.16s.0d. by 886 immigrants</td>
<td>£4,534.18s.6d. by 979 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>£4,419.17s.0d. by 707 immigrants</td>
<td>£4,541.11s.2d. by 765 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>£3,391.7s.4d. by 549 immigrants</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>£3,243.10s.4d. by 594 immigrants</td>
<td>£4,134.8s.2d. by 727 immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>£3,044.1s.0d. by 491 immigrants</td>
<td>£4,500.2s.9d. (no count given for number)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>£2,422.3s.2d. by 375 immigrants</td>
<td>£4,494.14s.10d. (no count given for number)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lost in the Mail

Whether these remittances were actually received remained an entirely different question.

Records of letters between India and indenture colonies are scant. However, there exist a few records of letters sent from India to Trinidad. These were sent to (or from) Trinidad via the Emigration Agency in Calcutta. Many were from family members in India asking for any news.

59 From 1909–1913, the Annual Reports listed the number of recipients in India rather than the number of remittances sent. The number of remittances for these years was taken from NAF Legislative Council, Council Paper No. 20, 15.
of their relatives. There exists one letter, however, that gives some insight into the remittance process. On May 26th, 1913, Hossein Ali, an indentured immigrant on an estate in Santa Cruz, sent a letter to the Indian government in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh. In it, he wrote (all errors are original to the letter):

I the undersigne hereby forward my petition to you praying it may be considered to your best interests. Sir the money I send to Siad Mohamed Abdoala in Ghari Wali Cothi I have never receive a reply as yet, which is about six months so I beg most respectfully to investigate the matter the reason why my reply delayed to long I also wright again twice. To find out why my answer is delayed I haven’t receive no answer up to this time. So I will like you to find out for me what is rong. Nothing more.60

In reply, the Trinidad Emigration Agent made it clear that “the Indian emigrants in Trinidad make remittances to their friends in India direct” and that “nothing is known in this office of the money referred to.”61 As previously noted in this chapter, this was a common experience for many remitters in the British Caribbean, perhaps owing to internal displacement and migration in South Asia.

However, money was not simply sent one way. In 1901, the Annual Reports on Immigration from Fiji begin to mention remittances sent via the Emigration Agent in Calcutta to Fiji. In the 1901 report, for example, the Agent-General for Immigrants wrote “five persons were paid £203 7s. 1d. deposited with the Emigration Agent for remittance. Of these, two came as immigrants bringing £91 19s. 2d. between them.”62 Thus, while some used this method of sending money out of India as a way of taking savings before their journey, others used it to send money to Fiji.

60 NATT: Letters from India, enclosure in No. 1095/1133, July 24, 1913. Grammatical and spelling errors in text.
61 Enclosure in Ibid.
A few instances of money being sent from India to Trinidad can be found in the letters between India and Trinidad. For example, in one letter from 1908, Mohamed Nasir, an indentured immigrant who had arrived in 1904, wrote to India from Princes Town, Trinidad:

I beg to inform you that by the last mail I procured a letter from my father Abdul Kabir Khan from Gorakhpur, informing me that he has sent me five hundred and sixty Rupees through the Immigration Agency of Calcutta, for me, in your care, as passage money for me, my wife and child. I shall be glad to hear from you to know the particulars as I would like to sail by the next boat going on to India. This letter allows us to see a slice of life of indentured Indians in Trinidad. The Emigration Agent noted that Nasir had met and married his wife in Trinidad. The couple, according to the letter, had had a child together. Nasir had then been in contact with his father, who had enough of a social standing to be able to put together a considerable sum of money to allow Nasir and his family to return to India before the completion of their ten years of industrial residence (allowing them a subsidized journey back home). In this case, the Emigration Agent found that the money had been received in India and sent onwards to Trinidad. Like those who had boarded the Eliza Stewart fifty-seven years prior, Nasir and his family was to sail back to India. This time, he brought no money with him. Instead, the money for his return had been sent across the sea to Trinidad.

This chapter has explored the details surrounding the development of a system for remittances in Indian indenture. Given the fact that many Indians came to the indenture colonies saddled with debt obligations in India, it was no surprise that many of them wished to remit their savings back to India. The failed promises of colonial reform projects—in this case, the project of land tenure in South Asia—would continually reverberate throughout the Empire. Here, a new system for sending money across the globe was born.

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63 NATT: Letters from India, enclosure in No. 725/1086, July 31, 1908.
This chapter found that the early system of remittances allowed for Indians to take their savings back on return ships to India. This later turned into a way for Indians to send money back to India without leaving the colony. This system, quite similar to modern remittances, was in fact developed five years prior to the introduction of Western Union and thirty-eight years prior to the Imperial Postal Money Order Service. The history of the world—and of finance—was never the same.
Chapter Four
*Settling the Land*

Figure 2: People at work in a cane field during the period of harvesting, undated (Source: *TS – (36)*, The West Indiana Collection, The Alma Jordan Library, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago)

Mahabir had saved his earnings. He had been able to send some back to friends and family back in India. But his thrift was unmatched. He had money left to use when his indenture came to an end. But what was he to do next? Did he want to return to India or stay in Trinidad? If he was to stay in Trinidad, where could he settle? Could he buy land?

Questions around land settlement, tenure, and taxation travelled throughout the globe in the British Empire. As previously discussed, the questions surrounding land tenure in South Asia, for example were raised almost immediately after the East India Company (EIC) began to annex territory in South Asia. After the Battles of Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1764), the EIC claimed
the right to collect land revenue on behalf of the Mughal Emperor. But how could they divide, tax, and sell land parcels to generate money? Debates on land tenure would continue from that point well through the nineteenth century.

This chapter builds off the idea that land tenure policies in Trinidad for indentured Indians was deeply embedded in this debate. These policies were taken across the globe and given a new context in Indian indenture. The ghosts of indebted peasants would now haunt the indenture system. In Trinidad, land tenure policy took the form of land settlement grants. These grants operated on the principle that Indians could settle in Trinidad if they gave up their right to a government-aided journey back to India upon the completion of their indentures.

This chapter finds that the first ideas surrounding land grants were developed in the late 1840s. However, much like the remittance system described in the previous chapter, land grants did not begin to take off until the 1860s, changing its rationale along the way.

**Land, Labor, Revenue**

In 1846, William Gladstone, then Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, reflected on the state of Indian indenture in Mauritius. He found troubling “the importation of human beings as simple organs of labour, and in no other capacity.” Indenture would be a moral hazard to the humanity of the indentured Indians if they were given “no other through or hope whatever than a return with the proceeds of their toil after a given time to their former home.”¹ For Gladstone, there was a moral hazard in not considering the humanity of the indentured Indians.

His successor, Earl Grey, picked up on the criticism that indenture without consideration to the individual was a moral hazard. Some of this criticism was a result of the successful lobbying of the British Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS), who sought to rid the indenture

¹ Gladstone to Gomm (No. 36), 14 May 1846 in *Returns relating to Labouring Population Part II*, PP 691-II (1846), 216.
system of skewed sex ratios between men and women, as well as the general transient nature of
the indenture enterprise. Grey sought ways to diminish “the evil . . . that a large portion of the
labourers in the colony will be attached to it by no permanent tie.” Grey found a solution to this
problem from a suggestion made by the Committee of the Council on Immigration. The
Committee had stated that “it would be highly advantageous to the colony to encourage the
settlement of Indians in villages, where they might become permanent residents, ready to render
their labor when it is wanted, and forming a nucleus for the settlement of other immigrants as
they arrive.” The Committee thought it would be advantageous to the colony if Indians were
settled in villages. These villages could then help newer immigrants assimilate as they arrived.

While this dissertation does not concern itself with the negotiations between the Colonial
Office and the BFASS, the ideas of permanent settlement should can also be located in a larger
class of a capitulation to the indenture project. By the 1840s, the BFASS transitioned from an
anti to a pro-indenture stance. In this case, London policy-makers, and BFASS members agreed
on one thing: indenture, if properly regulated, could lead to the uplift of Indian laborers. That is,
the BFASS tried to influence the details of indentured labor migration in order to eventually
prove the superiority of free labor over slave labor in the post-emancipation era.

In this case, the encouragement of settlements offered a chance to placate BFASS
demands as well as solve what the Colonial Office had determined to be a moral issue of migrant
transience. Case in point, Grey thought the idea of settlement wonderful and added that these

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2 Anil Persaud, “The Civility of Things: ‘Unnatural Practices’ and the Making of Value(s) in the British Sugar
3 Grey to Gomm (No. 3), 29 September 1846, in Correspondence relative to Supply of Labour PP 325 (1847), 146.
4 Ibid.
5 While this dissertation is not concered with the relationship between indenture and the BFASS, the premier text on
this matter remains Madhavi Kale’s Fragments of Empire.
6 Kale, Fragments of Empire, 132.
settlements were similar to the village communities found in India “from the earliest times.” He noted that the new Indian villages in indenture colonies could emulate these protean villages even further by vesting power in a “head man” who could assist in the payment of the village’s land-value taxes to the government. The first suggestions for settling Indians in indenture colonies were made in reference to raising revenue. Land revenue had been a concern in South Asia. Trinidad was no different.

Grey suggested that emigration officials could get in touch with potential headmen in India, who would then be asked to prepare groups of 100 to 200 men (with their wives and families). These groups would then move into prepared villages in Mauritius. Such villages would have “a moderate quantity of land” from “the cultivation of which the emigrants would derive a portion of at least their support.” Most importantly, however, “the new village community so established should be subjected to the payment of a fixed annual sum to the colonial revenue.” Making note to land tenure reforms in South Asia, Grey wrote, “The labouring population of India are well accustomed to such payments.” There too was a requisite amount of lip service to the liberal project. Grey argued that the payments received could pay for children’s education.

This letter was the same one referred to earlier with regard to Grey’s difficulties with laws that curtailed the freedom of movement of indentured Indians. This letter was forwarded to all governors of West Indian colonies in a circular dispatch dated a month later. Trinidad

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7 Ibid., 146–147.
8 Ibid., 148.
9 Ibid.
10 See Chapter Two.
11 Grey to Governors of the West Indian Colonies (No. 2), 23 October 1846, in Correspondence relative to Supply of Labour PP 325 (1847), 1.
took up the cause of land settlement quite quickly. By February 1847, Governor Harris included a clause in the new immigration ordinance to allow for immigrants to “commute his right to a free passage for the value in land of the cost of such passage.” All lands were to be crown lands sold at the upset price (the minimum sale price of a property as determined by the state). In 1847, the upset price for crown lands had been set at £2 per acre. While no reference was made in the ordinance to how much the return passage cost in 1847, a return passage on the Eliza Stewart (the first ship to send immigrants back to India) cost £20. Of that, £10 covered the cost to return to England, while the remaining £10 covered the trip from England to Calcutta. If immigrants were allowed to commute the full value of their return passage, they could theoretically settle on ten acres of land.

Earl Grey found that the downside to such legislation was that it involved the “making of a grant . . . to persons who could have been content without such an inducement to remain.” Nevertheless, he found there to be a “greatly prepondering advantage” to inducing immigrants to settle in Trinidad, and that outweighed “any objection of this kind which may be raised against the proposed exchange.” That is, his criticism focused on the fact that this scheme provided a grant to all Indians, including those who would have stayed absent any land bonus. This objection was outweighed by the benefits of convincing Indians remain in the colony.

And indeed, Trinidad had the land to support a land grant scheme. In 1851, the island colony only had a population of 68,600 with a density of approximately twenty-eight people per

12 No. 3.—Trinidad.—1847, enclosure in Harris to Grey (No. 15), 18 February 1847, in Ibid., 115.
14 Harris to Grey (No. 48), 28 March 1851, in Despatches Part III, PP 936 (1852–53), 106.
15 Grey to Harris (No. 16), 19 April 1847, in Correspondence relative to Supply of Labour PP 325 (1847), 121.
square mile. Most of the islands 1.5 million acres were unalienated Crown Lands.\textsuperscript{16} Given such conditions, the ordinance was passed and put into law.\textsuperscript{17}

Land commutation was an ingenious idea to raise revenue from surplus labor. Indians who had completed their indentures were, in essence, no longer relevant. If they returned to India, the colony lost laborers who had developed years of skill and know-how on the plantations. Beyond that, planters and the state also had to pay for the journey back to South Asia, resulting in a drain of economic resources on the colony. At the same time, the cost of the return journey was paid for at a ratio of two-thirds borne by the planters and one-third by the state. A return journey and repatriation was between £17 and £20 per person—a considerable sum.\textsuperscript{18}

If these workers stayed, the planters and colony could save on costs related to return journeys. However, these workers were often quite expensive. Their wages were dictated by the labor market rather than by the indenture contract. Allowing for Indians to settle provided for a solution to all these problems. Indians could stay and theoretically become part of an experienced labor reserve. This allowed for plantation owners to call upon laborers who could work through the seasonal fluctuations in labor importation (before the advent of the steam ship, labor migration was dictated by the post-monsoon wind patterns in South Asia). This year-round population could perform agricultural tasks on the plantation outside of the labor-intensive planting season.\textsuperscript{19}

However, if the workers chose to leave the plantation, the colony could still stand to profit. The nearly 1.5 million acres of surplus land in Trinidad could be put to productive use.

\textsuperscript{16} Marianne D. Ramesar, “Patterns of Regional Settlement and Economic Activity By Immigrant Groups in Trinidad: 1851-1900,” \textit{Social and Economic Studies} 25, no. 3 (September 1, 1976): 188.

\textsuperscript{17} TNA CO 297/4: Trinidad, No. 3—1847, “An Ordinance for promoting Immigration into the Colony of Trinidad, and the Industry of Immigrants,” §4.

\textsuperscript{18} Roopnarine, “The Other Side of Indo-Caribbean Indenture,” 209.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 210.
Once the land was put to use, the state could then collect land-value taxes on their property. With such benefits, the debates on land tenure and revenue found an open home in Trinidad.

As was seen in the introduction, the desire to create a system for the collection of land-value taxes—various schemes for permanent settlement—had far reaching implications. The same could be said of the schemes present in Trinidad. First, the British could avoid the creation of an indebted peasantry could be sidestepped here. They could create a system for land settlement that not only allowed for maximal revenue, but also allowed for Indians to become something beyond indebted serfs. In this case, land settlement allowed for the creation of a class of individuals to emerge from the plantation system and not repeat the experience of former slaves. In the eyes of the colonial state, Indians were an opportunity—they could become a citizenry. This was in distinction to freed blacks, who were often viewed as savage and barbarous.

But let us not forget that landownership was also viewed as a boon by the Indians themselves. The burden of debt had either stripped them of their land in South Asia or rendered their relationship to the land obscured by the contingencies of loan repayment. With the trauma of debt fresh in their minds, many Indians took up the offer to own land in their new colonial home. What had been denied to them in India would become theirs in Trinidad. But we should be mindful that this decision was always influenced by on the ground realities. Some Indians chose to remain on the plantations that had previously worked on in order to continue to access medical services and guaranteed employment. Others made a calculation that the semi-arable

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21 Bridget Brereton, Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 196.

22 Roopnarine, “The Other Side of Indo-Caribbean Indenture,” 216.
and/or difficult-to-manage lands offered to them were simply too much work—the plantation was a better way of life for them.\textsuperscript{23} 

Thus, Harris’ settlement scheme should be seen in the context of the intersections of labor, cultural change, and personal improvement. However, though the ordinance passed, historians have argued that it was quickly forgotten and there was no attempt to implement the law.\textsuperscript{24} Indentured immigration to Trinidad had come to a halt 1848 due to the financial crisis of 1847–8. However, by 1851, immigration began once again.\textsuperscript{25} Thus, the 1847 Ordinance was quickly overshadowed by the colony’s financial crisis. Nevertheless, its terms were not forgotten.

The sale of Crown Lands was under the supervision of the Court of Intendant. According to its records, 3,423 acres were sold from 1847 to 1865. In the grand scheme of 1.5 million acres of available land, this was truly a small sum. However, it still proves that Crown Land sales were active.\textsuperscript{26}

More proof of active commutations can be found in 1850 with the departure of the Eliza Stewart back to India. Governor Harris hoped that some of the returnees would “prefer to accept the value of their passage in land, and will remain in the colony.”\textsuperscript{27} However, in a letter sent two weeks later, he mentioned wishing to have given a cash payment or “offered the amount of passage-money instead of land to those who would prefer it.”\textsuperscript{28} Earl Grey refused to consider cash payments, saying “the objections to it seem to me to be too strong to make it expedient to

\textsuperscript{23} Roopnarine, “Indian Migration during Indentured Servitude in British Guiana and Trinidad, 1850–1920,” 181. 
\textsuperscript{24} Look Lai, \textit{Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar}, 228. 
\textsuperscript{25} Brereton, \textit{A History of Modern Trinidad}, 101. 
\textsuperscript{26} Klass, \textit{East Indians in Trinidad}, 30. 
\textsuperscript{27} Harris to Grey (No. 27), 11 October 1850, in \textit{Despatches Part III. PP 936 (1852–53)}, 45. 
\textsuperscript{28} Harris to Grey (No. 29), 26 October 1850, in Ibid, 46.
This disagreement allows us to see that the colony had at least been offering a commutation deal of six acres of land to formerly-indentured Indians.\textsuperscript{30}

While historians have contended that the difficulties to acquiring Crown Lands were a significant obstacle for Indian immigrants, such conclusions have to be qualified.\textsuperscript{31} It may have been difficult to acquire land, but it was not outside the realm of possibility. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the process was slow and cumbersome. Between 1847 and 1865, there were only a total of 779 grants of Crown Lands, 427 of which were agricultural grants.\textsuperscript{32} As previously noted, these sales totaled 3,423 acres.

The first ships to return to India began to sail in 1851. An examination of the acreage of Crown Land sales between 1850 and 1851 shows a noticeable jump from one grant of a total of five acres in 1850 to fifty grants of a total of thirty acres in 1851. This number continually fluctuated from sixty-five grants for a total of 126 acres in 1852 to twenty grants of a total of sixteen acres in 1853.\textsuperscript{33} It cannot be said with complete certainty that many of these grants were for Indians who chose to commute their return passage for land. However, it is safe to say that sales were occurring, and it is possible that some of these were to Indians.

\textit{Transitions}

In 1854, Trinidad passed a new Indian immigration ordinance. For reasons not quite known, this ordinance did not include a provision for the right to commute a return passage for acreages of

\begin{itemize}
\item Grey to Harris (No. 27), 30 November 1850, in Ibid., 177
\item Wood and Rogers to Merivale, 30 November 1850, enclosure in Ibid., 178.
\item Ibid., 51.
\end{itemize}
Crown Lands. In August 1856, Henry Mitchell, the Agent-General of Immigration, made Governor Charles Elliot aware that the provision was no longer in force. “Two coolies have applied to me to have their return passages commuted into grants of land,” he wrote. He added that it was desirable that “every facility should be given to the Hindoo for naturalizing himself in the colony.” He concluded that there should be certain areas set aside only for the settling of Indian immigrants.  

Governor Elliot agreed that reinstating the land program was necessary, but cautioned that Indians should not be settled separate from the general population. Instead, it would be better if they were settled near populated areas and main roads. This would allow for their “constant supervision by the Government of the colony.” He further recommended that Indians should not be granted title until they had resided on the granted land for at least three years. They also had to cultivate and fence in a portion of the land. 

Officials from the East India Company and the Colonial Office hailed the tenets of the new commutation scheme. EIC officials thought it important that each immigrant be made fully aware that he was giving up his right to return to India. The Colonial Office found the Governor’s remarks regarding surveillance “judicious.”

The desire for commutation and surveillance point to some of the changes occurring in colonial administration in the years leading up to the 1857 Rebellion in South Asia. In Alibis of

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34 CO 297/5: Trinidad No. 24—1854, “An Ordinance to amend and consolidate the laws with regard to Immigration,” 17 November 1854.

35 Mitchell to Colonial Secretary, 15 August 1856, enclosure in Elliot to Labouchere (No. 22), 24 August 1856, in Papers relating to Immigration, PP 2452 (1859 Session 1), 332–333.

36 Elliot to Labouchere (No. 22), 24 August 1856, in Ibid., 332. It is important to note that the ability to commute a return passage for land was available before the late 1860s. The current historiography on land commutation in Trinidad states that, for the most part, immigrants were unable to do so before 1869.

37 Melvill to India Board, 16 October 1856, sub-enclosure in Labouchere to Officer Administering the Government, 11 November 1856, in Papers relating to Immigration PP 2452 (1859 Session 1), 289.

38 CO 318/212: Murdoch and Rogers to Elliot, 27 September 1856.
Empire, Karuna Mantena found that the mid-nineteenth century experience of rebellion and resistance led to the demise of the liberal imperial project. From that point on, the reform took a back seat to a strict rule of law based upon the idea that Indians were fundamentally different from Europeans. Colonial rulers used anthropological, scientific, and ethnographic discoveries to find the inherent backwardness in native populations. We will explore more on this topic later, but for now, we may conclude that Trinidadian officials insisted upon keeping watch over the Indian population. They could only settle in the country under constant supervision.

Bounties to Stay

Many Indians did not take the colony up on the offer to commute one’s return passage for an equal value in land. This was perhaps because of a piece of legislation passed back in 1850. Back then, Governor Harris, with the Legislative Council’s assent, passed legislation that gave a fifty-dollar bounty to any immigrant who chose to remain for a further five years following the termination of their first five years of indenture. It has been estimated that immediately after the bounty was offered, 1,010 immigrants took the colony up on the offer.

The bounty was a clear incentive for immigrants to remain in Trinidad. Many took the colony up on its offer so they could better their own lives. It was even used on those who were eligible to return on the Eliza Stewart. Without giving a specific number, Lord Harris noted that “a great number of the Coolies who have completed their five years, have declared themselves ready to accept the bounty.”

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39 Mantena, Alibis of Empire, 186–87.
40 Harris to Grey (No. 34), 26 December 1850, in Despatches Part III PP 936 (1852–53), 77–78.
41 Tinker, A New System of Slavery, 106.
42 Northrup, Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 133–134.
43 Harris to Grey (No. 44), 26 April 1851, in Despatches Part III PP 936 (1852–53), 97–98.
In fact, the bounty system had been so successful that a year later, Lord Harris curtailed the program from a five-year bounty to a lesser one-to-year bounty. This meant the colony had to pay less for each immigrant, providing “very great temporary convenience to the Colonial Treasury.” Demand for five-year bounties had been so great that Harris wrote, “I do not know how I should have been able to meet the demand.” These lesser bounties were set at ten Trinidadian dollars per year, or £2.1s.8d (at a rate of 4s.2d. to the Trinidadian dollar). The bounty system was a partial solution to the surplus labor problem. It kept experienced labor in the colony, but did not capitalize on potential land-value taxation. However, it also did not run the risk of turning Indians into a landholding class completely independent from wages—a fear that we will see be mentioned by colonial officials at a later time.

In the report of the Agent General of Immigration submitted in 1856, A.T Anderson mentioned that the immigrants who had first taken the bounty in 1851 were nearing the completion of their ten years of required residence in the colony. “From what I have seen of the habits and feelings of these people,” he concluded, “It appears to me a large majority of them, after a residence of ten years, will never seek to return to India.” Colonial officials were beginning to have doubts whether it was even necessary to have a bounty program if the immigrants were going to stay.

Given that observation, a new ordinance, passed in 1854, changed the amount of time immigrants were to remain in Trinidad before they gained a right to return to India. The ordinance kept the amount of years under indenture capped at three, but increased the time of

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44 Harris to Pakington (No. 72) 24 September 1852, in Ibid., 152.

45 Trinidad.—No. 11—10 September 1852, “An Ordinance for the further Encouragement of Immigrants to enter into Contracts for further Terms of Industrial Residence,” enclosure in Ibid., 153.

46 Anderson to Elliot, 24 January 1856, enclosure in Elliot to Labouchere (No. 16), 21 February 1856, in Papers relating to Immigration PP 2452 (1859 Session 1), 322.
industrial residence—the years an immigrant had to remain working in the colony—from five to ten years. Thus, any immigrant arriving in the colony from 1854 onwards could only gain the right to a return passage back to India after ten years of residence.\textsuperscript{47} Furthermore, immigrants were now required to pay part of their return passage costs. This contribution was capped at £7.5s.10d.\textsuperscript{48} If Indians were going to stay anyway, colonial officials made it harder to leave.

In his 1858 report, Henry Mitchell reflected that it would be prudent to change the clause relating to the required payment of return passages, noting that while the colony had “long decided not to act upon it,” the presence of the clause was “alleged as one reason why it is so difficult to procure coolies for the colony.”\textsuperscript{49} Nevertheless, the clause remained in effect, even with the passing of another ordinance in 1862.\textsuperscript{50}

The Government of India weighed in on the right for Indians to commute their return passage for parcels of land or money in 1857. Lord Canning found no problem with such arrangements, as long as there were no changes to the right of return, as “no coolies, or very few, will emigrate without a right to a return passage.” On the other hand, allowing for commutation was fine. As Canning put it, “the labourers should be left to make their own bargain . . . [with] his absolute right to a return passage.”\textsuperscript{51}

This legislation was built around a new “moral project” of assisting the Indian immigrant in acclimating to his new environment. Take, for example, the lengthy reasoning of increasing the term of industrial residence as given by the Standing Committee on Immigration:

\textsuperscript{47} CO 297/5: Trinidad No. 24—1854, § XXVII.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Mitchell to Johnston, 1 June 1858, enclosure in Keate to Lytton, 26 September 1858 (No. 36), in Correspondence between Colonial Office and Governors of W. Indian Colonies and Mauritius, PP 31 31-I (1859 Session 2), 358.
\textsuperscript{50} CO 297/7: Trinidad No. 16–1862, “An Ordinance to amend and consolidate the Laws with regard to Immigration,” 1 August 1862, § XXXII.
\textsuperscript{51} Geoghegan, Note on Emigration, 28.
The great disproportion between the number introduced and the number now available as labourers, is to be ascribed almost exclusively to the right reserved to the Indian immigrant of a return passage at the public expense, on the expiration of a fixed term of residence. We believe that this right is founded on a false policy. It would be not only a great diminution of expense to the colony, but, as we conceive, a benefit to the coolie himself, if he were taught to regard his change of residence as permanent. It is evident that this want of fixity tends to prevent many of those advantages which the coolie would otherwise derive from his change of residence. It tends also to create despondency in those who would otherwise exert themselves to improve his moral character. Looking ever to a return to India, he retains the habits and prejudices of the country he was born, and from which he believes that his absence is only temporary. He does not identify himself with the population around him, nor does he amidst the religious instruction is offered to him . . . The concession recently made by which the period of residence has been lengthen from five to ten years, is liberal, as we believe it to be wise.\textsuperscript{52}

It is difficult to read such a justification without a raised eyebrow. The eyebrow is raised further when reading Henry Mitchell’s comments in his Annual Report of the same year: “In this colony there exists no immediate limit to the production of sugar, except the supply of labour.”\textsuperscript{53} Not ten years before, William Gladstone had been remarking that allowing for an immigrant to settle on his own land in Trinidad would give him hope following his toil.\textsuperscript{54} Now, the only hope for moral improvement came from an extension of his toil on Trinidadian soil. The colony’s true stance on commutation and uplift would be found, however, in later debates on squatting.

\textit{Squatting and Land Commutation}

In 1866, Governor Manners-Sutton found that over four thousand acres of Crown Lands had been occupied by eight-hundred squatters. With their families, this population totaled nearly three thousand individuals.\textsuperscript{55} Afro-Trinidadians had been squatting on Crown Lands since the


\textsuperscript{53} Mitchell to Johnston, 1 January 1857, enclosure in Ibid., 314.

\textsuperscript{54} Gladstone to Gomm (No. 36), 14 May 1846 in \textit{Returns relating to Labouring Population in British Colonies PP 691-II} (1846), 216.

\textsuperscript{55} Manners-Sutton to Secretary of State for Colonies, 6 April 1866, in “Papers Relating to the Occupation, Sale, and Management of the Crown Lands,” Vol. 2, Official records kept as governor of Trinidad, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.
time of emancipation. Most of this population of emancipated slaves had gone into cocoa cultivation, while others chose to keep small crops.\textsuperscript{56}

The reforms that had been passed back in 1847 had ostensibly encouraged Indians to settle in the colony. However, they also had the effect of pushing squatters off of Crown Lands. For example, the ordinance gave those who could not prove eight and one-half years residence on Crown Lands six months to pay five shillings per acre plus all surveying fees. Furthermore, they would be required to purchase their land at the £2 per acre upset price—a sum that was out of the range of possibility for many would-be small landholders.\textsuperscript{57}

After taking up the governorship in 1865, Arthur Hamilton-Gordon tried his hand at reforming the Crown Lands system. He first sought out the opinions of various high-ranking officials throughout Trinidad. The Justice of the Supreme Court, Justice H.T. Bowen, gave three suggestions on changing the management of Crown Lands. First, he argued that in lieu of one lump sum payment at the upset price, the buyer should be able to pay for the land in four installments. He sidestepped the question of the upset price being set at £2, although he did concede that this price was often more than the value of the land. Secondly, he argued that the Court of Intendant should be abolished, with all the legal duties of the Court transferred to the Supreme Civil Court. Finally, he argued that the management of Crown Lands should be a separate department managed by a Surveyor-General.\textsuperscript{58}

Each suggestion was meant to streamline the process of purchasing land. Installments, for example, had benefit of preventing the state from having to eject a squatter and once again put up the land at the upset price—only again to have the land likely squatted upon. For the second


\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 6.

\textsuperscript{58} Bowen to Gordon, 2 February 1867, in Official records, Vol. 2, NYPL.
suggestion, Bowen found that the Court of Intendant had no legal function, and could be done away with. Finally, with the last suggestion, Bowen envisioned the presence of more surveyors who could adequately survey Crown Land.  

However, when it came to Indian immigrants, the policies were to be different. Charles Warner, the Attorney General, argued that allowing Indians to settle on Crown Lands could theoretically lead to protest from plantation owners. Settling the land could lead Indians from the life of the laborer to that of the small landholder totally independent from wages. The conclusion was clear: no scheme for land purchases should drain the colony of its laboring class and put sugar production at risk. However, Warner found issue with his own hypothetical situation, arguing that Indians had been able to buy land up until 1869. “There has not been any difficulty in the way of laborers desirous of purchasing small lots of land,” he concluded.

His analysis found that among those who had bought land, few had become landlords. Their tendencies were instead to opt for “shopkeeping and petty commerce.” Still, Warner neither wanted a world where Indians could not purchase small freehold properties at all, nor did he want one where Indians would cease to be laborers. His solution was to limit the size of each lot sold to three acres. This meant that an Indian could technically buy up multiple lots of Crown Lands to get past the three-acre limit, but could not buy one plot that was larger than three acres. This created a barrier to entry into the land market. It should be noted that this restriction did not apply to lands sold outside of the Crown Lands scheme.

59 Ibid.
60 Memorandum of the Attorney-General, 22 February 1867, in Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
It should be clear that the conversations around settling the land had come a long way since Gladstone. The premise of Crown Land reform was to prevent squatting and to ensure that the lands held by the state could be put to productive, revenue-generating use. Warner argued that Afro-Trinidadians had been squatting due to “the habits of the African race, gregarious by nature, and impatient of the restraints of civilization.” They were not only a nuisance, but also incapable of transitioning from squatters to freeholders. However, if Indian laborers were capable of becoming freeholders, they were not encouraged to become landlords. The colony could not afford for the Indians to easily slide into a landlord class.

Some of this conversation raises the issue of race relations in Trinidad. With its population of emancipated blacks, creole planters, South Asian workers, as well as Portuguese Madeiran and Chinese immigrants, Trinidad was a plural society. Given that, race played a key part in social interaction. However, society in the indenture colony was incredibly segmented and defined by racial compartmentalization and socio-cultural exclusivity. In this environment, individuals were often perceived through notions of a collective “personality” of their ethnic group. This led to the formation of racial (pejorative or otherwise) stereotypes.

Some scholars have seen these stereotypes as elite reactions to repeat experiences with racial groups that eventually developed into archetypes. These elite reactions eventually trickled down to subordinate groups and were reshaped to fit their own experiences and positions in the social hierarchy of colonial rule.

Others have more or less agreed with this analysis. One scholar found that stereotypes were largely internalizations of what the white planter class had deemed to be prototypical

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63 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 13.
characteristics of laborers in colonial society. Imported indentured labor as being capable of saving the country from ruin, for example, was a common trope, as was the idea that Indians as a whole were docile, subservient, and easy to manipulate.\footnote{Robert J. Moore, “Colonial Images of Blacks and Indians in Nineteenth Century Guyana,” in \textit{The Colonial Caribbean in Transition: Essays on Postemancipation Social and Cultural History}, ed. Bridget Brereton and Kevin A. Yelvington (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1999), 141–42.} At the same time, the Indian could be immoral, superstitious, docile, excitable, vengeful, industrious, and thrifty.\footnote{Moore, \textit{Cultural Power, Resistance and Pluralism}, 13.}

In these accounts, it was the planter class that created these stereotypes in response to the post-emancipation contingences of labor. The planter class had determined that emancipated blacks were no longer fit for plantation labor. In response, they developed the idea of the Indian as the superior laborer. In this formulation, Indians were seen as thrifty and industrious. This was in distinction to what was seen as the disloyalty and ungratefulness of the black population.\footnote{Malcolm Cross, “East Indian-Creole Relations in Trinidad and Guiana in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in \textit{Across the Dark Waters: Ethnicity and Indian Identity in the Caribbean}, ed. David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1996), 19.}

There was indeed a nexus between race and occupation (and more broadly, capital and the state) and this relationship had a large role in determining the contours of racial difference in Trinidad and other indenture colonies.\footnote{Sara Abraham, “The Shifting Sources of Racial Definition in Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana: A Research Agenda,” \textit{Ethnic and Racial Studies} 24, no. 6 (2001): 981, doi:10.1080/01419870120077931.} In Trinidad and British Guiana, for example, to be an Indian was to be a sugar worker.\footnote{Kale, \textit{Fragments of Empire}, 134.} Indians were always set apart on sugar estates. As has been seen, this was largely achieved through control and surveillance. That is, the conditions of indenture assured that Indians would remain separate from society at large (and by extension, would remain cohesive social unit).\footnote{Ron Ramdin, \textit{Arising from Bondage: A History of the Indo-Caribbean People} (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 176.}
As previously noted, stereotypes were said to have trickled down from the planter class into both African and East Indian communities.\(^{72}\) Brinsley Samaroo has pointed out that Indians (as a result of “education on European texts”) saw the African as “a barbarian, shiftless and lazy who cared little for the virtues of civilized life” whereas the African saw the “bound coolie” as one who came deliberately lower wages and force the African off the plantation—in other words, a pawn of the planter class.\(^{73}\)

However, Indians did not interact with members of other races very often. They were largely concentrated in Trinidad’s southern “sugar belt” and lived in primarily Indian communities. Their interactions with members of other races was limited to visits to large towns and cities. It may be concluded that interactions between blacks and Indians were few in the cities and towns. On the plantations, conflicts were not uncommon, but were often isolated. Large-scale violent conflict never occurred between the two groups.\(^{74}\) As Bridget Brereton put it, “geographical and occupation separation, combined with mutual contempt and misunderstanding, kept the races apart.”\(^{75}\) The Crown Lands reforms should thus be seen in light of these racialized views.

In June 1867, Gordon proposed the following to the Legislative Council: the Court of Intendant was to be abolished, Crown Lands were to be managed by a department with a Surveyor General, and the upset price of agricultural land would be set at £1 per acre in particular districts in each Ward Union while all other land would be set at the original price of £2 per acre. This plan was first implemented in the Ward Union of Montserrat—a Ward popular

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\(^{74}\) Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870-1900*, 189.

\(^{75}\) Ibid.
with squatters due to its fertile soil and good conditions for cocoa growing.\textsuperscript{76} The system was a success. According to Robert W.S. Mitchell, the Commissioner of Crown Lands, the colony had received $17,776.28 by 1869 from the sale of Crown Lands in Montserrat from two hundred individuals. Thirty-seven of those were Indians.\textsuperscript{77}

The success of the Crown Lands experiment in Montserrat led Gordon to implement Crown Land reforms throughout the colony through a series of ordinances passed in late 1867 and early 1868. By May 1, 1869, any individual who wanted to purchase Crown Lands did not have to make the journey to Port of Spain. Instead, he had to go to the Warden of his district to make his purchase of Crown Lands.\textsuperscript{78}

In 1869, the reform initiative for Crown Lands was also extended to the Indian population. Although this was a continuation of previous attempts to allow Indians to commute their return passage, Gordon’s policy was seen at the time as being completely novel. The “new system” was described in a letter from Gordon to the Colonial Office in May 1869. Gordon described twenty-five Indians who had completed their industrial residence and were due to return to India on the ship \textit{Arima}. Gordon recounted how they had instead “transmitted … an expression of their willingness to surrender all claim to return to India at the expense of the Colony on condition of receiving a grant of land.” Gordon predicted that many more would take up the chance to transform from “temporary sojourners” into “permanent colonists.”\textsuperscript{79}

Enclosed in his letter were the regulations relating to program. Ten acres of Crown Lands would be granted free of cost to any adult male Indian immigrant who completed ten years of

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\textsuperscript{76} Lewis, “The Trinidad Cocoa Industry,” 53–54.
\textsuperscript{77} Mitchell to Bushe, February 1866, in Official records, Vol. 2, NYPL
\textsuperscript{78} Lewis, “The Trinidad Cocoa Industry,” 56.
\textsuperscript{79} CO 295/247 no 63: Gordon to Granville, 22 May 1869.
\end{flushleft}
industrial residence. Immigrants had to accept the land grant on the condition that they were aware that they were giving up their right of return. To prove such a point, each immigrant had to submit an application to the Agent General stating his desire for land, as well as his cognizance regarding the loss of a return passage. Upon receiving this application, the Agent General would confirm that the prerequisites had been met and would issue a certificate to the applicant. The applicant would then take certificate to the Sub-Intendant of Crown Lands, who would then assign ten acres to the immigrant from blocks of Crown Land reserved for that purpose. The initiative was approved quickly due to the fact that the Colonial Office had already okayed such a measure back in 1859.

The *Port of Spain Gazette* found reason to celebrate in the new Crown Lands initiative. Quoting the 1868 Immigration Report, the editorial found that thirty Indians had settled and purchased Crown Lands. “This movement,” they wrote, “should be encouraged in every possible way so as to stem the current that periodically sets in towards Calcutta.” Return passages to India, they argued “drains the Colony of hundreds of thrifty and industrious laborers who should have the strongest inducements held out to them to colonize the country where they have worked out their Indentures.”

More interesting was the sentiment found in the Immigration Report itself. After noting that thirty Indians had purchased Crown Lands in 1868, Henry Mitchell went on to congratulate the colony on its success:

> Should this movement continue and any considerable number be induced to follow in their wake or to accept an equivalent in land for their return passage, the Colony may congratulate itself on having made its most important step in securing a permanent supply of labor by erasing or deadening a sentiment more potent than that of caste, and hitherto

80 CO 295/247 no 63: Regulations for the Grant of Crown Lands to Indian Immigrants, enclosure in Ibid.

81 Laurence, “Indians as Permanent Settlers in Trinidad,” 137.

82 *Port of Spain Gazette*, 19 May 1869.
Inducing Indians to commute their return passage for land was compared to breaking caste norms. In his comparison, the desire to return to India was no longer viewed as a free choice granted by a contract, but instead a feature of native society. Indians were forced by the nature of their being to return back to India. Such language underlines how notions of Indian society had become part of governing after the mid-century rebellions. As we will see in the next few chapters, these kinds of ways of describing colonized subjects society, both in South Asia and the indenture colonies, would only grow following the mid-century rebellions against British Rule.

**The Evolution of Land Commutation**

The process for land commutation carried on quite well throughout the 1870s. In 1875 alone, 3,147 acres of cultivated Crown Lands resulted in the sale of 18,983 bags of rice, 2,931 barrels of peas, and 7,925 barrels of maize. Some even chose to sublease their land. To again use an example from 1875: 7.5 percent of 3,756 residents on settlements (284 Indians) were renting their lands from those who had received Crown Land from the state.

In 1873, immigrants were given a choice between ten acres of land or five acres of land and £5 in cash. Women were given the option of commuting their return passage for £5. In response to this, the Government of India wished that married women were only given the cash payment only if their husbands also commuted their return passage.

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84 See Chapters Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine.
86 Ibid., 231.
88 CO 318/269: Hobson to Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26 September 1873.
By 1879, however, Irving decided to end the system for land commutation for a simple cash grant of £5. When reflecting upon the change in 1878, Governor Irving argued that the original scheme “the disadvantage of forcing on the coolie in many cases more land than he wanted or could cultivate.”\(^{89}\) He argued that too many Indians were simply taking the land so they could get the £5 grant. Irving would not prevent Indians from buying land. However, those who wished to purchase would have to do so at the rate of ten shillings per acre. Irving concluded that this new system would allow “those only who really want land [to] acquire it, and they will not be compelled to acquire more than they really want.”\(^{90}\) In 1880, the colony formerly abolished the land grant system and left only the option for a cash grant.\(^{91}\) This was in many ways a return to the bounty system adopted in the 1850s.

Between 1869 and 1880, 2,643 Indians settled on approximately 19,000 acres.\(^{92}\) Beyond a tabulation of settled acres, however, scholars have deemed the land commutation system to be a failure. Many of the agricultural settlements were abandoned or did not produce agricultural products beyond a subsistence level.\(^{93}\)

During the mid-1880s, the colony faced a depression in sugar prices. The effects of this depression were far-reaching, and included strikes on several plantations.\(^{94}\) By the late 1880s, the Protector of Immigrants (formerly the Agent-General of Immigration) called on the colony to abandon the £5 bounty. He argued that the system had run its course and that those who took the money had “as a rule no intention of returning to their native country, having already discovered

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\(^{89}\) CO 384/119 no 254: Irving to Hicks Beach, 6 December 1878.

\(^{90}\) Ibid.

\(^{91}\) Ibid.

\(^{92}\) Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism*, 134.


\(^{94}\) See Chapter Eight.
that they prefer Trinidad to India.” On the other hand, for those who wished to return to India “the offer [of] Five Pounds sterling would be an absurdity, as they have already made up their minds to return at the expense of the Colony.”95 Such an argument was taken seriously, and the entire system of bounties was discontinued in 1891.

How could the colony raise revenue from the land? How could the colony not repeat the mistakes of the past? How could the indebted peasant become a productive, land-owning member of a Caribbean society?

In Trinidad, land settlement began in the contexts of surplus labor, cost-saving, and personal improvement on the part of the indentured laborers. In the case of surplus labor, land ownership offered a chance to put unproductive land to revenue-generating use. It also presented an opportunity to create a year-round laboring force. This laboring force was to be molded in an ideal never achieved in the post-emancipation era. Indians could be turned into productive members of society, rather than remaining barbarous or savage like the freed black population. The cost-saving solution was obvious: the colony would save on the return journey of immigrants. Nevertheless, Indians saw this as their chance to overcome their own indebted past. They could own the land that was denied to them in South Asia.

The parcels were small enough to prevent Indians from becoming large landlords. They would remain small freeholders and would likely need to supplement their income with wage labor on the plantation. However, the state was able to collect land-revenue tax on their settled land. Beyond this, any crops grown on the parcels were sold on the open market—another boon for the colony’s economy.

95 CO 384/173 no 343: Mitchell to Colonial Secretary, 17 September 1889, enclosure in Fowler to Knutsford, 28 September 1889.
Mahabir may have been thrifty, but Trinidad knew how to capitalize on his thrift. The British Empire was a global project and ideas about colonialism and land settlement informed how indenture colonies were to deal with Indians after they finished their indenture contracts. Mahabir’s savings and settlement would be used to ensure the economic security of the colony.

The actual practice of land commutation operated in fits and starts and at times was supplanted with the bounty system. During the tenure of Arthur Hamilton-Gordon, the colony began to sell Crown Lands to Indian immigrants. The commutation of return passages secured a labor force while simultaneously providing revenue for the colonial treasury.

It remains interesting to note that the idea of commutation for land never got off the ground in Fiji, where Arthur Hamilton-Gordon later perfected the idea of post-1857 indenture governance. In Fiji, Gordon established native Fijian authority in land use. He codified Fijian custom and restricted the alienation and sale of native land. This was done to protect the village community by protecting communal land.96 Thus, while the government of Fiji encouraged Indians to remain in the colony and work the land after the expiration of their indenture, they could only lease native land after attaining the approval of village chiefs.97

In any case, it remains that while in Trinidad, Mahabir was able, at times, to settle the land and work it for his own gain. But the colony was always watching—and profiting—from his actions.

96 Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, 173.
97 *East India (indentured labour). Report to the government of India on the conditions of Indian immigrants in four British colonies and Surinam* PP Cd. 7745 (1914–16), 261.
Chapter Five
Changes: Arthur Hamilton-Gordon in Trinidad

As Mahabir labored on his plantation, he was perhaps unaware of the unrest of the world beyond his shores. But global developments—especially those from South Asia—had a way of finding a home in Trinidad. On May 10, 1857 native Indian troops mutinied against their British commanders. Far from being an isolated insurrection, 130,000 soldiers eventually joined the mutiny. Theirs was one of the largest rebellions against the British Empire in the nineteenth-century. By its conclusion, the Rebellion had drawn in figures both military and civilian. Its leaders, including the Rani of Jhansi, Tatya Tope, and Nana Sahib, have since become names and figures that resonate throughout South Asian culture and history. Although the Rebellion was brutally suppressed by the British, it became an important moment of transition for colonial rule and governance in South Asia and the British Empire.

This chapter begins by examining the contexts of the 1857 Rebellion and other uprisings. These challenges to British rule would begin a shift in colonial governance. Gone were the tattered remains of imperial liberalism; the new day would be defined by a new conservatism. Scholars such as Karuna Mantena have seen this conservative thought as being exemplified by indirect rule, where “native” rulers and society were the face of government, but the wizard behind the curtain always remained the British. This chapter will argue that indirect rule was impossible in the indenture colonies as there was no native society with whom the British could rule. However, post-1857 governance in the indenture colonies was exemplified not by indirect rule, but instead by authoritarian and paternalist tendencies. This chapter thus builds off the idea that we can construct a global history using South Asia as our focus.

The global experiences of rebellion had deep implications in the indenture colonies. In Trinidad, figures such as Arthur-Hamilton Gordon (Governor from 1865–1869) were
instrumental in bringing about this new conservatism in the Caribbean. This new rule of law was perhaps best explained by two ordinances developed by Gordon and his predecessor: the Hospital and the Feeding Ordinance. These ordinances were tantamount to creating a brave new world. In turning peasants into laborers, the state would now take control of the bodies of Indian immigrants.

*The 1857 Rebellion*

Whispers and anxieties filled the streets of North India in 1857. A rumor was spreading: the ammunition of the Enfield rifle—the new standard issue rifle in the army—had been greased with tallow from cows and pigs. Even worse, reloading the rifle required the cartridges to be bitten before being used. Fat from cows and pigs would have entered the mouths of loyal soldiers. Many found this an affront by British Christians undermining South Asian religions. A soldier broke rank and shot his superior officer. The mutiny had begun.

The mutineers began by killing nearly all the English residents of Meerut. From there, they marched onwards to Delhi. They, along with other rebels who had joined them, sought to rally around Bahadur Shah Zafar, an ailing and ineffective Mughal sovereign. The British had severely circumscribed his power to a mostly ceremonial position. And yet, as a symbol he was powerful enough to draw the mutineers to Delhi.

Besides the goal of reinstating Zafar, the Rebellion lacked any cohesive strategy. Furthermore, the rebellion was often colored by local concerns. In Awadh, rebels fought in retaliation for the recent deposition of King Wajid Ali Shah and the assumption of direct rule by the East India Company.¹ In the North-Western Provinces, local magnates who had profited from

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British rule kept loyal, while those who had been disenfranchised joined the fray. Historians since the time of the Rebellion have sought to understand its causes. It has been viewed as a metonym for ideas as varied as a fear of Christian domination, the discontent of a ruled population, an example of inherent lawlessness and fanaticism among the Indians, or the first instance of anti-colonial freedom fighting.

After brutally putting down the Rebellion, colonial leaders began to change some of their basic assumptions about how to govern the subcontinent. This change was first reflected in policy at the highest level. On August 2, 1858, Parliament passed the Government of India Act. This act transferred all authority over conquered territories from the East India Company to the British Crown. The Company was dissolved and the British Raj was born.

With a change in government came a change in outlook. Imperial legislation had, until the mid-nineteenth century, been more or less informed by liberal beliefs. This was to change following the Rebellion. Take, for example, an excerpt from what Queen Victoria declared in her 1858 Proclamation (the same Proclamation that would outline the establishment of the Raj):

> We know, and respect, the feelings of attachment with which the natives of India regard the lands inherited by them from their ancestors, and we desire to protect them in all rights connected therewith, subject to the equitable demands of the State; and we will that generally, in framing and administering the law, due regard be paid to the ancient rights, usages, and customs of India.

This is a far cry from the liberal reforms of the earlier nineteenth century. Colonialism had been a force for cultural assimilation and development. Now, the colonial state pledged to pay due care to the “ancient rights, usages, and customs of India.” This was a significant change in

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2 Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj*.


4 *Proclamation relating to Government of India, by Queen in Council to Princes, Chiefs and People of India* (published by Governor General at Allahabad, November 1858) PP C. 1436 (1876), 2.
outlook. But the 1857 Rebellion had come as a shock to the people and government of the United Kingdom. A radical change, given the circumstances, was inevitable.

*Rebellions Elsewhere*

The 1857 Rebellion would not be the last challenge to British rule in the mid-nineteenth century. In the Caribbean came the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica. The previous ten years were not kind to the island colony. Plagues of cholera and smallpox, inclement weather, bankruptcies in the sugar industry, and increasing prices of cotton goods due to the US blockade of Confederate ports during the American Civil War had ravaged the colony. Afro-Jamaicans bore the brunt of the resulting precarity. The white political elite took little action in the wake of Afro-Jamaicans’ petitions, rallies, demonstrations, and direct action.

Morant Bay, located on the southeastern coast of Jamaica (approximately twenty-five miles from Kingston), was the site of the first mass demonstration. From October 9 to October 11, 1865, Paul Bogle led a massive revolt of black individuals seeking higher wages, better working conditions, lower taxes, land ownership, and political freedoms. At its peak, the uprising involved between 1,500 and 2,000 individuals. It was a peasant war, with the most disenchanted and disenfranchised seeking some respite. They were not passive when making their demands and sought to maim and kill elites of both white and mixed-race backgrounds.

Like the 1857 Rebellion in India, the Morant Bay Rebellion was brutally put down by the British. The Governor of Jamaica, John Eyre, sent government troops to find the group and capture Paul Bogle. Though they met little to no resistance, the troops opened fire, killing 439, flogging hundreds, and burning 1,000 houses. Another 354, including Bogle, were arrested and
tried under martial law courts. Many were executed, including George William Gordon, a mixed-race businessman and vociferous political opponent of Eyre.⁵

The use of martial law, military force, summary trials, and executions following the Rebellion raised questions in Britain and led for some to call for Eyre’s trial. Some liberals argued for his indictment on murder charges. The liberal view, however, was not quite generous towards the colonized. John Stuart Mill argued that Eyre had broken a contract of good colonial administration over a backwards people. He maintained that even despotic government must have some shred of accountability. His Tory opponents used arguments based upon open racial superiority.⁶ The Tory view prevailed, and Eyre was never indicted.

The Indian Rebellion, Morant Bay Rebellion, along with other challenges to rule such as the Maori Wars in New Zealand and the Xhosa Wars in the Eastern Cape, were a shockwave that reverberated throughout the British Empire. This shock soon reached the ideologies of governance. These changes involved the diminution of the moral agenda of the liberal empire and the beginning of an authoritarian insistence upon efficacy and stability.⁷

This shift in governance has not yet been thoroughly studied with relation to Indian indenture, although there has been work that has suggested that the 1857 Rebellion led to a pronounced uptick in migration from India to the indenture colonies. One historian argued that this uptick was a result of both Indian sepoys migrating to escape persecution, as well as other Indians who felt the need to leave an environment characterized by the harsh blowback of Rebellion.⁸

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⁶ Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 161.
Indeed, the desire to connect the Rebellion to the need for labor was seen during the Rebellion itself. In an August 28, 1857 confidential memorandum, the Governor of British Guiana, Philip Edmund Wodehouse wrote

We may, therefore, assume that the usual tribunals will have to deal with vast number of offenders, whom, as regards the troops, we may divide into three classes:—

1. Those conspicuous either for their rank or excessive atrocities, who must be individually tried and executed.
2. Those somewhat less conspicuous, but who must likewise be individually tried and sentenced to imprisonment with hard labour as felons, for terms of greater or less duration.
3. The great mass of the mutineers, who cannot all be individually tried, but against whom the fact of their having been in certain regiments at a certain time can be readily proved, and whom, with their wives and families, I would remove *en masse* to the West Indies.9

He was arguing that the Rebellion could be used as a boon for the West Indies. In the year preceding the 1857 Rebellion, planters had complained that there were too few Indians migrating to the Caribbean indenture colonies.10 Given the increase in migration, the Rebellion was seen as a possibility for acquiring more laboring bodies. This was a way of responding to the question of what to do with the mutineer population. In South Asia, the 1857 Rebellion led to the development of a system of convict transportation.11 In this case, mutineers were sent to the Port Blair settlement in the Andaman Islands. Beyond convict settlements, another possibility was sending former mutineers to the West Indies.

However, there has been little research into the transition away from imperial liberalism in indenture policy. To find that out, we must first turn to the governorship of Arthur Hamilton-Gordon.

*What was Conservatism in Trinidad?*

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9 TNA CO 885/1/21: Memorandum by P.E. Wodehouse, 28 August 1857.


Arthur Hamilton-Gordon was born in 1829 and was the youngest son of the then foreign secretary, George Hamilton-Gordon (Lord Aberdeen). He matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1847. From 1852 to 1855 he served as private secretary to his father, who had risen to become the Prime Minister. Arthur Hamilton-Gordon entered parliament at the age of twenty-four as an MP for Beverley from 1854–1857. After losing his seat, he acted as private secretary to William Gladstone who was then the Lord High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands.

When he returned to England in 1859 to tend to his ailing father, he approached the Duke of Newcastle to enter the colonial service.\(^{12}\) While he hoped for a governorship of Trinidad, Ceylon, or New Zealand, he was offered two choices: Governor of Antigua or Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick.\(^{13}\) He chose British North America and in 1861 became Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick. There, he acted as intermediary between the rough-and-tumble local politics and the grand wishes of London. While serving in this position from 1861–1866, he was able to satisfy London’s wishes for New Brunswick ascent into the Canadian Confederation.\(^{14}\)

Gordon arrived in Trinidad on November 5, 1866, but did not assume the governorship until November 9. Between the two dates, Gordon allowed the interim governor, E.E. Rushworth, to wrap up the governorship before Rushworth left the island for Jamaica.\(^{15}\) Gordon was quick to begin his administrative agenda after November 9. Although he passed quite a few pieces of legislation with respect to indenture (the Crown Lands initiative being one of them), this chapter will focus on two of the ordinances passed around the time of his administration. The first was


\(^{14}\) Ibid., 33.

\(^{15}\) TNA CO 295/236 no 126: Gordon to Carnarvon, 9 November, 1866.
the Hospitals Ordinance, which required that every plantation that employed a certain amount of indentured Indians to have had a hospital. The second was the Feeding Ordinance. This ordinance required every indentured Indian to have some money taken out from his or her pay in order to be provided mandatory rations for their first year of their contract.

At first look, these ordinances seem to add up to a “liberal” agenda, perhaps in the sense of the twentieth-century welfare state. And indeed, some have argued that the 1857 and Morant Bay Rebellions (as well as labor unrest in British Guiana) did lead to policies that would promote social cohesion and stability in the sugar colonies.\(^\text{16}\) However, this policy was not as liberal as once thought.

As Karuna Mantena argued in *Alibis of Empire*, the move away from imperial liberalism was meant to ensure the existential safety of the colony. This shift was defined by the use of indirect rule. Indirect rule here refers to the mechanisms of governance that, as Nicholas Dirks argued, both buttressed and displaced colonial rule.\(^\text{17}\) At the end of the 1857 Rebellion, the British formally disbanded the East India Company and assumed direct rule over the British Raj. But at that very same time, they displaced their authority to local kingdoms and rulers. This occurred not only in South Asia, but also in African colonies, such as the Eastern Cape.\(^\text{18}\) While those not familiar with South Asia may see the moment of direct control of the subcontinent as an example of direct metropolitan control of a colony, this was actually when indirect rule was more prominent.

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\(^\text{17}\) Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 15.

The British maintained authority *through* these local magnates. Administrative changes made through these local kingdoms had distinct and far-reaching changes on society at large.¹⁹ In Mantena’s understanding, the key figure in the development of indirect rule was the scholar and jurist Henry Maine. Maine articulated a method of ruling traditional societies—an idea that effectively boiled down to not fiddling *too* much with native society. His theories on law and jurisprudence were instrumental in the shift from imperial liberalism to what Mantena termed culturalism.²⁰

However, indirect rule was not an option in indenture colonies—native society had ceased to exist in these places centuries ago. Only the spirit of indirect rule remained in such an absence. Recall that indirect rule was an alibi for securing the absolute existential security of the colony. Without natives, all that remained was policy-making that existed only for the sake of the security of the colony. The global ramifications of rebellion had come home to the indenture colonies as something entirely new.

Some may argue that a full appreciation of the indenture colony can only occur with an analysis couched in recognition of the full constellation of various schemes of colonialism—direct rule, indirect rule, settler colonialism, and plantation colonialism. Of these, it is perhaps most tempting to think of the relationship between plantation society and colonial rule. However, it remains the case that the majority of scholarship on Indian indenture has viewed it as a continuation of the plantation complex. In this formulation, sugar plantations were always seeking a form of servile labor and that the plantation complex determined the forms and

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¹⁹ For an incisive take on how indirect rule transformed the functioning of caste, see Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, 324–57.

conditions of this kind of bondage. Indenture is thus viewed as a continuation of plantation colonialism.\textsuperscript{21}

Such analysis has dominated the historiography of indenture. However, this dissertation contends that such a framework ultimately limits an understanding of indenture. We may expand our understanding of Indian indenture by thinking through the ways in which other forms of colonial rule influenced the operation of this trans-imperial enterprise.

With this in mind, colonial rule in the indenture colonies in the mid-nineteenth century should be thought of as a blend of authoritarian and paternalist tendencies. On one hand, the rule of law was quite authoritarian. This could prevent rebellions such as 1857 or Morant Bay from occurring again. This was part and parcel of the post-1857 landscape. In other colonies indirect rule served as a way to hide authoritarian tendencies. As Mahmood Mamdani argued, British rule in Africa could find authoritarian possibilities in native culture and magnify them, in the process creating a decentralized despotism.\textsuperscript{22} Indenture colonies were the flip side of this: an example of highly centralized despotism.

This kind of authoritarianism did not necessarily translate into blanket oppression. Indenture colonies often enacted paternalist policies, like the Hospital and Feeding ordinances. While these policies may have been for the benefit of the workers, they were far from liberal. These kinds of paternalist policies were firmly rooted in racialization and racial categories. Ethnography mattered: Indians were viewed as essentially different with only the state able to save them from their own worst instincts. For example, officials believed that Indians would save and hoard their money to the point of starvation.

\textsuperscript{21} See, for example, Saunders, \textit{Indentured Labour in the British Empire}.

The postliberal turn took different forms throughout the British Empire. But they were all were informed by a rule of law that sought to protect the existential security of the colony. In some colonies, this was enacted through policies based upon indirect rule. Indenture colonies, on the other hand, were subject to a different logic. These colonies lacked identifiable native societies. Furthermore, their raison d’être was plantation production. This was the case during slavery and it would remain the case during the indenture eras. Securing the existential security of the colony meant legislating through authoritarianism and paternalism.

**A Cast of Colonial Administrators**

While this chapter seeks to understand the postliberal turn during the Gordon administration, it is difficult to place the full brunt of an ideological shift wholly upon one man, especially during his first stint as a colonial governor. Gordon’s predecessors were of great importance in enacting polices born out of a global change in thinking.

For example, Governor Robert William Keate, who served as Governor of Trinidad from 1857–1864, enacted a few paternalist measures. When sending the Agent-General of Immigration’s report for 1857 to London, he reflected upon the Agent-General’s comments on the problems of drunkenness among indentured Indians. Keate pointed out that too many Indians were being paid on credit that could be used in the various shops on a plantation. Administrators had found that some Indians had used the credit to purchase rum. The solution was to use a previous ordinance to insist upon wages being paid in cash to prevent, or make difficult, more advantageous arrangements between employer and employee through the use of credit.\(^{23}\)

In their reply, the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners agreed with the analysis, adding that the practice of keeping a liquor shop and paying laborers in credit on that shop was

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\(^{23}\) Keate to Labouchere, (No. 19), 11 February 1858, in *Correspondence between Colonial Office and Governors of W. Indian Colonies and Mauritius, with respect to Condition of Labouring Population and Supply of Labour* PP 31 31-I (1859 Session 2), 329.
“as indefensible in theory as it is evidently mischievous in practice.”\textsuperscript{24} The commissioners, however, deferred on making a decision until they the new laws regarding the sale of rum were instituted. Passed in 1860, the new rum and spirits ordinance prohibited distillers from being a retailer of spirits and further prohibited licensed distillers from permitting another person to sell spirits within a quarter-mile of the still.\textsuperscript{25} Sugar cane plantations could no longer produce rum and sell it to their indentured workers on credit.

Such a law marked a transition in governance. Couched within the law was a paternalist impulse. Indians could not be trusted to stay away from the liquor shop on their own. Only law and the state could prevent their continual drunkenness.

One of the foundations of the postliberal colonial state was the use of bureaucracy to control or fundamentally alter various aspects of the lives of the colonized. This practice has been referred to as “colonial governmentality” in historical scholarship. The French theorist Michel Foucault surmised that modern state governance relied on set of practices he termed “governmentality” in a lecture given at the Collège de France. In this form of governance, the state was “to apply economy, to set up an economy at the level of the entire state, which means exercising towards its inhabits, and the wealth and behavior of each and all, a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and his goods.”\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{24} Murdoch and Rogers to Merivale, 20 April 1858, enclosure in the Stanley to Keate (No. 28), 3 May 1858, in Correspondence between Colonial Office and Governors Labour PP 31 31-I (1859 Session 2), 394.


However, scholars have since attempted to add nuance to this concept by moving it away from a purely metropolitan European phenomenon into the colonial. Discussions of governmentality in colonialism have been marked as explorations of “colonial governmentality.” The addition of colonial as an adjectival marker is significant. The adjective highlights what Nicholas Dirks called a “relationship between sovereignty and bureaucracy [that] is necessarily different from metropolitan forms.” Gyan Prakash too noted this difference, but took the “necessarily different” aspect a bit further. He argued, “Colonial governmentality could not be a mere ‘tropicalization’ of the Western norm, but its fundamental dislocation.”

While the act of preventing liquor purchases may perhaps seem to be of little (or perhaps positive) consequence, it was in fact one of the first pieces of legislation that micromanaged the lives and bodies of the indentured. Previously, decisions regarding free time, consumption, pay (credit or cash), and spending habits were the prerogative of the worker. This policy took away some control and decision-making these individuals had over their lives and bodies.

Another change occurred in the ways in which colonial administrators began to portray immigrants. After 1857, British administrators feared that they lacked sufficient knowledge about the subjects they governed. This kind of anxiety led to the development of what has been termed the ethnographic state. The ethnographic state used anthropology, statistics, survey, and fact-finding to structure colonial knowledge of native societies and provide for the basis of rule. For example, the 1857 Rebellion brought into sharp relief for the British the idea that only some communities in India could be trusted, while others were to be permanently viewed with

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suspicion. The trusted communities would later became the “martial races” that were to be used in the army, while the others were deemed to be effeminate and untrustworthy.\(^{28}\)

This kind logic made its way to the indenture colonies. In his 1858 Immigration Report, Henry Mitchell (the Agent-General of Immigration) explained the effects of immigration by studying two groups of returnees embarking on ships back to Calcutta. In his description, he wrote that one group was “superior in physical development to the newly arrived” and that they had “acquired habits of continuous industry, foreign to their previous character.” Even more, “the common labourer is evidently less prone to falsehood in his social relations.” He concluded by arguing, “their good qualities appear to have been merely dormant.” Left on its own, this would seem to be a fulfillment of universalism. Making note of the cultural assimilation of indentured workers amounted to a pat on the back for colonial policy. However, he followed up with his initial observation by commenting that, “the same can be scarcely said of what may be styled the more respectable class of Asiatics in this colony, viz. Those who are doing well as shopkeepers or priests; they maintain the national character of falsehood in its utmost purity.”\(^{29}\)

Mitchell used the language of ethnography when he described priests as maintaining a “national character of falsehood.” Such a comment was not too far off from the terminology that the Reverend M.A. Sherring would use in his influential 1872 text, *Hindu Tribes and Castes*, where he referred to the Brahman (the priest) as “wily,” “selfish,” “tyrannical,” and “intractable.”\(^{30}\) This is all to say that while difference had been a bulwark to change in the era of


\(^{29}\) Enclosure in Keate to Lytton, (No. 36), 26 September 1858, in *Correspondence between Colonial Office and Governors* PP 31 31-I (1859 Session 2), 354.

imperial liberalism, it was now an accepted fact backed up with observational conclusions of certain groups. Difference could no longer be surmounted—it was a fact of life.

These moments point to another administrator we must view in tandem with Arthur Hamilton-Gordon. Henry Mitchell had penned the notes about drunkenness and the observations of Indian classes. Mitchell acted as the colony’s Agent General of Immigration from 1850 to 1882 and exercised an influential role in indenture policy.

Governor Harris hired Mitchell in November 1850 as the Superintendent of Immigrants. Lord Harris hoped that Mitchell would be of some use in enforcing the recently passed Immigration Ordinance of 1850. Little is known about Henry Mitchell other than the fact that he was a Creole medical practitioner. In 1847, he wrote an essay that was first published in the Agricultural Journal and then reprinted in the Port of Spain Gazette. The essay compared methods of liquor production at various plantations in the West Indies in order to provide information to Trinidad plantation owners on how to “express a sufficient quantity of liquor.” He signed his name “Henry Mitchell M.D. Ph.D. P.,” indicating he had some degree of scientific knowledge. He would later join the Scientific Association of Trinidad, and presented papers on topics ranging from earth closets, to the breeding of horses, to sulphites and bisulphites.

He would remain in his position through its multiple name changes. In 1854, the Superintendent of Immigrants became the Agent-General of Immigration. In 1878, the title was changed once again the Protector of Immigrants. He would become an integral part of the

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31 Harris to Grey (No. 30), 9 November 1850, in Despatches on Condition of Sugar-growing Colonies. Part III. Trinidad PP 936 (1852–53), 48.
32 Wood, Trinidad in Transition, 132.
functioning of the immigrant department. Perhaps because of this, he held sway over Arthur
Hamilton-Gordon’s administration of indenture in Trinidad.\(^{36}\) Before his departure from Trinidad
in 1870, Gordon would write of Mitchell:

> The Agent General is one of the ablest and most sagacious public servants that I have
> known during a long acquaintance with official life both in England and the Colonies.
> With rare tact and moderation whilst he has never ceased to wage reforms in the
> Immigration system, he has never broken with the planters; and whilst he has never failed
> to take advantage of every favourable opportunity to press the adoption of these reforms,
> he has known how to wait patiently and remain silent when their advocacy would have
> been fruitless and would only have provoked needless irritation.\(^{37}\)

While Gordon may be a center of focus, both of this chapter and of other scholarship (one
historian referred to him as “one of the most remarkable colonial administrators of the nineteenth
century”\(^{38}\)), he was only one of many administrators at the center of vast changes in governance.

In fact, his predecessor, E.E. Rushworth, started the process for what would become two
of Gordon’s principal achievements with respect to Indian indenture. Rushworth was another
itinerant colonial administrator. Born in 1818 and educated at Oxford, his career began in 1842
as a Clerk at Somerset House in London. In 1847 he was sent to Canada and worked as the
private secretary to the Governor of Newfoundland, followed by that of Nova Scotia. In 1855, he
was named President and Senior Member of the Council of Montserrat. In 1861, he was named
Auditor-General of Mauritius and in 1863 was named Acting Colonial Secretary of the same
colony.\(^{39}\) It was in Mauritius where Rushworth was first introduced to Indian indenture, and his
policies during his short stint in Trinidad were influenced by his time there.

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\(^{36}\) Laurence Brown, “Inter-Colonial Migration and the Refashioning of Indentured Labour: Arthur Gordon in
Trinidad, Mauritius and Fiji (1866–1880),” in Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the

\(^{37}\) TNA CO 295/250, no 46: Gordon to Granville, 8 April 1870.

\(^{38}\) Wood, Trinidad in Transition, 265.

\(^{39}\) The Gentleman’s Magazine, vol. 43 (London: John Bowyer Nichols and Sons, 1855), 299; The Mauritius
On April 24, 1866, he was named the acting governor of Trinidad after the departure of Governor John Manners-Sutton. In fact, it was Rushworth who first recommended the adoption of the Hospitals Ordinance. He also made gestures towards the Feeding Ordinance. The language used during the debate around the ordinance is quite informative when trying to understand the rationales behind shifts in governance.

The Hospitals Ordinance

On May 20, 1866—about a month into his acting governorship—Rushworth received a report from Henry Mitchell on the state of medical care among indentured Indians. Mitchell recommended that all sugar plantations should be required to build hospitals. This was due to the overcrowding in the colony’s public hospitals, as well as the fact that plantations had been unable to deal with sick immigrants.\(^{40}\)

When Rushworth visited the two public hospitals, he saw a number of immigrants affiliated by illnesses resulting from untreated ulcers.\(^{41}\) The ulcers he was referred to were most likely lesions caused by hookworm infection. The infection often necessitated amputation if it was left untreated.\(^{42}\)

Rushworth brought to the Legislative Council a suggestion to require hospital accommodations for indentured laborers on all sugar estates, echoing Mitchell’s earlier remarks.\(^{43}\) Mitchell had argued that if the colony did not require plantation owners to build hospitals on their estates, immigrants would ultimately be sent to the overcrowded Public Hospital. Although Mitchell attributed hookworm infection to “want of personal cleanliness and

\(^{40}\) TNA CO 295/235 no 84: Rushworth to Cardwell, 20 July 1866.

\(^{41}\) Ibid.

\(^{42}\) For more on the colonial response to hookworm, see Chapter Eight.

\(^{43}\) TNA CO 295/235, no 84: Rushworth to Cardwell, 20 July 1866.
insufficient diet,” he nevertheless thought that plantation hospitals could do much to treat the illness. He also suggested that newly arrived immigrants could be rationed provisions paid out of their wages for their first year in Trinidad. This could prevent illness and counteract the immigrant’s inclination to “hoard his money, even at the risk of denying himself sufficient food.”44 This point on food rationing would later be taken up by Gordon and would become an important part of his administrative agenda.

On June 1, 1866, Rushworth delivered his message on the necessity of estate hospitals to the Legislative Council of Trinidad. He reasoned that the 1865 Immigration Ordinance required the construction of estate hospitals. The Ordinance declared that owners were “to furnish the Immigrant, free of charge, suitable Lodging, and when sick, suitable and sufficient Medicines, and Nourishment, medical Attendance and hospital accommodation.”45 The clause would have required no action if there had been room in the public hospitals for the care and treatment of Indian treatments. This was not the case, he argued, as “when the sickly season commences, no amount of existing public Hospital service could accommodate a tithe of the applicants for admission.”46 In a report on the ordinance, Attorney-General Charles W. Warner noted that the public hospitals could only house about 270 patients—a fraction of a total population of 10,000 indentured Indians.47

Warner contended that planters were also unwilling to send their indentured workers to the hospital. Warner argued that they were not willing to “do today what may be done tomorrow.”

44 TNA CO 295/235, no. 84: Mitchell to Bushe, 20 July 1866, enclosure in Rushworth to Cardwell.
45 TNA CO 297/7: No. 3—1865, “An Ordinance Enacted by the Governor of Trinidad with the advice and consent of the Legislative Council thereof, With regard to Immigration,” ¶15, §2.
46 TNA: CO 295/235, no 84, extracts of June 16, 1866 Legislative Council meeting, enclosure in Rushworth to Cardwell.
The planters were also not interested in transporting the sick, “spare the labour necessary for their removal.” Finally, Warner contended that they would also not “incur the cost charged at the Public Hospitals.” The only way to prevent the suffering of the worker and sidestep such issues was to establish private hospitals on plantations. The plantation owner would not have to incur the continual cost of sending Indians to the public hospital and diseases would be treated at their earlier stages.

On June 19, the Attorney General introduced the ordinance to the Legislative Council. It had an almost unanimous consent, with the final vote of ten for and two against. One of the dissenters, R. Wilson, eventually filed a petition against the measure. He argued that it was unfair for both small plantations and large plantations to be forced to have hospitals on their estates. He saw it impossible for small plantations to afford the cost of a medical man to attend to a private hospital twice a week. He also argued that there were not enough medical men on the island for the number of private hospitals that were to be built.

In reply, Rushworth argued that it was the government’s duty to ensure that the employer and the indentured were faithfully executing the tenets of their contract. With regards to the medical men, he found that there were plenty in the more populous parts of the island, and that in the more remote areas, the government would ensure the proper conditions. He concluded his letter with a succinct point: “The great importance I attach to the continuance of the introduction each year of Indian and Chinese immigrants to the British West Indian Islands will I trust be

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 TNA: CO 295/235, no 84, Rushworth to Cardwell.
51 TNA: CO 295/235, no 84, Protest of the Undersigned against Clause 7 in the 2nd draft of the Ordinance for the Establishment of Hospitals for Immigrants, enclosure in Rushworth to Cardwell.
52 TNA CO 295/235 no 84: Rushworth to Cardwell.
accepted as sufficient cause for my dwelling so long on the subject of their condition of arrival in these parts.”\textsuperscript{53}

The Hospitals Ordinance introduced health management into the indenture system. This idea was both new and was rapidly spreading to other indenture colonies. Mauritius and British Guiana had too introduced ordinances requiring estate hospitals. It seemed as if colonial officials found that the health of the indentured population of great concern.\textsuperscript{54}

Public opinion in Trinidad was firmly against the ordinance. While Estate Hospital ordinances had recently been introduced in Mauritius and British Guiana, the \textit{Port of Spain Gazette} conceded that those ordinances had only been successful because those colonies had absolutely terrible public hospitals. They argued that Trinidad had two of the best hospitals in the Caribbean, each built at great cost explicitly for Indian and Chinese immigrants.\textsuperscript{55}

The \textit{San Fernando Gazette} asked, “Is more expensive humanity towards his coolies to be required of the planter, while his debts are yearly increasing?” Such a question was fitting for an editorial that began with a denouncement of at it saw as colonial mismanagement and bad governance.\textsuperscript{56}

Nevertheless, London was well disposed to the measure. It found Wilson’s objection that the costs of medical men would burden plantation owners formidable. But, officials concluded that this was a problem for plantation owners to deal with. Wilson’s other objection on the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{54} For more on the centrality of health to the indenture colony, see Chapter Nine.
\item \textsuperscript{55} \textit{Port of Spain Gazette}, 9 June 1866.
\item \textsuperscript{56} \textit{San Fernando Gazette}, 15 June 1866.
\end{itemize}
number of available medical practitioners was largely ignored. By October 29, 1865 the Ordinance was confirmed.

When he arrived in Trinidad in November, Arthur Hamilton-Gordon had the Agent General of Immigrants, the Chief Justice, the Colonial Secretary, and the Receiver General prepare letters on the status of the Hospital Ordinance.

The Agent General gave Gordon instructions on how to deal with rural and remote estates. He argued that the ordinance should be modified for three estates: the Bonaventure, New Grant, and Mon Desir estates. These estates were three miles from the nearest property that belonged to the same owner—the ordinance would require immigrants to pass on treacherous roads (that were nearly impassable during the wet season) to the nearest hospital facility. Instead of forcing all sick individuals to go to the hospital, Mitchell recommended that only the most sick should be sent with due care, and the rest could convalesce on their estates. The Colonial Secretary, John Scott Bushe, wrote a hasty reply arguing that such issues should have been dealt with when the ordinance was written.

In December, Gordon announced in a memo that wandering immigrants were to be sent, at a magistrate’s discretion, to the hospital at their home plantation, unless the situation called for the wandering immigrant to be sent to the Colonial Hospital.

The Chief Justice, William George Knox, agreed that wandering immigrants should be sent to the hospitals on the estates to which they were indentured, unless they were quite sick, in which case they should be sent to the Colonial Hospital. However, since such a stipulation would

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57 TNA CO 318/247: Walcott to Rogers, 29 August 1866.
58 TNA CO 318/247: Draft letter to the Officer Administering the Government of Trinidad, 29 October 1866.
59 Mitchell to Gordon, 15 November 1866, Official records, Vol. 2, NYPL.
60 Bushe to Gordon, 20 November 1866, Official records, Vol. 2, NYPL.
61 Memo by Arthur Gordon, 3 December 1866, Official records, Vol. 2, NYPL.
require fresh legislation, he concluded that the Stipendiary Magistrate should use discretion as to how to proceed in such situations.\(^62\) The Receiver General interpreted Gordon’s declaration by finding that it was perfectly legal for Justices of the Peace to send wandering immigrants to their respective estate hospital rather than the Colonial Hospital.\(^63\)

In any case, the colony passed an ordinance in February 1867, which allowed for wandering immigrants to be sent to any hospital on the magistrate’s discretion.\(^64\) Gordon had introduced a way to deal with vagrancy without the prison. The law allowed for an estate to forcibly keep a wandering laborer, showcasing how a law with paternalist tendencies could quickly veer into the authoritarian. The Hospital Ordinance, started under Rushworth, amended under Gordon, and always under the watchful eye of Henry Mitchell, represented one of the first legislative actions of a new conservative era. There was a desire to keep the worker under a close watch as his health and his life were now of great concern to the state. It is important to note that hospitals were not replacements for prisons. Instead, they were another way to exert granular control over the lives of the indentured. While some vagrants could be sent to jail, others could be sent to the hospital. Both were ways to control movement and keep indentured workers bound to their plantations.

Part of this law was rooted in a belief that Indians were preternaturally unclean and did not seek out medical care until it was too late. Only government intervention could save the Indian. This ordinance did not necessary bend to the wants and desires of the planter class. Instead, it was part of the colonial state exerting control over what it deemed to be the best interests of the colony rather than individual plantation owners. In keeping the sugar flowing

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\(^{62}\) Knox to Gordon, 4 December 1866, Official records, Vol. 2, NYPL.

\(^{63}\) Bulwer to Gordon, 6 December 1866, Official records, Vol. 2, NYPL.

\(^{64}\) TNA CO 295/238, no 17: Gordon to Earl of Carnarvon, 8 February 1867.
throughout the empire, the colony had to ensure a healthy and secure workforce. Now, some might argue that this was a law designed to dictate to planters what they could and could not do. That might be true. In fact, planters were often a thorn in the side of colonial officials. Take the Ilbert Bill crisis in South Asia. In mofussil towns (the areas outside Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras), Indian magistrates were barred from trying Europeans. The 1883 Ilbert Bill tried to amend statute to allow for any Indian Civil Servant with sufficient rank and experience to administer criminal law over Europeans. The scandal that resulted was deemed a “white mutiny.” Because Indians were seen as untrustworthy, there was a racialized fear over the ramifications of this kind of power. However, the Ilbert Bill was in itself an attempt to try to control settlers and settler violence. What the Ilbert Bill crisis can show us is that plantation hospitals can be both an attempt to control what the planters could and could not do, in addition to an attempt to further colonial control over the indentured. It need not be an either/or dichotomy.

This was not to be the last piece of legislation that sought to wrestle control of the immigrant’s body. The next would be the Feeding Ordinance.

*The Feeding Ordinance*

When Henry Mitchell wrote his report on the Hospital Ordinance, he also included a small note on the rationing of Indian immigrants. He thought that part of the immigrants’ wages for their

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first year under contract could be used to purchase rations. This, in turn, would counteract the Indian’s desire to “hoard his money, even at the risk of denying himself sufficient food.”

Rushworth took immediate notice of Mitchell’s appeal. Noting that such a policy existed in Mauritius, he was shocked to see that such a policy was not in place in Trinidad. Echoing the Agent General’s remarks, he found that most deaths among the indentured occurred in the first year or two of residence in Trinidad. The best way to prevent such deaths was through legislation and ordinances. Rushworth brought the Feeding Ordinance to the Legislative Council alongside the Hospital Ordinance. Several members of the Council found that the measure would be beneficial, but held “great apprehension” that immigrants would oppose any reduction in their wages, even if rations were to be provided with them.

The Colonial Office waited on giving a full opinion on the matter until it formally received a draft ordinance. They did note that while it was desirable to protect an immigrant “against his own mismanagement,” the system could be abused, raising the specter of discontent and anger among the immigrants. In this case, possible unrest was weighed against exerting control over immigrants’ bodies.

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66 TNA: CO 295/235, no. 84, Mitchell to Bushe, enclosure in Rushworth to Cardwell.

67 Mauritius mandated the rationing of indentured Indians from start of indenture in that colony. Perhaps the reason for such a measure was that indenture in Mauritius was always colored by migrants who returned back to India (as Mauritius was in the a part of Indian Ocean trade and migration networks). The Mauritian labor experiment fell between two types of labor recruitment system in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the sirdari or kangani system of private recruitment and the official state-sanctioned indentured system. The flow of migration was determined by conditions in Mauritius as well as returnee-recruits who induced new migrants to join them. For more, see Carter, Servants, Sirdars and Settlers.

68 TNA CO 295/235 no 84: Rushworth to Cardwell.

69 Ibid.

70 TNA CO 318/247: Walcott to Rogers.
The matter was not taken up again during Rushworth’s interim administration. However, by May 1867, Gordon had taken up the cause.\textsuperscript{71} His ordinance called for all immigrants to receive daily rations by their employer for their first year of employment. All immigrants above ten years of age would receive either one and a half pounds of rice, two pounds of maize, or two pounds of cooked lauia; half a pound of either salted fish, salted meat, or dried and uncooked meat; and one ounce of coconut oil. If the immigrant were under ten years of age, then he or she would receive half of the above rations. The full ration was valued at the rate of five pence and a half-penny.\textsuperscript{72}

In reply, the officials at the Colonial Office saw the positives in preventing “ignorant men, sometimes with a very depraved appetite, sometimes of very pernicious habits, from either indulging in unwholesome food, or restricting themselves to less than is necessary to health.”\textsuperscript{73} The negatives were the possibility of abusing the system on the part of the employer as well as “interference with the liberty of the immigrant.”\textsuperscript{74}

A similar system had been tested in St. Lucia in 1860. St. Lucia had received a small number of Indian immigrants to work on sugar plantations. There, Colonial Officials found that Indians would eat “unwholesome food.” The Secretary of State for India thus agreed to the passage of a voluntary system for receiving rations in exchange for wages for three months after their arrival to St. Lucia.\textsuperscript{75} With that in mind, the Colonial Office recommended that the Trinidadian ordinance should also be voluntary.

\textsuperscript{71} TNA CO 295/239 no 73: Gordon to Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, 24 May 1867.
\textsuperscript{72} TNA CO 295/239 no 73: “An Ordinance for the Feeding of Indentured Immigrants,” enclosure in Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} TNA CO 318/250: Murdoch to Rogers, 26 June 1867.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
Gordon gave an impassioned reply to this suggestion. The only way to ensure the health of the immigrant—and by extension, the health of the colony—was to govern on behalf of the worker. “Generally speaking,” he wrote, “if the option be [sic] left to the employer he will only take advantage of the permission when the supply of rations to the immigrants will afford a pecuniary advantage to himself.”\textsuperscript{76}

The problem was the nature of the Indian immigrants. Gordon found that they spent the first year of their indenture “reducing their own food and that of their families to an amount barely sufficient to sustain life, in order that they may add every possible farthing to their hoard of savings.”\textsuperscript{77} It is illuminating to see that while saving and the liberal value of thrift was once encouraged, it soon became a threat to the very life of the immigrant himself.

The final paragraph of the letter shows Gordon’s true beliefs regarding the measure. An examination of the letter’s draft copy shows that Gordon inserted the paragraph after the Colonial Secretary penned the first draft.\textsuperscript{78}

“I feel so strongly,” Gordon wrote, “the inutility of any merely permissive measure and the disadvantages which would attend any abandonment of a uniform system of treatment on all estates throughout the colony that until I receive your Grace’s reply I shall abstain from introducing any measure upon the subject.”\textsuperscript{79}

In the face of such a response, the Colonial Office relented and allowed for the measure to be mandatory, but only for three months, rather than a full year.\textsuperscript{80} Gordon persisted and by February 1868, the measure passed with the approval of the Colonial Office. All immigrants,

\textsuperscript{76} TNA CO 295/240 no 108: Gordon to Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, 28 August 1867.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Gordon to Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, Draft despatch no 108, Official records, Vol. 5, NYPL.
\textsuperscript{79} TNA CO 295/240 no 108: Gordon to Duke of Buckingham and Chandos.
\textsuperscript{80} TNA CO 318/250: Walcott to Rogers, 17 October 1867.
excluding those who had already been indentured in another British West Indian colony, would now be rationed for one year.\textsuperscript{81} In 1870, Gordon would return to this ordinance, extending it from twelve months to twenty-four months of rationing.\textsuperscript{82}

Gordon viewed this ordinance as one of the most important pieces of his legislative history in Trinidad. In 1869, prior to departing for a brief trip to London, Gordon wrote a memo summarizing the state of the colony to the Lieutenant Governor of Tobago, Cornelius Kortright. Kortright was to would govern the island during Gordon’s absence. In his memo, Gordon wrote that the ordinance had the effect of improving the health and wealth of indentured immigrants. “There has been hardly a single death among the new coolies up to this time,” he wrote, “and the amount of work done and wages earned by them is much greater than has ever been the case before.”\textsuperscript{83} In terms of protecting life, labor, wages, and profit, the ordinance was a success.

It may seem on first glance that the Hospital and Feeding Ordinances were a net positive. They decreased mortality and encouraged the health and well-being of Indian immigrants. That very well may have been the case. It does not change the fact that these ordinances, in addition to the changes in speaking \textit{about} immigrants that preceded them, represented monumental shifts in governance. These shifts were a result of an empire and world stunned by rebellion. Gordon made reference to such a transition in a speech he made in Couva in 1869:

\begin{quote}
During my administration . . . at least one important change has taken place. The new policy of England with regard to the colonies is now better-established and better understood than heretofore . . . Five-and-twenty or thirty years ago the conduct of England towards her colonies was generous and liberal, but above all it was masked by a desire to Anglicize—to print her own stamp on all her subjects—to introduce her laws and institutions wherever she ruled. She now has realized the impolicy of such a course
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{81} TNA CO 295/243, no 19: Gordon to Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, 10 February 1868.

\textsuperscript{82} TNA CO 295/250 no 38: Gordon to Granville, 6 April 1870.

\textsuperscript{83} Gordon to Kortright, June 1869, Official records, Vol. 5, NYPL.
when she has to deal with an established civilization and another race . . . The colonies shall be treated on quite another principle to that on which they have hitherto been ruled.\footnote{The Review, November 20, 1869, as cited in Wood, Trinidad in Transition, 292–93.}

This is perhaps the most literal way of putting it: the policies of cultural assimilation (or Anglicization, as Gordon put it) gave way to governing another race and civilization. And while these policies may have made the lives of others better, they were couched in a new language. Both the Hospitals and Feeding ordinance were based on the idea that Indians did not know how to control their own bodies. They would wait until the last moment to seek care in a hospital. They would save money to the point of starvation. Only state intervention could help keep them alive. And only state intervention could help keep the peace.

This idea that issues stemming from race could destabilize the colony was seen perhaps most clearly in a secret dispatch from 1867. In it, Gordon described his fears of riot and insubordination stemming from Asian immigrants:

The only danger of disturbance to the public tranquility (so long as Great Britain is at peace with other powers) that I can see is that of serious outbreaks among the Chinese or Indian immigrants. Such as event is improbable, but it should be guarded against, for occasional riots on apparently slight provocation (I say apparently for I have some doubt whether the true cause of these disturbances is ever satisfactorily ascertained) have shown it to be not impossible, and in remote districts much blood might be shed an serious outrages committed before assistance could arrive.\footnote{Gordon to Granville (draft secret), May 1869, Official records, Vol. 8, NYPL.}

Mahabir’s world was changing. He was viewed either as a threat or as incapable of managing his own life. This was not necessarily due to anything he had done. Rather, it was the actions of those in South Asia that influenced colonial administrators in the indenture colonies. Indians had taken up arms and had dared to challenge the British Empire. The reactions to rebellion would curtail Mahabir’s freedom.

Colonial administrators believed that Mahabir had become a threat. Who knew what he was capable of? One day he could be a docile worker and the next, a rebel and criminal. The man
who was once an indebted peasant was now a threat. To turn him into a proper worker required realizing that danger lurked around every corner. Such thoughts were surely on the minds of many (and perhaps all) colonial administrators. The only way to prevent riots and outrages, it seemed, was an empowered state legislating for the security of the colony. A state that, with Gordon’s help, was to be exported to Fiji.
Chapter Six
On to Fiji

Mahabir was everywhere and nowhere. Our everyman labored in every indenture colony across the British Empire. By the late-nineteenth century, he would find himself in the South Pacific, ready and willing to work the fields of cane he had tilled in colonies around the world. While the post-rebellion empire had recently come home to Trinidad, it was now Trinidad’s turn to travel about the world. Policies familiar to Mahabir in Trinidad were to form the basis for indenture in Fiji.

In 1874, Fiji, a collection of 332 islands in the South Pacific, formally became a colony of the United Kingdom. Arthur Hamilton-Gordon was selected by London to be Fiji’s first
governor. He had arrived in the colony following a stint as governor of Mauritius—another
indenture colony. In 1879—the last year of Gordon’s governorship—the ship *Leonidas* arrived
from Calcutta. Upon its decks were the island’s first indentured Indians. We will now move our
gaze from Trinidad to the beginnings of colonial rule and Indian indenture in Fiji. In Fiji, unlike
in other indenture colonies, there was no turn to conservative rule. Instead, Gordon made the
colony in line with a conservative ethos. That meant indirect rule with native Fijian society and
the heavy-handed mix of authoritarianism and paternalism with the Indians.

We will explore ordinances on policing and health—topics that will be discussed further
in this dissertation. In doing so, we will find a world where the Indian immigrant had little
control over his life and body.

*A Brief History of Colonization*

Fiji had been roughly familiar to the United Kingdom prior to its formal annexation. Captain
Cook had skirted the shores of its islands in 1769, but he quickly set sail after he concluded that
the land was filled with cannibals.¹ In 1835, missionaries associated with the Wesleyan Mission
landed upon Fiji’s beaches and made their way inland. Their attempts at proselytizing were
initially met with considerable resistance. One missionary likened the task to “walking in the
mouths of sharks.”² After a few years of missionary activity, however, hostility to the gospels
gave way to mass conversions.

Christian influence reached a pinnacle with the conversion of Seru Epenisa Cakobau, the
Paramount Chief of Bau. Cakobau would later unite the Fiji islands and title himself as King of
Fiji. During this time, other Europeans, including beachcombers, those involved with the bèche-

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¹ The extent to which cannibalism in pre-colonial Fiji has been over-emphasized, including whether cannibalism
was a significant part of Fijian society, has been a subject of debate. See
² Matt Tomlinson, *In God’s Image: The Metaculture of Fijian Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press,
2009), 36.
de-mer and sandalwood trade, and naval officers jockeyed for space on the Fijian islands and attempted to influence local politics. For example, the Royal Navy was involved in several humanitarian missions that were ostensibly meant for the protection of islanders. Naval officers armed with beliefs ranging from evangelism, to antislavery, to racial theories of superiority (and benevolent protection) policed the waters of the South Pacific with a sense of moral obligation. Influenced by the Aborigines’ Protection Society, Commodore James Goodenough declared British rule on the islands prior to formal cession on the grounds that the Cakobau government was dependent on slavery.³

Goodenough’s proclamation was welcomed by Cakobau as an escape from mounting debts amassed due to rise and fall of cotton prices during and after the American Civil War. In 1874, he and several native chiefs signed a formal Deed of Cession, bringing Fiji into the British Empire and reliving the kingdom of monetary pressures. Hercules Robinson, then Lieutenant-Governor of New South Wales, had arranged signing of the Deed. Sent to see if annexation was a possibility, he exceeded the task assigned to him and presented London with a Deed of Cession that had already been signed during a handover ceremony.⁴

Arthur-Hamilton Gordon lobbied the Colonial Office to become the colony’s first governor. Though the position represented a departure from the upward trajectory of colonial servants, Gordon saw the position as a chance to cement a personal legacy.⁵ His lobbying was successful and he was chosen to serve as Fiji’s first governor.

⁴ John Dunham Kelly, “Gordon Was No Amateur: Imperial Legal Strategies in the Colonization of Fiji,” in *Law & Empire in the Pacific: Fiji and Hawai’i*, ed. Sally Engle Merry and Donald Brenneis (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2004), 65.
Gordon came to the position from Mauritius, where he had served following his governorship of Trinidad. The question first and foremost on Gordon’s agenda was how to develop the Fijian economy without decimating its native population.

Who Should Work? Who Shouldn’t?

In the years preceding annexation, native Fijians had died in massive numbers due to internal warring during Cakobau’s reign, as well as from epidemics from diseases introduced by Europeans. William Thomas Pritchard, appointed in 1858 as the first British consul to Fiji, estimated that there were 200,000 Fijians in the isles. By 1867, he estimated their number at 100,000. Such depopulation put the colony in peril.

Further confounding officials was the fact that Fijians more often than not refused to undertake any field labor. However, there did exist a system for the transport of indentured labor inside the South Pacific. Known as “blackbirding” and decried by many in the United Kingdom as slavery, blackbirding was responsible for the transportation of nearly 60,000 individuals between 1863 and 1906 from various South and Southwestern Pacific islands to Queensland to work the sugar plantations. The South Pacific indentured labor trade ended due to the adoption of Australia’s white-only policy.

This system was extended to Fiji as well. Prior to the introduction of indentured Indians, regulation for blackbirded workers in the South Pacific was modeled off of indenture legislation in other colonies. In 1877, for example, Gordon amended the immigration ordinance for

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6 Pritchard to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, enclosure in Hammond to Merivale (No. 1), 18 February 1859, in Correspondence relative to Fiji Islands PP 2995 (1862), 2.

7 “Mr. Thurston’s report on the Navigation, Trade, and Social Condition of the Fiji Islands,” in Correspondence and Documents relating to Fiji Islands, on Annexation to Colonial Empire of United Kingdom PP 435 (1871), 68.


Polynesian laborers and modeled it on the immigration ordinances of Trinidad and British Guiana.\textsuperscript{10}

Gordon did not grapple with questions of labor regulation on his own. Accompanying him to Fiji was a familiar cast of characters. Charles Mitchell, the son of the Trinidadian Agent General of Immigration Henry Mitchell, had worked with Gordon in Mauritius. He accepted a pay cut to continue to work with Gordon in Fiji. Also accompanying him was Arthur Havelock (Treasurer) and Dr. William MacGregor (Chief Medical Officer), who were appointed by Gordon in Seychelles. Gordon also recruited several others from his time in Mauritius.\textsuperscript{11}

However, despite the use of indentured Polynesian labor on the island, Gordon implemented a new experiment in government by seeking to protect native society. Given the depopulation of the Fijians, Gordon sought to use imperial policy to protect an endangered people. And of course, there was a strategic importance in reinforcing foreign rule by gaining the support of the native chiefs.\textsuperscript{12}

Indirect rule was a way to legitimize colonial despotism through native society. Part of the reason to use indirect rule in Fiji may have been to shift the balance of power away from the white proprietors that had settled in the colony prior to formal annexation. While Gordon believed that white settlers had been unduly criticized for their poor financial decisions, he concluded that “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.”\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} Gordon to Carnarvon (No. 5), 11 April 1877 in Ordinances by Sir A. Gordon to regulate Treatment of Polynesian Labourers, and Introduction of Indian Coolies into Fiji; Correspondence relating to Ordinances between Colonial Office and Government of Fiji PP 111 (1878), 35–43.
\textsuperscript{11} Brown, “Inter-Colonial Migration and the Refashioning of Indentured Labour,” 220.
\textsuperscript{12} For an analysis of indirect rule in Fiji, see J. D. Legge, Britain in Fiji, 1858-1880 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1958).
\textsuperscript{13} Gordon to Carnarvon, undated, BL, Stanmore Papers, Add. Ms. 49199, f. 132.
Gordon would rely upon Henry Maine’s ideas to think through the protection of native society. Maine had argued that native society had one integrated character with a system of social ideas and practices that was so total, that any change in one area could undo the stability of society. On top of this, Gordon believed that sustained contact with the West would eventually undermine Fijian society—a view that can be traced back to Maine as well.

With this in mind, Gordon solidified native control over the land by codifying Fijian custom and restricting the alienation and sale of land parcels. He also sought to protect the village community by protecting communal land and legalizing chiefly authority. Gordon imagined that this type of government would successfully handle Fijian affairs. It would reject the blanket introduction of Western institutions by wrapping an imperial project of cultural protection into the language of Fijian self-determination.

This was made clear in an 1878 speech to the Aberdeen Philosophical Society. Gordon described his method in sharp contrast to the liberal project first used in India. First and foremost, his government in Fiji “sanctioned the maintenance to a great extent of the old laws.” And while British colonial rule did attempt “to reduce them to form and to modify them,” he did not think it “necessary to impose upon the native population the whole technicalities and proceedings of the English law.” This was in contrast to the “disastrous effects [that] were produced by such an attempt a hundred years ago in India. Then, when the Supreme Court was first founded in

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14 Mantena, Alibis of Empire, 172.
15 There has been some debate as to the degree to which Henry Maine influenced Gordon. John D. Kelly found Henry Maine’s influence in Gordon’s policies to be mixed. While his policies did turn towards indirect rule, Kelly asked: “Where is any concern for the customary law of the so called coolies? Where is his concern for effects of contracts or courts of law on them?” This dissertation is in part an attempt to answer Kelly’s question. On the other hand, another scholar, Colin Newbury, saw Gordon as more of an adaptive governor, whose policies fit the situation he was found in. Newbury saw Gordon as a figure more or less influenced by the politics of patronage. However, this explanation fails to take into account the nuances of Gordon’s indenture policy. See Kelly, “Gordon Was No Amateur,” 77–85; Newbury, Patronage and Politics in the Victorian Empire, 176–78.
16 Mantena, Alibis of Empire, 173.
17 Ibid.
Calcutta, the judges took it into their heads that English law was to be imposed altogether throughout Hindostan.”

This was quite similar to Gordon’s 1869 speech in Trinidad where he reflected that when the British had “to deal with an established civilization and another race,” it was necessary for state power to treat the colonies “on quite another principle to that on which they have hitherto been ruled.” In Fiji, this would lead to a bifurcation of rule. On one hand, native society would be governed through the dictates of indirect rule. When it came to Indian indentured labor, this would be far from the case.

A Labor Solution

Despite his use of indirect rule to govern native society, Gordon recognized that the colony still needed an economic base. He determined that plantation labor would be necessary to jumpstart the economy. Plantation labor required plantations and Gordon was not quite thrilled with their presence: “When I speak more favourably of the planters I do not work to be understood to speak of them all. Some are brutes.” Gordon’s prior experience in Trinidad and Mauritius combined with his mistrust of Fiji’s planter class. This led him to implement a familiar labor system that used state power to stake a claim over the lives of the indentured.

The planter interest had settled itself in Fiji in the years prior to formal colonization. They had mainly run cotton plantations, as the price of that commodity boomed during the American Civil War. However, following the conclusion of the war, the boom reached its bust and many of the planters were facing poverty.

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21 Kelly, “Gordon Was No Amateur,” 63.
When Gordon froze the alienation and sale of land, he did so to also stem the issues that arose between planters and native Fijians. Planters had been buying land from Fijian chiefs and would sometimes cultivate it with the help of Fijians already living on the purchased parcel. However, plantation owners found Fijian labor unreliable at best. The planters would routinely expel any Fijians living on the bought land. Fijians, however, understood land purchases as not constituting an exclusive right. It was generally believed that the planters had purchased customary rights from the chief to use the land. It was further believed that the planters had only purchased a right of occupation with the Fijians, not a right to exclude others from the parcel.22

Beyond issues relating to land tenure, Gordon recognized that agricultural production required ample and reliable labor. In this case, that meant a plentiful supply of workers who would not abscond from work. In a lengthy speech made to planters on September 2, 1875, Gordon asked two questions to the assembled group: “Is it in your opinion desirable that the Government should undertake the conduct and management of the immigration of labour?” and “Is it in your opinion desirable that efforts should be made to effect the introduction of immigrant labour from India?”23 Gordon hoped to receive actual answers to his questions and requested the audience to mark “ay” or “no” on slips of paper near the exit.

With respect to the first question, Gordon guaranteed an organized system of immigration. The colony would pay the initial immigration expenses and would provide for an installment program for other payments with planters. With regards to the second question, Gordon conceded that procuring Indian labor was more expensive than Polynesian labor. However, he

remained adamant that Indians were a better choice. Indians would enter into a longer employment contract and the supply of labor from India was “practically boundless.”

The planter interest initially opposed the use of indentured Indians. Most of the planters had small estates and were in debt. As a result, most of them could not afford the initial payments for Indian immigrants. Within a few years of the project, however, colonial officials largely saw the planter class as on board with the indenture project.

Gordon came into Fiji with a three-prong approach: to support colonial rule through the protection of native society, to shore up the colony’s economy by rescuing the planter interest, and to provide for the future labor needs of the colony by implementing a plan for labor importation. Gordon’s ability to quickly create a sugar economy was remarkable. He successfully persuaded the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR), Australia’s leading sugar producer, to make major investments in the industrial infrastructure in Fiji. By the early twentieth century, the CSR would be the sole sugar refiner in the colony and would own most of the sugar plantations, in the process controlling nearly half of the colony’s cash economy.

By 1877, Gordon moved forward with his plan to import Indian labor. In a letter to Lord Carnarvon, then Secretary of State for the Colonies, he outlined the necessity of using indentured immigrants. The first reason was that native labor both diminished and hard to find. Furthermore, blackbired labor from Western Polynesia was no longer a viable choice. By the middle of August of that year, only 110 immigrants had arrived in the colony.

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24 Ibid., 1:179.
25 Gillion, Fiji’s Indian Migrants, 15.
26 “Fiji,” in Report of the Committee on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates (East India: Emigration) PP Cd. 5192 (1910), 85.
27 Kelly, “Gordon Was No Amateur,” 63.
Gordon found three reasons for the decrease in Polynesian labor: the rapid diminution of the population of the islands from where those laborers were recruited, much higher wages in Queensland, and a long delay in returning laborers to their homes.\textsuperscript{28} Returns were delayed because planters, saddled with large debts, were unable to afford the return journeys for Polynesian laborers.\textsuperscript{29}

The solution to these issues was to supply labor from “the superabundant population of India.” Gordon believed that Fiji had a pleasant-enough climate and country that could “suit the health and tastes of Indian coolies.” Gordon presented his plan as the solution to a stark situation. Only a steady supply of labor would prevent the rise of slavery and “involuntary servitude” in Fiji. Having just set up a government designed to protect native society from outside pressures, this was an unacceptable fate. Instead, a system of immigration similar to that of the West Indies and Mauritius would allow the colony to thrive.\textsuperscript{30}

Some scholars have seen indenture as a side project for Gordon. In this argument, Gordon was more interested in the management of Fijian native society; outside labor guaranteed the survival of the Fijian population.\textsuperscript{31} It is perhaps more accurate to see indirect rule for native society and authoritarian-paternalist rule for indenture society as a coherent way of governing Fiji. For Gordon, the security and well-being of the colony was dependent on two factors: the use of native society to protect rule and the profitability of agricultural enterprise. Fijian society was to be placated through rule that operated through native custom. Agricultural enterprise would be guaranteed through Indian immigration. As has been seen, these ways of ruling the colony were

\textsuperscript{28} Gordon to Carnarvon (No. 7), 9 August 1877, in \textit{Ordinances by Sir A. Gordon} PP 111 (1878), 45.
\textsuperscript{29} Cumpston, “Sir Arthur Gordon and the Introduction of Indians into the Pacific,” 374.
\textsuperscript{30} Gordon to Carnarvon, 9 August 9 1877, in \textit{Ordinances by Sir A. Gordon} PP 111 (1878), 45.
\textsuperscript{31} Gillion, \textit{Fiji’s Indian Migrants}, 17.
two sides of the same coin: postliberal control of the colony. Indeed, these kinds of tendencies in colonial power were to be seen in the initial negotiations regarding indenture.

**Negotiating the Terms**

In July 1877, Gordon sent Charles Mitchell to Calcutta to negotiate the terms of Indian immigration with the Government of India. He was also to convince to the authorities that the welfare and protection of the Indian emigrant was to be of the utmost priority.\(^{32}\)

On November 14, 1877, Gordon received the news from London he had been hoping for. Lord Carnarvon wrote to him that the Colonial Office had no objections with his plan and that Indian immigration to Fiji could begin.\(^{33}\) Government officials began drafting an ordinance for Indian immigration. By May 1878, colonial officials in Fiji were able to transmit a report of their draft ordinance to London.

The ordinance was modeled of those in force in British Guiana and Trinidad, with minor modifications.\(^{34}\) Many of the paternalist policies instituted in those colonies were copied wholesale into the Fijian ordinance. For example, the law prevented immigrants from being allotted to plantations where the death rate exceeded five percent (though these regulations were to be relaxed if there were fewer than twenty immigrants on a plantation). Families, wives, and children were not to be separated. Like Trinidad, hospitals were required on plantations with more than five immigrants. In these hospitals, planters had to provide food while immigrants were under care. Again like Trinidad, immigrants were to be rationed for twelve months.\(^{35}\)

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32 Thurston to Mitchell, 13 July 1877, enclosure in Ibid., 49.

33 Carnarvon to Gordon (No. 8), 14 November 1877, in *Ordinances by Sir A. Gordon* PP 111 (1878), 51.

34 TNA CO 384/117 no 61: Minutes of J.B. Gill, 27 May 1878.

35 TNA CO 384/117 no 61: Report on Ordinance No. VI of 1878, enclosure in Gordon to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 27 May 1878.
Because these policies were passed almost by default and without much debate, this chapter will focus on those policies that received much more attention. This is not to say that Fiji was more authoritarian than paternalistic. Like Trinidad (and other indenture colonies), Fiji was swayed between authoritarian and paternalistic impulses. Thus, while this chapter focuses on other portions of Indian indenture in Fiji, it should be noted that the previously discussed examples of paternalist policies were instituted across different indenture colonies.

None of these policies were to threaten agricultural production. For example, if an immigrant was convalescing after a hospital stay, the cost of his or her rations would be deducted from future wages at 5p. per day. A worker off the plantation, even if convalescing, was an economic sunk cost. That cost was to be passed on to the worker.

In another case, the Agent General of Immigrants could refuse allotting immigrants on a plantation where any employer was convicted of aggravated assaults on his laborers more than three times in two years. Though one would think that one or two convictions would be enough proof, it would take extreme circumstances to remove labor from the plantation.

In terms of desertion, the ordinance used more authoritarian measures to keep workers on the plantation. Desertion was defined as “an absence without legal excuse for five days.” Following such an absence, anyone in authority on the immigrant’s plantation could notify the police and the immigrant could be arrested without a warrant. The rule of law was grounded in repressive power that guaranteed the presence of labor on the estates. As noted earlier in this dissertation, colonial officials began to curtail Indian’s freedom of movement in order to control...

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
vagrancy. This authoritarian impulse only grew after the mid-nineteenth century. As we will see later, this desire led to large percentages of the Indian population being sent to jail.\footnote{See Chapter Seven.}

However, there was some wariness from London in granting this kind of power over the lives of the indentured. J.B. Gill, a clerk transferred from the Colonial Land and Emigration office to the Colonial Office after the former office’s closure, noted in his minutes, “It seems to me that the powers granted to ‘employers’ or ‘any one in authority’ on plantations by which they can arrest an immigrant \textit{without a warrant} may be open to abuse.”\footnote{TNA CO 384/117 no 61: Minutes of J.B. Gill, 27 May 1878. Emphasis in original.} Nevertheless, such concerns were only murmured in minutes and were not brought to the level of actual policy critique.

What remains surprising about the vagrancy laws was that they were in stark contrast to the promises made to the Government of India by Charles Mitchell during negotiations regarding the basic tenets of immigration. In a November 1877 letter, Mitchell spoke of the evils of the “pass system” and how the laws in Fiji would buck the trend in this regard:

The draft ordinance also differs both from the law of British Guiana and Trinidad in its provisions regarding passes or tickets-of-leave. In those Colonies any policeman may stop an immigrant and ask him for a ticket-of-leave, and if he fails to produce it, may take him to the nearest police-station. A power of this kind, unless carefully watched by the Immigration authorities, may be much abused, and is at times exceedingly annoying to immigrants who have completed their industrial residence . . . To obviate such cases as I have mentioned, it is provided that only the employer of an immigrant or his overseers or headmen, who are sure of the identity of an immigrant, may arrest him, and a policeman may not do so unless provided with a warrant for his arrest.\footnote{TNA CO 384/120 (India Office): Mitchell to the Officiating Secretary to the Government of India, 13 November 1877, enclosure in Stanhope to the Under Secretary of State, 15 May 1878.} Indian officials seemed pleased with this assurance and found the Fijian law to be an improvement upon the one in force in British Guiana.\footnote{TNA CO 384/120 (India Office); Batten to Agent-General of Immigration for Fiji, 4 December 1877, enclosure in Stanhope to Under Secretary of State, 15 May 1878.} Despite such promises, the copy of the Draft Ordinance sent to India noted the same provision as that sent to the Colonial Office—an...
arrest without warrant in suspected cases of desertion. The Government of India did not raise any objections to the about face. The language stood, and the act was passed on May 27, 1878.

Force and repression would ensure that Indians remained on the plantation. Vagrancy was a breach of contract and would lead to jail time. Labor would be secured by force. Penal measures were to be used to counteract idleness, vagrancy, and absenteeism.

_The Indians Arrive, Pathogens in Tow_

498 Indians were recruited to depart from Calcutta to Fiji on the ship _Leonidas_. It only after they were recruited did officials in Fiji realize that they needed a location to receive the immigrants. Making the reception more complicated was that the government had received only a few applications by planters for immigrants. The vast majority would have to be employed by the government in the interim. Thus, officials needed a location where a number of them could be left in the hands of the colonial government. The ideal location would be one where “inmates might be readily employed in useful work and at the same time be kept under control without undue expense.”

Given these conditions, officials decided that instead of receiving them near the capital Suva on the main island of Viti Levu or near the old capital of Levuka (the capital was moved in 1877) on the island of Ovalau, the immigrants would first land on the island of Yanuca Lailai. This was decided in consultation with the Medical Officer and the Agent General of Immigration. Yanuca Lailai Island is located south of Ovalau in the straits between that island and the small

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42 TNA CO 384/120 (India Office); §13, ¶74 in “An Ordinance with Regard to Immigration,” enclosure in Stanhope to Under Secretary of State, 15 May 1878.

43 TNA CO 384/120 (India Office): Gordon to the Viceroy and Governor General of India in Council, 27 May 1878, enclosure in Mallet to Undersecretary of State, 13 September 1878. For full text of the act, see TNA CO 84/1: No. 6–1878, “An Ordinance with regard to Indian Immigration.”

44 See Chapter Seven.

45 TNA CO 384/122 no 54: Des Voeux to Kimberley, 28 April 1879.
island of Yanuca Levu. The island would serve the dual purpose of housing immigrants at a distance and also acting as a quarantine station.46

Putting the Indian immigrants on the island of Yanuca Lailai used geography to protect the colony. Indians were a potential microbial threat. Each one was a potential carrier of illness and concomitant disorder. To secure the colony from the disarray of disease, Indians would first have to be quarantined on an island close enough to the mainland to keep a watchful eye, but far enough to prevent any pathogens from wafting in.

Quarantine stations for travelers had a long history. Their usage dates back to fifteenth-century Venice, where travelers arriving by the Mediterranean were quarantined in the Venetian Lagoon. In 1738, New York City used Bedloe’s Island (now Liberty Island) to quarantine passengers suspected to be infected with smallpox and other malignant fevers.47 Such practices were put into use with wide-scale migration in the nineteenth century. Established in 1892, Ellis Island received many of the new Southern and Eastern European migrants to the United States. One of the principal features of landing on the island was the medical inspection. Placing the immigration station on an island served to prevent disease from entering New York. The same logic applied to Angel Island when it was established in 1910 in the San Francisco Bay. There, the mainly East Asian immigrants were detained prior to their entry into the country.

The use of a quarantine station would soon come in handy. On May 14, 1879, the ship Leonidas reached Fiji from India. On board were four hundred eighty Indians. The ship’s log

46 Ibid.
showed that thirteen died en route, some from dysentery, most from cholera, though it was also
suspected that there were a few infected with smallpox.\textsuperscript{48}

Colonial officials acted quickly to contain any possibility of an epidemic. A schooner
with an armed guard was placed between the ship and the shore. As there was only housing for
three hundred fifty on Yanuca Lailai, William Des Voeux (a former governor of British Guiana
who was administering the island colony while Gordon was in London) ordered twenty more
huts to be built on Yanuca Lailai to house all the Indians aboard the \textit{Leonidas}. For delivering
provisions, the colony’s medical officer designed a floating trestle to be placed near the ship that
would be “purified and washed off by the sea” at high tide and serviceable for two hours around
low tide. In short, the infected Indians were to be literally kept at bay.\textsuperscript{49}

By July 22, no new cases of smallpox had appeared, and the ship \textit{Leonidas} departed Fiji
for San Francisco.\textsuperscript{50} On August 9, the Indians quarantined on Yanuca Lailai were finally
released.\textsuperscript{51} Some of the immigrants were sent to the island of Rabi (an island to the north of Viti
Levu between Vanua Levu and Taveuni). There, Captain J. Hill had agreed to take on 106 of the
migrants as field workers on his plantation.\textsuperscript{52} By 1880, there were seventy-six immigrants
remaining on the plantation—fifty-one men and twenty-six women. Despite the loss of thirty
immigrants, the remaining, according to one Stipendiary Magistrate, “looked well and
contented.”\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{48} NAF CSO MP 1068/1879: Extract from ship’s log, enclosure in Mitchell to Colonial Secretary, 20 June 1879.
\textsuperscript{49} Des Voeux to Beach (No. 1), 24 May 1879, in \textit{Correspondence between Administrator of Fiji and Secretary of
State for Colonies, relative to Detention of Coolie Ship Leonidas at Nasova, May 1879, in consequence of Outbreak
of Small-pox, and Reports on Efforts to prevent Introduction of Disease into Fiji PP 411 (1880), 3–5.}
\textsuperscript{50} Des Voeux to Beach (No. 5), 22 July 1879, in Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{51} Des Voeux to Beach (No 7), 10 August 1879, in Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{52} Gillion, \textit{Fiji’s Indian Migrants}, 69.
\textsuperscript{53} NAF CSO MP 2164/1880: Taylor to Colonial Secretary, 19 December 1880.
While quarantine stations were used for centuries and around the globe, the emphasis on indentured Indians as potential carriers of disease was a new feature of Indian indenture. This feature allows us to locate the intersection between colonial biopolitics and the management of labor.\(^\text{54}\) As will be explored later, public health and biopower were used to not only racialize indentured Indians, but to enact an authoritarian power that micromanaged every part of their bodies.\(^\text{55}\)

**Methods for Control**

The remaining Indians on Yanuca Lailai were in a state of limbo. The colonial government was required to either provide those not given an allotment on a plantation with work at the wages promised to them in India or to remunerate them for the time spent waiting for employment.\(^\text{56}\) By November, some of the remaining immigrants were indentured to government for Public Works.\(^\text{57}\) In total, 281 immigrants were sent to work for the colonial government on works programs in the capital.\(^\text{58}\) Colonial officials began to immediately legislate upon their personal and work lives.

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\(^{54}\) In his lectures at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault identified how sovereignty in the nineteenth century acquired the power over life. Foucault had identified that sovereign power had traditionally occupied itself with the right to take the life of its subjects. He summarized this power as to “take life or let live.” However, the nineteenth century saw the development of the opposite right—“the right to make live and to let die.” He identified increasing state power over the biological life of its subjects as “biopower” and its political implementation as “biopolitics.” Scholars such as Ann Stoler have seen colonial biopolitics as deeply inflected by power and race. Her study of colonial sexualities allowed one to locate how the management of colonial sexuality was used to create distinctions between the ruler and the ruled. Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976,” in *Society Must Be Defended*: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976, ed. Mauro Bertani, Alessandro Fontana, and François Ewald, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 239–64; Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (University of California Press, 2002).

\(^{55}\) See Chapter Nine.

\(^{56}\) NAF CSO MP 1559/1879: Mitchell to Colonial Secretary, 14 September 1879.

\(^{57}\) NAF CSO MP 1855/1879: Berry to Colonial Secretary, 6 November 1879.

\(^{58}\) NAF Microcopy Catalogue No. L42, Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1879, 1 April 1880.
Some of this legislation was passed while the Indians were still in quarantine. In June, Charles Mitchell suggested a prohibition of the sale of liquor to Indian immigrants.\(^{59}\) The ordinance was passed, and remained in effect—in a diluted form—until 1958.\(^{60}\) In 1886, this law was extended to prohibit the use of cannabis and opium by prohibiting smoking in or around plantation accommodations.\(^{61}\)

Such laws reflected a belief that Indians could not be trusted with their bodies. This legislation was similar to the ordinances put into effect during and around the time of Gordon’s governorship in Trinidad. Conclusions regarding the capabilities of Indians to control their consumptive habits were put into effect as soon as the Indians arrived in Fiji. The colonial state would not only ration the Indians upon their arrival, but control what substances they were allowed to consume during their free time.

More telling was the plan regarding prisons. Before Indians arrived in Suva to begin their Public Works indentures, the Superintendent of Police recommended that the government put up a small jail for Indians. He wrote, “there is no lock-up in the Police Camp at Suva and that as the Indian coolies will shortly be going to that town such a lock-up will be very necessary and I submit it should be erected before the coolies arrive.”\(^{62}\) This recommendation was made not even two weeks after it was decided that the homes being built for Indians in Suva should have a door

\(^{59}\) NAF CSO MP 1118/1879: Mitchell to Colonial Secretary, 24 June 1879.

\(^{60}\) By the twentieth century, Fiji Indians were able to consume alcohol at hotels or in their home by purchasing a permit. Though these permits were freely available, each permit did contain caps on personal consumption. See Mayer, Peasants in the Pacific: A Study of Fiji Indian Rural Society, 49.

\(^{61}\) TNA CO 384/159 no 114: Barkley, “Report on Ordinance No XIV of 1886 intituled an Ordinance to amend Ordinance No. VI of 1878 with regard to Indian Immigrants,” enclosure in McGregor to Granville, 9 September 1886.

\(^{62}\) NAF CSO MP 1832/1879: Superintendent of Police to Colonial Secretary, 22 October 1879, enclosed in Berry to Colonial Secretary, 4 November 1879.
and a window with shutter and padlock. In his minutes regarding the police lock-up, Gordon simply wrote: “This is quite necessary.”

The construction of a lock-up was quite necessary because of the centrality of the prison during the authoritarian-paternalist era. As will be seen later, jails were used to combat perceived idleness as well as vagrancy and absenteeism. Indentured workers sung folk songs about how their lives revolved around the plantation, the courthouse, the police station, and the prison.

Only a handful of years prior to the annexation of Fiji, the postliberal turn had come home to Trinidadian indenture. Soon the conservative principles developed in the West Indies would travel the world. They arrived in Fiji and shaped the lives of the first group of indentured Indians.

In Fiji, Arthur Hamilton-Gordon first secured native authority through the rule of law. With native society taken care of, Gordon sought to develop the colony’s plantation economy. Utilizing a conservative approach in his legislation, Gordon developed Indian indenture in Fiji in an authoritarian-paternalist mold that looked much like indenture in Trinidad and elsewhere.

From here on out, Mahabir’s world felt increasingly claustrophobic. As colonial officials redefined what an ideal worker looked like, Mahabir sung folk songs decrying his near-constant surveillance and punishment. But this was the world he lived in now. The law that was born in other indenture colonies now ruled his life in Fiji.

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63 NAF CSO 1713/1879: Berry to Colonial Secretary, 9 October 1879.

64 NAF CSO 1832/1879: Minutes of Arthur Hamilton Gordon (AHG).

Chapter Seven
In the Lockup

Figure 4: Certificate of Industrial Residence of Summir, 30 November 1886 (Source: SC99 Documents from St. Joseph Estate, Mayaro 1873–1890, The West Indiana Collection, The Alma Jordan Library, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago)

The prison now defined Mahabir’s life. He could waste days or weeks behind bars. His crimes were vague. Perhaps he left to visit someone on another plantation. Perhaps he left to lodge a complaint with the Protector of Immigrants. Perhaps the work that caused every bone in his body to shiver with exhaustion was too much and he simply needed to breathe the free air before returning back to the fields. It was no matter. If he lacked the proper documentation, he was picked up and sent to the lockup.

Global empire increasingly relied on prisons and convict transportation. Convict transportation was used as a tool for political repression. The British shipped convicts out of India in increasing numbers following rebellions and political events. The 1857 Rebellion, the founding of the Indian National Congress (1885), the Partition of Bengal (1905), and the
Malabar Rebellion (1921) all led to pronounced upticks in the number of convicts shipped abroad.¹

Repression was also part of new state endeavors to know and govern its subjects. In 1871, officials in South Asia passed the Criminal Tribes Act, which deemed certain castes and tribes permanently criminal. Tribes were labeled criminal if the Raj could gather enough evidence that a group of people existed as a tribe and that some of these individuals committed crimes.² It was believed that these individuals refused to acknowledge any moral code outside of their tribe and would pass down their criminal behavior through the generations. The only way to combat their tendencies was through measures that attacked the group: confinement to special villages that they could not leave without a ticket or pass, forced agricultural labor, relocation to the Andaman Islands, and police supervision.³

This was by no means a process limited to South Asia. British power in sub-Saharan Africa was supported by the wide use of prisons. There remains scant evidence of pre-colonial prisons in Kenya. One of the first tasks the British undertook in Kenya after establishing colonial control was to build prisons. These prisons were used for social control. Prisoners were jailed for violating laws derived from English common and criminal law—they were convicted for activities that were by-and-large not considered offenses in indigenous society.⁴

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But how was the prison used in the indenture colonies in the postliberal era? By 1895, the rate of prosecution in Trinidad for breach of contract had reached levels high enough to attract London’s scrutiny. The number of prosecutions had been large enough for The Marquess of Ripon to request a report on the increasing number of convictions for breaches of the immigration ordinances. In response, colonial officials in Trinidad prepared a table of all of the convictions for breach of contract among Indian Immigrants. Anticipating any possible criticism of the large number of convictions, then Acting Governor Clement Knollys argued that the large number of cases was due to “hard times.” The planters had to make ends meet and thus required every worker to “give a full day’s work for their days’ pay.”

The punishment for not completing a full day’s work was prison. While the Hospitals Ordinance offered a chance for vagrant indentured workers to be sent to their estate hospital, data on the rate of conviction and imprisonment seem to suggest that most Indians were sent to the prison instead. The hospital was one tool among many used to secure the bodies of indentured workers. Prisons were another—and more widely used.

Between 1885 and 1895, 16,906 Indians in Trinidad were convicted for breach of contract. This averaged approximately 1,690 convictions per year, with a high of 2,372 convictions in 1893, and a low of 1,333 convictions in 1887. Of these convictions, 7,326 individuals were sent to prison—the rest paid the fine associated with breach of contract.

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5 TNA CO 384/192 no 355: Knollys to Chamberlain, 16 September 1895.
6 TNA CO 384/192 no 355: “Return of the number of convictions of Indian Immigrants for breaches of Indenture in the Magistrates’ Courts in each of the years ended 31st December 1894,” enclosure in Ibid.
7 TNA CO 384/192 no 355: “Return of Immigrants committed to prison for Breaches of the Immigration Ordinance during the last ten years,” enclosure in Ibid.
At some point during his indenture, an Indian could expect to be charged with breach of contract. These breaches of contract, which tended to be violations related to vagrancy, desertion, or absence from work, would lead to significant incarceration rates among indentured Indians.

Prisons and convict transportation were used in South Asia as a form of social control. This impulse was modified and put to use in the indenture colonies. In this case, the security and well-being of the colony depended on the security of labor, a drive that fell towards authoritarianism in the continuum between authoritarian and paternalism. In practice, this meant using penal measures to counteract what was seen as excessive idleness, vagrancy, or absenteeism on the part of Indians. Mahabir would now be reformed into a worker by the use of force.

We will begin by looking at the repeal of the Masters and Servants Ordinance in the United Kingdom and its subsequent continuation in the colonies. We will then examine the policing of breach of contract to see how the colonial state used legislation outside the norms of its own standards of justice to police vagrancy and breach of contract.

But why focus on vagrancy? While some of the impulse behind punishing immigrants for breach of contract was to guarantee labor on sugar plantation, punishing vagrancy was also related to state security. Preventing workers from their estates could also prevent protest and unrest. Finally, we will conclude by looking at Indian opinions of vagrancy to find that assimilated Indians in the bourgeoisie were likely to support punishments for vagrancy.

*Masters and Servants Redux*

Criminal prosecution for breach of contract had been subject to vigorous debate in an earlier era of indenture. Colonial officials in London initially believed that indentured Indians could transform into laborers without the repressive influence of laws confining them to one estate.
Such opinions were eventually colored by ideas of racial difference that saw Indians as incapable of fundamental change. This change allowed officials to move towards the adoption of increasingly repressive laws with respect to breach of contract.

Earlier in this dissertation, it was pointed out that criminal punishment for breach of contract was not unique to the indenture colonies, but instead had precedent in Master and Servant law in the United Kingdom. That law was used to criminally punish laborers for breach of contract. In 1875, the Disraeli government successfully negotiated the repeal of the Master and Servants Law when Parliament passed the Employers and Workmen Act. This act removed the prison penalty for basic breaches of contract. In doing so, the law attempted to establish parity between employers and workers. Prior to the act’s passing, workers were liable for criminal prosecution, while employers were only liable to civil action. Now, breach of contract was a civil matter for both parties. Upon the passing of the bill, Disraeli wrote in a letter to Lady Bradford, “I cannot express to you the importance of last night. It is one of those measures that root and consolidate a party. We have settled the long and vexatious contest between Capital and Labor.”

Master and Servant laws were only repealed inside the United Kingdom. The colonies were still subject to regulations passed by their individual Legislative Councils. For the indenture colonies, that meant that breach of contract remained a criminal offense. Workers were to be subject to jail time for violating the stipulations of their contracts. As a result, large percentages

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8 See Chapter Two for more on movements in law and order during the liberal era.
9 Ian St John, Disraeli and the Art of Victorian Politics (Anthem Press, 2010), 149.
10 Marquis of Zetland, ed., The Letters Of Disraeli To Lady Chesterfield And Lady Bradford, vol. I: 1873 to 1875 (New York: D. Appleton And Company, 1929), 337. During the summer after the death of his wife, Mary Anne, in 1872, Disraeli began to court two sisters: Selina, Countess of Bradford and Anne, Countess of Chesterfield. Such a declaration regarding the Employers and Workmen Act was apparently written in a love letter. See Adam Kirsch, Benjamin Disraeli (New York: Schocken, 2008), 156.
of Indians would spend time in the lockup. Certain years saw up to 20 percent of the working population were convicted for breach of contract. The punishment for breach of contract typically involved a fine and failure to pay the fine resulted in jail time. Only some of the indentured workers were able to pay. The rest were sent to prison.

*The State and the Planter Interest*

The indentured Indians were regularly subject to prosecution. Scholars have argued that these prosecutions were used to intimidate and coerce Indians. Above all, they were used to maintain plantation discipline.\(^{11}\) And as others have argued, vagrancy and desertion laws were not only an accompaniment to labor laws, but an integral part of socializing indentured Indians into pliant plantation workers.

Breach of contract and prosecution is well documented in the historiography of indenture. Hugh Tinker first condemned the harsh nature of vagrancy laws. In *A New System of Slavery*, he found the discussion of vagrancy to justify “the imposition of the whole array of penal legislation.”\(^ {12}\)

Walton Look Lai described these laws as being passed in the mid-1850s—a decade he referred to as being part of the “mature phase” of the indenture experiment. These laws formed the legal basis of social regimentation that was ultimately concerned with controlling indentured workers’ freedom of movement.\(^ {13}\)

K.O. Laurence found that legislation regarding criminal sanctions for absence and vagrancy reached its maturity in the 1870s. He argued that the ordinances passed from the late 1850s through the 1860s were increasingly harsh and that the penalties developed in these laws

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were solely repressive.\textsuperscript{14} However, the laws passed in the 1870s were more complex, as they balanced the outright desires of the planter class with legal provisions that prevented Indians’ freedom of movement. The ordinances were used with great regularity. In 1885, 14.3 percent of the indentured population was convicted. Over the next five years, this rate would fluctuate between 14 and 16 percent, before reaching 17.2 percent in 1890.\textsuperscript{15}

These laws were clearly used to keep indentured Indians on their plantations. What would Trinidad or Fiji be without Indian labor? The economic security and vitality of the colony was dependent on an unimpeded flow of contracted labor. Once in the colony, the state used its power to transform every individual into a laborer. As E.P. Thompson put it, “The factory system demands a transformation of human nature, the ‘working paroxysms’ of the artisan or outworker must be methodised until the man is adapted to the discipline of the machine.”\textsuperscript{16} While sugar and cocoa production did not constitute a factory system, the state still used its power to penalize workers.

Global empire used prisons to socialize and punish colonial subjects. In the indenture colonies, this took the form of punishing workers for not working. However, we will also consider some of the other contexts for worker punishment, including a fear of organized protest and rebellion. It was this type of fear that led the state to create vagrancy legislation. We will also locate some of the support for such laws—support that came from the Indians themselves.

\textit{Punishment Outside the Norms of the Law}

In an 1874 report regarding the state of indenture, James Geoghegan found the provisions of the law with regard to vagrancy to be “very stringent.” He noted that any immigrant found outside

\textsuperscript{14} Laurence, \textit{A Question of Labour}, 132.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 145.

the “land or house” of his employer, may be stopped without warrant by an officer of the Immigration department, or any public constable. If an immigrant could not produce a certificate of industrial residence (proving that he had completed five years of indenture), or a ticket of leave, he was to be sent to the nearest police station and detained until he was taken before a justice of the peace.\textsuperscript{17}

As early as 1852, Indians were required to carry a certificate of industrial residence stating that they had completed their indenture. In Ordinance 12 of that year, colonial officials deemed it necessary for all “old immigrants” to carry a certificate of residence. They had believed that new immigrants were deceiving colonial officials by posing as either old or new immigrant “as may happen to suit them best for the occasion.”\textsuperscript{18}

Thus, anyone found outside of the boundaries of his or her workplace could be stopped without warrant. This point had perplexed some of the stipendiary magistrates, who were unsure whether stopping the Indians without warrant had a legal basis. In 1873, Trinidad’s Attorney General issued an opinion on the matter, finding that “the issuing a warrant . . . is therefore a matter in the \textit{discretion} of the Justice.” He went on to say that “in all cases of civil nature . . . where the offence does not involve a \textit{Breach of the Peace}, the proper course is to issue a \textit{Summons}, and not a \textit{Warrant.”}\textsuperscript{19}

Warner saw the arrest of Indians for breach of contract as a civil matter. Nevertheless, the summons could eventually result in criminal prosecution and jail time. Colonial officials essentially used the law to have it both ways: by viewing breach of contract as a civil matter, they did not need to go through the legal routes of having to issue warrants for the arrest of

\textsuperscript{17} Geoghegan, \textit{Note on Emigration}, 119.

\textsuperscript{18} Harris to Pakington (No. 73), 24 September 1852, \textit{Despatches Part III} PP 936 (1852–53), 153

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Port of Spain Gazette}, 1 March 1873. Emphasis in original.
Indian immigrants. However, they also noted in the Immigration Ordinances that breach of contract could result in criminal prosecution.

Such legal maneuvering did not go without criticism. An editorial in the *Port of Spain Gazette* found the Attorney General’s opinion to be “perfectly sound, and perfectly clear to persons versed in the intricacies of legal phraseology, but to ordinary readers like ourselves, and the majority of the Justices, it is very far from being clear or satisfactory.”\(^{20}\) The editor of the *Gazette* was hardly sympathetic to Indian causes. T.R.N Laughlin edited the newspaper from 1875–1900.\(^{21}\) He would later write of the Indian population:

> Let it not be forgotten that these Asiatics now form one third of our population, and that, fanatics of an effete superstition and most corrupt form of ethics, they must, as a matter of self-preservation, be kept in subjection to our laws under pain of the most disastrous results.\(^{22}\)

A man who found Indians to be effete corrupt fanatics in need of constant supervision found that warrantless arrest was a step too far, and “In so doing His Excellency has, in our opinion, by placing himself above the law, assumed an unjustifiable and intenable [sic] position.”\(^{23}\)

This was not the only practice critiqued by the public. In May 1874, the Planters’ Association successfully petitioned the Governor to allow for days spent in jail to be added to an immigrant’s indenture—as this had been the practice before 1870. This was a step too far for the *San Fernando Gazette*, which found that such additions amounted to a double punishment for immigrants.\(^{24}\) Like the *Port of Spain Gazette*, the *San Fernando Gazette* was not entirely sympathetic to Indian causes. The publication later described Indians as a “dead weight . . . inert

\(^{20}\) Ibid.

\(^{21}\) Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870-1900*, 55.

\(^{22}\) *Port of Spain Gazette*, 13 September 1884, as cited in Ibid., 187.

\(^{23}\) *Port of Spain Gazette*, 1 March 1873.

\(^{24}\) Laurence, *A Question of Labour*, 134.
in all matters of Christian civilisation, and only a temporary aid to a development entirely material.”

Nevertheless, the two rules persisted. Indians were to be stopped without warrant on suspicion of vagrancy and they were to be double punished for their “crime.” As other scholars have found, the rule of law in the colonial state was often utilized in ways that operated outside the norms of justice and order. This kind of legal maneuvering was used around the world to punish and discipline colonial subjects. The indenture colonies were no different. Vagrancy laws were enforced through legal exception. Breach of contract was both a criminal and a civil matter simultaneously. Only through such maneuvering could the state attempt to control its indentured population.

Vagrancy and Protest

Absenteeism had been declared a criminal offense from the start of indenture in Fiji. In 1877, Charles Mitchell, the colony’s first Agent General of Immigration, went to India to negotiate the basic terms of Indian indenture to Fiji. The Government of India objected to a provision that called for an extension of indenture for both the absence from work as well as the time spent in jail (like the double punishment referred to above). In reply, Mitchell wrote that the Stipendiary Magistrates would be instructed to abstain from using such penalties unless the immigrant was a “frequent offender.” Most immigrants would thus be convicted and returned to his or her

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25 San Fernando Gazette, 14 June 1890, as cited in Brereton, Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870-1900, 188.

employer with an order of how many days he or she had been absent. The Government of India was placated by this response.

In 1899, the Sub-Agent of Immigration, John Forster, concluded that “the very mild system described by Mr. Mitchell has certainly not been in force here and in fact is impracticable in dealing with the coolies.” The double punishment that the Government of India had cautioned against was in fact being used with great regularity.

Double punishment was eventually passed into law in 1894. Prior to 1894, the Immigration Department found it difficult to keep a record of how many days an immigrant’s indenture was to be extended due to time in prison. The new law provided for the Agent General to issue orders of extension for a period of time equal to the time lost to the employer. In 1898, the indentures of 508 immigrants were set to expire. 236 of these indentures were extended due to extensions by way of lost days. Such extensions affected between 35 and 58 percent of expiring indentures through 1908, at which point they began to decline slightly.

Extensions required jail time, but how often were Indians sent to jail? A 1910 inquiry into indenture in Trinidad found that there were 1,869 convictions from 1907 to 1908. This occurred in a total indentured population of 11,506, giving a conviction rate of 16.5 percent. The inquiry also found that the average rate of convictions from 1901 to 1910 never fell below 16 percent. The situation was little better in Fiji, where it was noted that in 1907 there were 2,291 charges

27 TNA CO 384/120 (India Office): Mitchell to the Officiating Secretary to the Government of India, 27 December 1877, enclosed in Stanhope to the Under Secretary of State, 15 May 1878.
28 NAF CSO 752/1899, as cited in Gillion, Fiji’s Indian Migrants, 118.
29 TNA CO 384/190 no 65: “Report on Ordinance No XII of 1895, to amend ‘The Indian Immigration Ordinance 1891-2.’”
30 Brij V. Lal, Chalo Jahaji: On a Journey through Indenture in Fiji (Canberra: Australian National University and Fiji Museum, 2000), 188.
31 Report of the Committee on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates (East India: Emigration) PP Cd. 5192 (1910), 71.
brought by employers for breach of contract against 1,461 individuals, of which 90 percent resulted in convictions.32

The Report’s minutes of evidence provided a window into the arrest process. The Report’s committee asked W.H. Coombs, the Protector of Immigrants in Trinidad, as to how immigrants were arrested for desertion. Coombs answered that he had a special constable attached to the Immigration Office who was responsible for arresting “stragglers.” When asked how he distinguished who should be arrested versus an innocent person, Coombs replied, “I do not know. He has a wonderful facility for doing so, and he very rarely makes a mistake; but I do not know. I suppose he listens to them talking.”33

The administration of justice was dependent on the ability of one Constable to identify deserters. Furthermore, when asked why the law was changed to classify an individual as a deserter after being absent from work for three days rather than the original seven, Coombs answered that he had taken the provision from the Navy and that if someone was away for three days “he certainly has no intention of returning, I should think.”34 The comparison to the military in this case was apt—the law was used to maintain a style of discipline not too far from the regimentation seen in the military.

Deliberate as well as unintentional reasons were included in the definition of unlawful absence. In Fiji, absence could include truancy, detention in jail, or even court attendance. This was remarkable: an immigrant could be in jail for one crime and as a result, be charged for unlawful absence. Fiji used Trinidad’s definition of desertion: unlawful absence for three days

32 Ibid., 88.
33 Report of the Committee on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates Part II. Minutes of Evidence (East India: Emigration) PP. Cd. 5193 (1910), 409.
34 Ibid.
exclusive of Sundays or holidays. Desertion was punishable by a fine up to £2 or up to two months in prison.35

Officials were quick to make assumptions regarding the workers’ absence. In the 1885 Annual Report, the Agent General of Immigration in Fiji saw an increase of “undefined absences” of around three percent from 20.73 percent of the indentured population in 1884 to 23.60 percent in 1885. He attributed the increase to a small number of “dissatisfied, dissipated, and vicious” workers who would abscond to indulge in “gambling, prostitution, or seclusion and idleness.”36 No proof was given to back up such claims.

Nevertheless, absence was viewed as a willful problem endemic to the Indian community. In justifying more thorough punishments for Indians not showing up for work, Fiji’s Governor McGregor wrote in 1886 that laborers did not attend work due to habitual absence and idleness rather than an interest in work.37

When describing rates of absence, McGregor went on to argue for the necessity of making tougher absenteeism laws. With his arguments, however, lurked a new fear: that Indians could organize and pose a danger to the public safety of the colony. McGregor argued that in addition the economic loss experienced by employers, absent works were “fast becoming so demoralized as to threaten to become speedily a grave public danger.”38

He went on to describe the May 1886 Koronivia Strike. Indentured workers had conducted the strike because their agricultural task had been increased from 154 to 220 yards of weeding.39 McGregor recounted that two groups of seventy-five and forty-three workers struck

35 Lal, Chalo Jahaji 186.
37 TNA CO 384/159 no 108: McGregor to Granville, 8 September 1886.
38 Ibid.
39 Lal, Chalo Jahaji, 176.
work. The group carried their harvesting tools—hoes, cane knives, etc.—and marched twelve miles to Suva to complain to the Agent General of Immigration “instead of applying to the magistrate of their own district.”

After being ordered back to their plantation, a magistrate was sent to inspect their complaints. McGregor recalled that before the magistrate had left, the plantation owner took 133 of the workers on a barge towed by a steam launch to a magistrate’s station on the Rewa River. There, they were to be presented to another magistrate and were to tell him why they refused to work. It was not stated whether the immigrants were aware that they were being taken to the magistrate or whether they were simply placed on a barge without their consent. Perhaps because of this, the magistrate found the group “in a state of open mutiny” upon arrival. He only allowed eleven to disembark and make a formal complaint.

The group stated that they had been overtasked—an employer violation of their indenture contract. In general, complaints against one’s employer were few. Between 1890 and 1897, indentured laborers in Fiji filed only 251 complaints against their employers, mainly for assault, battery, and nonpayment of wages (though one complaint was for overtasking). From 251 complaints came only 86 convictions. Such convictions led to light punishments such as fines. From time to time, overseers would reimburse the fines of sirdars convicted by the courts.

With respect to the Koronivia Strike, the magistrate claimed to have conducted a careful investigation and found no just cause for their complaint. Given that conclusion, the Governor went about figuring out how to prevent such an act of defiance from ever occurring again.

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40 TNA CO 384/159 no 108: McGregor to Granville.
41 Ibid.
42 Lal, Chalo Jahaji, 50.
43 Ibid.
44 TNA CO 384/159 no 108: McGregor to Granville.
One should remember that legislating against absenteeism meant maintaining the public order. Even though it was the right of every indentured laborer to complain against his or her employer, exercising this right was viewed as a threat to the security of the colony. Recall that jailing and convict transportation were used as tools for political repression in South Asia. In this case, coming together in a group (as well as carrying the tools of one’s trade) were seen as threatening gestures. As the Sub-Agent of Immigration put it, “The men certainly had not the shadow of a right to leave their work en masse and rush to Suva to complain.”\textsuperscript{45} The governor found it to be “the duty of the Government to prevent the recurrence of such disorder which would have no doubt been initiated by the Coolies on other plantations.”\textsuperscript{46}

In order to prevent such “disorder,” the Ordinance XIV of 1886 prohibited groups of five or more immigrants from leaving their estate without leave for the explicit reason of laying complaints against their employer. It also imposed penalties for those who violated these rules. The Ordinance too addressed the fear of the immigrant carrying a cane knife by imposing further penalties for carrying weapons, sticks, or tools with them when visiting the house of their employer, the office of a Magistrate, or “any other Public officer” when laying a complaint.\textsuperscript{47}

In his minutes, Edward Wingfield, Assistant Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office, remarked, “This is a very draconian law.” However, Wingfield found the law to be draconian because it defined the maximum term of imprisonment upon default of payment at three months. With regard to preventing protest, the law was not draconian at all. Instead, he found it “very desirable to prohibit the immigrants from going in large bodies to the magistrate or immigration agent to make complaints, and to prohibit them from carrying weapons when they go to the

\textsuperscript{45} NAF CSO 3481/86, Minute Paper, as cited in Lal, \textit{Chalo Jahaji}, 176.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} TNA CO 384/159 no 114: “Report on Ordinance No XIV of 1886 intitled \textit{sic} an Ordinance ‘to amend Ordinance No VI of 1878 with regard to Indian Immigrants.’, enclosure in McGregor to Earl Granville, 9 September 1886.
magistrate.”\textsuperscript{48} The law was passed, curtailing not only the freedom of movement, but also the right of protest for Indian immigrants.

Such laws were not limited to Fiji and were being elsewhere. Ordinance 6 of 1885 in Trinidad technically allowed an immigrant to make a complaint against his or her employer without a ticket of leave. Upon receiving the immigrant, the Stipendiary Justice or Protector would issue the immigrant a certificate if his or her absence was for a just and reasonable cause. This put the immigrant at risk in two ways: he was first liable to be arrested en route to the Protector. If the arresting officer chose not to believe him, he would be sent to jail for unlawful absence. Even if he made it to his destination, if the colonial officer did not believe the complaint to be reasonable, the immigrant could be denied a certificate, and thus again be found liable for absence without leave. Furthermore, no certificate would be granted to any immigrant who was carrying a cutlass, hoe, or “other agricultural implement” or was conducting himself “so as to cause terror or alarm.”\textsuperscript{49} Controlling so-called vagrancy and the security of the colony went hand-in-hand. Ideas and ideologies of rule, like individuals, colonial officials, goods, capital, and labor were circulating throughout the British Empire. Here, we can see that the fear of protest and insurgency was built into policy meant to combat vagrancy.

Protest had to be domesticated. The indentured laborer who carried his tools as he filed a complaint was a potential insurgent. Solidarity was to be shunned. Workers could only come in groups less than five, and ideally, alone. And at the end of it all, the complaint was to be judged by the state itself. If it were deemed to be frivolous, the indentured worker would be at the risk of being deemed a vagrant, and thus could be fined or thrown in jail. He was to be controlled and cowed.

\textsuperscript{48} TNA CO 384/159 no 114: Minutes by Edward Wingfield (EW), 6 November 1886, enclosure in Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} TNA CO 297/11: No. 6:—1885: An Ordinance to amend the Immigration Ordinances, 1 June 1885.
The Indian Interest

Who supported these laws? It was perhaps most surprising to see that support came, in part, from the community of formerly-indentured Indians. In 1873, the Government of India, led by Lord Northbrook, argued that all immigrants in Trinidad who had received their certificate of industrial residence should be given a bronze medal identifying him as a free laborer. While the certificate could be left at home, the medal could identify him quickly and easily.\(^50\)

The desire to distinguish free Indians from indentured became an issue when certain Indians sought to become plantation owners. Northbrook’s recommendation had come after Trinidad’s Protector of Immigrants sent a report to the India Office noting that an Indian had purchased five indentured Indians for the purpose of working a sugar estate. It was only when an Indian wished to become a plantation operator where modifications of the laws on wandering were suggested.\(^51\)

This should complicate our understanding of postliberal empire and indenture. Colonies were governed on the premise of separating white and colored subjects. In South Asia, for example, while the idea of equal laws for all circulated widely, in practice, most felt that placing Europeans and Indians on equal footing was a disfigurement of what justice should look like.\(^52\)

In this case, capital trumped race. And while the law never passed—the Protector of Immigrants and Governor Longden questioned whether old immigrants would choose to wear medals—it may be fruitful to think of land-owning Indians through the concept of

\(^{50}\) TNA CO 318/269 (India Office): Northbrook, et al. to Duke of Argyll, 25 August 1873, enclosed in Hobhouse to Knatchbull-Hugessen, 17 October 1873.

\(^{51}\) TNA CO 318/269 (India Office): Duff to Knatchbull-Hugessen, 3 July 1873.

\(^{52}\) Kolsky, “A Note on the Study of Indian Legal History,” 705.
exceptionality. The suggestion of such a law was indicative of the willingness of the state to consider landowning Indians as a loophole in the logic of colonial rule.

This loophole was rooted in the basis of the indenture colony: the security and well-being of the colony was dependent on agricultural production and the availability of labor. If an Indian became a landowner and subsequently an employer of indentured immigrants, he too needed state power to bind labor to his plantations. In this case, it meant using a badge as a secondary signifier. If the color of Indians’ skin and their ethnicity signified racial difference, the badge was a signifier that could operate on top of that. It let the viewer know that the immigrant was no longer indentured. His freedom of movement was only guaranteed if he could insert himself in the colony’s economic mandate.

A few of Indians who had risen to become a part of the island’s more comfortable classes had written to Governor Longden on the matter. They were Thomas Walter Cockey (a teacher), Benjamin Balagee (a student), Lal Bihari (a catechist), Charles Clarence Soodeen (a writing clerk), Babu Bharatsing (a proprietor), as well as Juppy Sale, Kalimaraj, Sewraj Gosain, Babu Ranglalsing, Babu Risalsing, and John Benjamin (all shopkeepers). They argued against medals, noting that “wherever we go it will be considered a disgrace to wear such a medal and will subject us more than ever to impertinent remarks.” By arguing that a medal would subject them more than ever to impertinent remarks, they hinted at the fact that their day-to-day lives were mired in racial discrimination.

The group concluded that medals were an ill-advised idea, as they could be replicated or stolen. More importantly, the medals would be a burden for all free Indians, including those who

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53 TNA CO 384/102 no 37: Longden to Earl of Kimberley, 4 February 1874.
had been born on the island.\textsuperscript{54} These men were either former indentured laborers or the children of indentured laborers. They had risen from the fields to become members of the colony’s bourgeoisie. They wanted their arrival to be recognized, but they didn’t want to have to show their ticket from travel. Their plight was reminiscent of Aimé Césaire’s conclusion that colonial rule involved “no human contact, but relations in domination and submission” that turned “the indigenous man into an instrument of production.”\textsuperscript{55} As assimilated as the shopkeeper could become, Indians were always to be seen as instruments of production. Only a visual reminder could render them something else.

Despite this, the Indian bourgeoisie in Trinidad generally saw few problems with the vagrancy laws. The Indian Koh-i-Noor Gazette, published only from 1898 to 1900, provided a window into their views. Effendi Beg (a possible pseudonym of a member of the Indian community) edited the newspaper. His editorials would often contradict themselves. At one point he discussed the necessity of British colonialism and in another waxed on about Lucknow and the superiority of India.\textsuperscript{56} When defending East Indian immigration from a letter to the editor in another newspaper, Beg wrote that “Of course there might be a rather large number of them in gaol, but this is simply owing to the fact that they are quite unaccustomed with the laws of this island and the offences committed by them are mainly due to ignorance.”\textsuperscript{57} Once one was accustomed to the laws of the island, such problems would cease to exist.

\textsuperscript{54} TNA CO 384/102 no 58: Cockey, et al. to Warner, 16 February 1874, enclosed in Longden to Earl of Kimberley, 24 February 1874.


\textsuperscript{57} “Mr. Stollmeyer on Indian Immigration,” \textit{The Indian Koh-i-Noor Gazette}, 11 February 1899.
Much like the shopkeepers who saw themselves as part of the island, Beg saw that once Indians acquiesced to the law, they would, “after their hard toil days are over become owners of valuable properties, Shopkeepers &c, paying heavy taxes and in other word increasing the amount of the revenue of the Colony.” Among the Indian bourgeoisie, petite or otherwise, there was a sense that keeping one’s head down and abiding by the law was not only a path to assimilation, but to economic success.

The presence of such a bourgeoisie was reminiscent of position of the English-speaking Indian in South Asia. They relied on colonial rule to achieve their social and class position. They used British systems of land tenure, education, and administrative employment to arrive in their new social station. And yet, they always stood at a distance from the British—as well as the large population of peasant Indians. Their lives were defined by the chasm of difference. In other formulations, this group was referred to as the collaborationist class. Scholars have seen their position as crucial to sustaining colonial rule. This was also a position ascribed to the class in the West Indies generally known as “freed people of color.” They occupied a key role as a go-between in the plantation colony and were seen as integral to the functioning of imperial rule.

58 Ibid.
60 For a take on the position of freed people of color in nineteenth-century Trinidad, see Selwyn R. Cudjoe, Beyond Boundaries: The Intellectual Tradition of Trinidad and Tobago in the Nineteenth Century (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003). For a general take on the ways in which freed people of color influenced visions of freedom in a post-emancipation environment, see Scott, Degrees of Freedom.
Indians in the indenture colony were quite similar. They had moved beyond their indentures and used the means offered in colonial rule to achieve a measure of status. Perhaps their role supported colonial power. And yet they were neither British, nor were they the subsistence farmers operating in the sugar cane belt. No badge could identify them.

Mahabir never had a chance to enter the world of petty capital. Endless fields of green stalks defined his world. And if the plantation owners and colonial officials had their way, he would never wander from that world. They sought to control the colony and secure its labor. Indians were first and foremost instruments of production that could keep the sugar economy afloat.

Although the Masters and Servants laws had been repealed in the United Kingdom, they were still in effect in the indenture colonies, allowing for a criminal prosecution for vagrancy. In Trinidad, vagrancy laws controlled movement and also sought prevent uprising and protest. Who knew what lurked deep in Mahabir’s mind? Only those working the cane knew of each other’s toil and woe. Colonial officials knew that if they ever got together, chaos would ensue. They used vagrancy laws to stem any chances of disorder or protest. The attempt to turn peasants into indentured workers now took a more authoritarian turn. Colonial officials arrested workers in order to stem disorder and repress labor movements. The indenture colony were to be secured by brute force.

If Mahabir ever wanted to pick up his cutlass and protest the conditions of his life, he had to do so carefully, almost silently, and with knowledge of the grave dangers of his actions. The colony put itself between laborer and planter to ensure that its raison d'être in the Empire and world would not be threatened. Sugar production would continue. But Mahabir would grow
frustrated. He would find allies. As we will see in the next chapter, his protest had disastrous results.
Chapter Eight
_Protest, Response, Violence_

Figure 5: Workers raising a tazia during the Hosay festival on St. Augustine Estate in Trinidad, ca. 1891 (Source: _Album of Trinidadian Photographs_, The West Indiana Collection, The Alma Jordan Library, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago)

Mahabir had many reasons to be angry. His life was reduced to the plantation around him. He wanted to protest his conditions, but he knew that doing so was nearly impossible. But there were times when he could relax. There were days when he could enjoy the company of his countrymen and celebrate the heritage he brought with him from India. Those were the days he could see those not only from his plantation, but those from plantations all over the island. But could those days be a chance for a protest? Could he risk it all to express his most inner disquiet?

The 1884 Trinidad Hosay festival was scheduled for October 30. Hosay was related to commemorations important in _Shī‘ah_ Islam that took place during the Islamic month of
The last day of Muḥarram, known as ‘Āshūrā was celebrated as Hosay in Trinidad. Hosay, celebrated by both Hindus and Muslims, was a carnival—a time of celebration outside of work and daily life. During the Hosay celebrations near San Fernando in the south of Trinidad, Indian participants tried to enter the city via the Cipero Road to “bury” the ta’zīa at sea.

Weeks prior to the 1884 Hosay, colonial officials decided to prohibit celebrants from entering San Fernando. This was despite the fact that the city had the only public path to the sea. When the procession nevertheless tried to make their way into the city, the colonial police and army opened fire, killing sixteen and wounding eighty-seven. The event is known in Trinidadian history as the Hosay or Muharram Massacre of 1884.1

Recall Arthur Hamilton-Gordon: “The only danger of disturbance to the public tranquility (so long as Great Britain is at peace with other powers) that I can see is that of serious outbreaks among the Chinese or Indian immigrants.” 2 Global empire feared rebellion. It used the force of arms and of the law to stem discontent among Indian subjects. The indenture colonies were no different in this regard. And like other outposts of global empire, colonial subjects were at times able to voice their discontent through direct action. These protests occurred either on the plantations or in public spaces during religious holidays. The most notable of these instances was the Hosay Massacre of 1884 in Trinidad.

We will read and analyze the responses of the colonial government during times of crises and protest. We will do so with an eye to colonial responses to protest in South Asia. Historians of the subcontinent have developed ways of analyzing protest and response. We will look

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1 This chapter will use “Muḥarram” when referring to the Islamic calendar and/or its commemoration in Shī‘ah Islam. As the commemoration is commonly spelled Muharram (or even more commonly, Hosay) in Trinidad, it will use that orthographic convention when referring specifically to its indenture context. The same applies to the ta’zīa/tazia distinction.
2 Gordon to Granville (draft secret), May 1869, Official records, Vol. 8, NYPL
towards those as a model so we may see the ways in which colonial administrators in Trinidad were using similar methods to quash protest.

While many have used the discontent leading up to the 1884 Hosay Massacre as a brief preface to that day’s violence, we will do the opposite. We will focus upon the years leading up 1884 in order to understand the contours of the colonial response to protest. We will then look at the Hosay Massacre and smaller protests that occurred on plantations in Fiji.

How did the indenture colony respond to discontent? Through violence and brute force. However, it was in inevitable state investigations that followed where one can locate the details and their devils. These inquiries and investigations inevitably proved the same truth over and over again: a violent response was necessary and no blame could be consigned upon colonial rule. It was in the response to protest where one can see that the transformation from peasant into indentured worker was now not based upon progress or improvement, but upon preventing what colonial officials saw as Indians’ worst characteristics from coming to the fore.

We will first focus on the 1882 Cedar Hill Protests (alongside other smaller protests) to understand how the colonial state interpreted protest by Indian immigrants. Rather than seeing their agitations as form of planned political protest, those in power reduced organized political action to individual proclivities. In doing so, they utilized tropes of religious fanaticism and diminished emotional capability that were commonly seen in colonial rule in South Asia.

From the Cedar Hill Protest we will move on to protest movements from 1882–1884. During that time, colonial officials and the planter elite began to dread the yearly Hosay festival. They saw it as a chance for political violence. We will look closely at the 1884 Hosay Massacre and its response and will conclude by locating small-scale protests in Fiji.

*Muḥarram—Tazia—Hosay*
This chapter discusses a commemoration known in Shi‘ah Islam as Āshūrā, but known in Trinidad and Fiji as Hosay or Tazia. It is worth considering the background to this commemoration. In 680 CE (61 AH), on the tenth day of the month on the Islamic calendar known as Muḥarram, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, Hussein ibn ‘Alī, was beheaded during the Battle of Karbala after refusing to pledge allegiance to the new Umayyad caliph, Yazid. Shi‘ah Muslims commemorate his martyrdom during the first ten days of the month of Muḥarram. The tenth day, known as ‘Āshūrā, is of particular importance and is commemorated as a day of mourning.

In Trinidad and other indenture colonies, ‘Āshūrā is known as Hosay, the name being a reference to Hussein. In other colonies (such as Fiji) ‘Āshūrā is commemorated as Tazia. Both Hosay and Tazia referred to the South Asian Ta‘zīa procession wherein participants would construct miniature mausoleums to be carried in a silent procession.

In indenture colonies, Hosay/Tazia was one of the principal festivals for indentured workers. In Fiji, for example, the two great festivals were Tazia and Holi. However, these celebrations were not limited by religion. That is, all Indian indentured workers celebrated Tazia. And Tazia truly was a celebration. Tazia had changed from a day of mourning to a work holiday for all Indians with a carnivalesque atmosphere. This was somewhat surprising due to the fact that the indentured workers were mainly Hindu, and only a small minority of Muslims was Shi‘ah.3

Tazia offered an escape from the toil of the plantation. It was a space for merry-making and was a time to forget the horrid working conditions on the plantation estates.4 The atmosphere

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3 Mishra, “Tazia Fiji! The Place of Potentiality,” 75.
4 Ibid., 77.
was convivial and shared. Hindus and Muslims (Shī‘ah and Sunnī) participated in an event that incorporated both Islamic and Hindu cultural practices.\textsuperscript{5}

Trinidad’s Hosay was similar to Fiji’s Tazia. Hosay was the principal celebration of the year for the Indian community. While Diwali and Holi/Phagwa were celebrations and festivals in their own right, Hosay provided a space for interreligious participation. It was a public show of Indian identity that cared little for religious background.\textsuperscript{6}

In Trinidad, Hosay took on elements of Carnival, which had strong roots in the island due to the French Catholic presence. Bharath, a former Indian indentured laborer, described participating in Hosay as “playing Hosay,” much in the same way one would describe participating in Carnival as “playing Mas.” As he put it, “nobody na humbug wha you doing / hosay making / barrick / estate gi money / hosay / play hosay.”\textsuperscript{7}

Whether it went by Muḥarram, Hosay, or Tazia, the event had great energy and potential. In the minds of colonial officials, it held the possibility of agitation and protest. In contemporary South Asia, local public processions during Muḥarram have provided possibilities for political protest, sectarian violence, and other forms of division.\textsuperscript{8} In indenture-era Fiji, on the other hand, Tazia offered a chance to forge a sense of united community and identity.\textsuperscript{9}

Perhaps colonial officials too recognized that the holiday was more than a religious procession, but a place where the practice of everyday life was upended. More likely they believed that religious events could bring to the light of day the irrationality and fanaticism of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 86.
\item \textsuperscript{6} Frank J. Korom, \textit{Hosay Trinidad: Muharram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 98.
\item \textsuperscript{7} Noor Kumar Mahabir, ed., \textit{The Still Cry: Personal Accounts of East Indians in Trinidad and Tobago during Indentureship, 1845-1917} (Tacarigua, Trinidad: Calaloux Publications, 1985), 135.
\item \textsuperscript{8} Korom, \textit{Hosay Trinidad}, 90.
\item \textsuperscript{9} Lal, \textit{Chalo Jahaji}, 240. Other scholars, such as K.L. Gillion, saw Tazia as a moment of incorporative revelry. See Gillion, \textit{The Fiji Indians}, 105.
\end{itemize}
Indian people. Religion and public presence could combine to result in anarchy if colonial officials ever withdrew their iron hand.\textsuperscript{10} While protests were allowed to occur in South Asia, security was paramount in the indenture colony. Trinidad was not India. Not even the hint of protest was to be tolerated.

\textit{Inquiries and Investigations}

Colonial inquiries did not seek to find the truth. They made the truth. Fact-finding and conclusion-making in colonial inquiries were always colored by certain ways of evaluating and processing conflicting positions. In this miasma of stories, colonial officials could posit themselves as the staid arbiters of what was fact and what was fiction.\textsuperscript{11}

This was a strategy used in the earliest days of colonial rule. Inquiries into land tenure in South Asia in the 1770s had a power that could reach back into history itself. These inquiries formed the basis of an understanding into the construction and nature of Indian civilization.\textsuperscript{12} These understandings of Indian history could then draw the lines of debate over the means and ends of colonial rule in India.\textsuperscript{13} Put bluntly, inquiries were used to produce and disseminate knowledge that could rule India.

Inquires often came out of events that scandalized the imperial public. Such scandals and their exorcisms via inquiries was part of empire-building. Scandals that came out of Britain’s colonial engagements were a blot upon the imperial record that had to be erased. Any remaining

\textsuperscript{11} Mongia, “Impartial Regimes of Truth,” 750–52.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 5.
proof of wrongdoing had to be shifted onto the colonized people.\textsuperscript{14} Scandals did not lead to the questioning of colonial rule. Instead, if there was any blame to be assigned, it was upon the nature of the Indians themselves.

But how can we to read the history of protest and violent response? First, we must recognize that protest and violence were never wanton or haphazard. When used as a form of protest, violence was always contingent and discriminatory. Peasants and workers rarely participate in unplanned mob attacks (if there is such a thing). However, these acts of defiance were usually portrayed as haphazard attacks upon the body politic. Magistrates, judges, and colonial officials depoliticized any and all violence and effaced the deep causes of discontent. This, in turn, rendered discontent as an outbreak of violence. The historical actors involved in a protest were rendered into a mob.\textsuperscript{15}

The inquiry into the 1884 Hosay Massacre, for example, was known as the Norman Report. Published in 1885, the Norman Report was named after Henry Wylie Norman, the Governor of Jamaica. Norman conducted his report in December 1884 and January 1885. His analysis put the Massacre into the contexts of race and class tensions in the colony, thus exonerating the colonial state of any role in the crisis.\textsuperscript{16}

This chapter will look deeper into such inquires to find meaning in official narratives. This chapter will focus first, and most closely, on the first instances of mass protest in Trinidad

\textsuperscript{14} Nicholas B. Dirks, \textit{The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 34.

\textsuperscript{15} This analysis is indebted to Shahid Amin’s \textit{Event, Metaphor, Memory}. Amin looked at the February 4, 1922 Chauri Chaura “riot” to see how political protest and violence by Gandhi’s followers in India’s Eastern Uttar Pradesh (then United Provinces) constituted an event and a metaphor for wrongdoing. That is, Amin used the construction of a history of the event as an archive as well as a narrative of Indian nationalism. He was able to locate how Chauri Chaura was expunged from the nationalist record and then refigured back in during the postcolonial. This form of reading protest was taken from his methodology of reading juridical evidence. See Shahid Amin, \textit{Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922-1992} (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 94–100.

\textsuperscript{16} Kale, \textit{Fragments of Empire}, 153.
that occurred in the fall and winter of 1882. In doing so, it acts in the spirit of other historians reading of the Norman Report. These readings do not necessarily give a full picture of all the dynamics involved, but instead present some of the genealogies and ideas of rule.¹⁷

*Years of Discontent in Trinidad*

In 1882, two years prior to the Hosay Massacre, there was a smaller protest known among colonial officials as the Cedar Hill Disturbance. Cedar Hill was the estate on which the protest occurred. Here, it will be referred to as the Cedar Hill protest, reflecting the fact that the events on the Cedar Hill plantation were not random interruptions of peaceful conditions, but planned attacks on an unjust situation.

This reading and name change is assisted by the fact that the protest was not an isolated incident. Between 1882 and 1884, there were twenty-five recorded conflicts between workers (both indentured and free) and management on sugar plantations. This number amounted to more than half the recorded protests between 1870 and 1902.¹⁸ The protests came during a time of economic turmoil. During the early 1880s, sugar prices plummeted, and planters moved to shore up their finances by reducing wages and increasing tasks.¹⁹ This dissertation will not delve into the details of the relationship between free and indentured workers. However, it seems as if the protests between 1882 and 1884 were all related to the same issues. Wages were reduced across the board and workers protested these as threats to their livelihood.²⁰ What remains of concern to this dissertation is how the colonial state dealt with such protest.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Gerad Tikasingh, “The Establishment of East Indians in Trinidad, 1870–1900” (Ph.D. diss., The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, 1973), 264.


²⁰ Kusha Haraksingh, “Control and Resistance among Overseas Indian Workers: A Study of Labour on the Sugar Plantations of Trinidad, 1875-1917,” *The Journal of Caribbean History* 14 (May 1, 1981): 11–12; Radica Mahase,
The Cedar Hill protest had its roots in labor dispute and unrest related to the economic contexts mentioned above. It began, according to police officials, when Indians decried that their tasks were being considered incomplete. Tasks referred to the ways in which a day’s work was divided. By 1882, plantation labor had moved away from hourly wages to a system based upon the completion of a set number of tasks per day. The heart of complaints against an “incomplete task” was wage theft. Accusations of partial completion of a task would cost an indentured laborer part of his or her daily wage.

Newspaper reports note that the laborers became hostile and refused the estate management’s requests to complete the task. There is some evidence of worker solidarity and group action here. Each worker knew very well that refusal to work was considered a breach of contract. Each worker that participated in the protest risked a fine and/or jail time. And yet, they banded together to make their complaints heard.

In general, the colonial archive calls events like these “outbreaks” of violence. The use of such a word was not a happy coincidence. Narratives of revolt and unrest were often hidden under a semantic blanket that likened political action to natural phenomena. “They break out like thunder storms, heave like earthquakes, spread like wildfires, infect like epidemics,” the historian Ranajit Guha wrote. “In other words, when the proverbial clod of earth turns, this is a matter to be explained in terms of natural history.”21 But such action was not natural history. It was a calculated and very human risk.

Back on Cedar Hill, one of the plantation overseers sent for two policemen to deal with the protesters. As the police arrived, the Indians on the plantation fought back. One newspaper


reported that one of the two officers escaped injury only because his horse kicked away attackers.\textsuperscript{22} The next day, twenty police returned to the plantation armed with batons. However, after they tried to make arrests for the previous day’s altercations, a large group of Indian workers again fought them back. The local police determined that it was necessary to bring in a mediator. However, this mediator was not some disinterested third party, but a representative from Colonial Company Estates—the company that owned the Cedar Hill Estate. The workers forcefully turned him away.

The protest on the Cedar Hill Estate was only resolved in favor of the police when the Inspector Commandant of the police force, Captain Baker, arrived from Port of Spain with a contingent of forty policemen. After the police contingent confronted the laborers on the estate, the protestors decided to lay down their arms without resistance. The so-called “ringleaders” were arrested and sent back to Port of Spain.\textsuperscript{23}

Colonial officials in Trinidad reported to London that “a disturbance took place” on September 28 and 29 among the indentured Indians on the Cedar Hill Estate.\textsuperscript{24} Governor Sanford Freeling found that there were conflicting accounts as to the protest’s causes. In response, he set up a commission to investigate the Cedar Hill disturbance. The commission consisted of Herbert C. Stone, the acting Protector of Immigrants (serving while Henry Mitchell was out of office due to illness), and two officials, David Wilson and John Arthur Harragin, who served as Commissioners of the Northern and Southern province respectively. The commission would not send its report back to colonial officials until December—after a few more protests. Unlike other

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{San Fernando Gazette}, 30 September 1882.

\textsuperscript{23} The rough outline of the Cedar Hill disturbance was taken from Rajesh Surendra Persad, “A Passage from India: The East Indian Indenture Experience in Trinidad 1845-1885” (MA thesis, North Carolina State University, 2008), 107–8, http://catalog.lib.ncsu.edu/record/NCSU2181069.

\textsuperscript{24} TNA CO 384/139 no 256: Freeling to Earl of Kimberley, 27 October 1882.
commissions conducted by the state, this commission of enquiry was never made public. One scholar surmised that this was because the report, in part, indicted the management of Cedar Hill and other estates for their role in creating the conditions that led to the strike and protest.²⁵

Freeling found the commission to be necessary because neither the Immigration Department nor the planters could find the true reason for the protest. In spite of this, he sent to the Colonial Office in London his own thoughts as to its causes. According to Freeling, the initial disquiet among the Indian immigrants was because a “high caste Mohammedan named Mowlabux” had his beard shaven “when he was committed to gaol for leaving the Cedar Hill Estate without a pass.”²⁶

Following this conclusion, Freeling’s account corroborates that of the newspapers: two policemen were threatened by immigrants and withdrew; this was followed by a group of twenty policemen who were “assaulted by over a hundred Immigrants armed with sticks, cutlasses, and hoes.” The incident only came to a close after Captain Baker brought in forty policemen and thirty armed men.²⁷

In his summary, Freeling underlined his fear that a “spirit of insubordination and discontent” was spreading to other estates.²⁸ The colonial state’s fears were coming to life. A rebellion could be spreading under their noses.

Let us return first to what he saw as the actual cause of the event. He determined that a “high caste” Muslim laborer had his beard shaven when committed to jail for a breach of contract. Thus, while Freeling feared that a spirit of discontent would spread among the Indian

²⁶ TNA CO 384/139 no 256: Freeling to Earl of Kimberley.
²⁷ Ibid.
²⁸ Ibid.
population, this fear was not based upon connecting unrest with laboring conditions. Instead, the causes were based in the religious feeling of one particular laborer.

_The Port of Spain Gazette_ picked up this analysis in an editorial. “In consequence of the riot amongst the Cedar Hill Coolies,” they wrote, “a most unaccountable and unfounded feeling prevailed in Naparima, that our Indian labourers are universally dissatisfied [sic] with the treatment they receive from the planters.”

The _Port of Spain Gazette_ was the broadsheet of the Trinidadian elite. Its editor, T.R.N. Laughlin, had little sympathy for Indians or so-called Indian causes. Given that background, it is no surprise that the events at Cedar Hill were first labeled as a riot—a disturbance to the peace, a convulsion of violent activity—rather than a planned protest by laborers.

However, the newspaper took “great pains to procure the most reliable information as to the spirit which animates the coolies in general.” Such great pains led to the conclusion that “all such fears are idle and unfounded.” This was in stark contrast with how the editorial began. By making reference to a universal dissatisfaction, they stoked a fear that the largest minority group in the colony was liable to protest in large numbers. However, by couching their analysis in a reading of the Indian psyche, they were able to conclude that such fears were misplaced.

The paper agreed with Freeling’s findings, though they chose not to name the Indian laborer who had his beard shaved. “One of their Babagees,” they wrote, referring to the title _Baba_ often given to religious leaders, “a man venerated by them all, had been sent to gaol for seven days for not having a pass . . . In gaol his beard was shaved. In a religious point of view, among the Mahometans, this is considered as the greatest calamity that could have befallen

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29 _Port of Spain Gazette_, 21 October 1882.
30 Ibid.
him.”\textsuperscript{31} The editors concluded that the Governor should give instructions to the prison officials to avoid stirring the religious feelings of Muslims.\textsuperscript{32}

They also listed further possibilities for the protest: a woman by the name of “Babooie” lived with the head overseer and acted as a spy among laborers, that a “coolie driver” who had worked on the plantation for eighteen years had been fired and replaced by a black man, and that the workers’ tasks had been increased without an increase in pay. The editorial dismissed these claims as “more sentimental than material.” The protest was an isolated case and that the structure for finding and rectifying redress was so “complete and effective” that there could not be any possible injustices on the plantations.\textsuperscript{33}

The belief that Indians were devoted to religions that inculcated irrationality expressed through violent protest was not unique to Trinidad. After the 1857 Rebellion, state administrators were quick to connect religion and violence. It was the resounding opinion of British administrators that the Rebellion emanated from the religious community.\textsuperscript{34} Furthermore, many officials found that it was Muslims who were devoted to a religion that supported fanaticism.\textsuperscript{35}

For example, W.W. Hunter in \textit{The Indian Musalmans} concluded, “Their [Muslims’] fanaticism, for which ample warrant can always be found in the Kuran \textit{sic}, has been hotly excited, until at last there is a danger that the entire Muhammadan community will rapidly be transformed into a mass of disloyal ignorant fanatics.”\textsuperscript{36}

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\textsuperscript{31} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid. Emphasis in text. \\
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{34} Peter Hardy, \textit{The Muslims of British India} (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 65. \\
\textsuperscript{35} Metcalf, \textit{The Aftermath of Revolt}, 391. \\
\textsuperscript{36} W.W. Hunter, \textit{The Indian Musalmans} (London: Trubner and Company, 1872), 151. \\
\end{flushright}

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Colonial rule saw religiosity and fanatacism as a pathological condition endemic to Indian society. They also believed that this characteristic could be expressed during times of unrest. As such, any protest in South Asia that had a possible religious connection was offered as proof of Hindu-Muslim animosity.\(^{37}\)

Such understandings crossed the borders of the Raj and circulated throughout the British Empire. As the *Port of Spain Gazette* had put it in an editorial in 1870, “The horrors of the Indian Mutiny are fresh in the recollections of Englishmen, and we do not need to be reminded that the race to which our immigrants belong is easily roused.”\(^{38}\) The ghosts of 1857 haunted the protests of indentured Indian workers throughout the British Empire.\(^{39}\)

The colonial state, unable and unwilling to indict itself, blamed the protest on Indian nature. With his religious feeling insulted, the Indian was bound to engage in violent rioting.

Now, it may seem like a given that empire would not criticize itself. Recall that colonial rule in the postliberal era saw itself as a force against the collapse of native societies through an insistence upon imperial rule founded through traditional societies.\(^{40}\) Even though indenture colonies lacked a native society for indirect rule, uprisings gave colonial officials the chance to highlight the “native character” of indentured subjects by underlining religiosity and its concomitant irrationality.

There was a twist to this formulation, however. The colonial state saw itself as part of the cause of the issue. Recall that the immediate cause of the Cedar Hill protest was that a venerated Muslim man had his beard shaved by an officer in jail. It was the misuse of state power with

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\(^{38}\) *Port of Spain Gazette*, 26 November 1870.


\(^{40}\) Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, 177.
respect to religious sentiment that caused the protest in the first place. Recognizing this indiscretion, Governor Freeling issued orders to stop the practice of beard-shaving for all Muslims committed to prison for labor law violations.41

This was how colonial officials were able to come to terms with protest. First, the protest was stripped of any meaning related to labor conditions and worker solidarity. Instead, collective action was only read as religious action. In making that shift, officials located any perceived religious wrongs that may have precipitated the protest. In doing so, they found the state itself at fault and proceeded to rectify the situation.

Colonial officials were then able to exculpate the colony from any future wrongdoing. They argued while fault lay in the irrational nature of the Indians, officials should have known better. Indian protest was a perfect scandal: the root causes stemmed from individual issues and the solution could come from piecemeal regulation from the state.

Indenture colonies used methods of understanding colonial subjects from other colonies. This framework fueled the indenture colony’s security apparatus by reducing protest to irrationality. It further allowed the state to pass repressive measures to control the Indian population.

Fear of Hosay

Trinidadian officials were content with identifying the cause of the Cedar Hill protest as religious. The reality was, of course, quite different. In the months after the Cedar Hill protest, there were protests on six other estates.42 For example, on October 9, a group of workers staged a strike on the Fairfield Estate. Their principal complaint was that their tasks had been increased. Following their strike, they marched to town with their agricultural tools in hand to complain to the

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41 TNA CO 384/139 no 256: Freeling to Earl of Kimberley,
magistrate and local immigration agent.\textsuperscript{43} The combination of the two strikes led the \textit{San Fernando Gazette} to conclude that the protests on the Fairfield Estate “as well as to other minor disturbances on sugar plantations as evidence of the fact that there is a fermentation of some kind not yet laid bare.”\textsuperscript{44}

In response to the Cedar Hill, Fairfield, and other protests, the state felt confident in its ability to put down any discontent. Police, armed and ready, greeted each protest. After facing the brutal possibilities of resistance, protestors usually decided to put down their arms.\textsuperscript{45}

Even though each protest was put down, there was a tremendous fear that this kind of unrest would spill over into the November Hosay celebrations. A French Catholic priest, Armand Massé, mentioned the situation in his diary. His analysis neatly distilled the fear of Indian uprising:

In the course of this year the coolies of several plantations revolted and it became necessary to employ the armed forces against them. Many say that they were not absolutely wrong because certain people and above all a good number of overseers ill-treated them. A commission was set up lately to listen to their complaints, unfortunately well founded . . . They carry in their heart a secret hated which they have allowed to be seen at different times. Indiscretions coming from some of them have shown that they were hoping to profit from their annual feast to revenge themselves on the whites.\textsuperscript{46}

An editorial in the \textit{New Era} newspaper put it similarly: “It was almost universally felt, that as the intended agents of a great catastrophe, the discontented coolies who were plotting, as it was fancied, all over the island, were to be repressed and, if need arose, be crushed without hesitation, at any cost.”\textsuperscript{47}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[43] Ibid., 32.
\item[44] \textit{San Fernando Gazette}, 11 November 1882.
\item[45] BL IOR V/27/820/10: D.W.D Comins, \textit{Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad} (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1893), 42.
\end{footnotes}
In response to this heightened state of fear, colonial officials requested naval reinforcements for the 1882 Hosay festival.48 Many found the threat of insurrection imminent due to the fact that Hosay processions involved mass amounts of Indians.49

However, nothing came to pass during the 1882 Hosay festival. The Port of Spain Gazette called it “the quietest we have ever seen.”50 However, the same article also mentioned evidence of the heightened state of alert throughout Trinidad. At one point, a telegram was sent to the police force reporting an open state of rebellion on two plantations. When the captain of the police force arrived with an armed contingent, they found nothing but quiet.51

By December of the same year, the report of the commission convened due to protests at Cedar Hill, Fairfield, and other estates was ready. The commission concluded that the Cedar Hill protest was not premeditated. Instead, the commissioners were of the opinion that the attack on the police was the result of a “sudden impulse” rather than a premeditated plan of resistance.52 The Commission wrote off the ability of Indians to plan and carry out a protest. Instead, they were painted as those suffering from whims of their impulses.

Let us not fall into the belief that this inquiry was an indisputable truth. Their conclusions can be read through what Bernard Cohn, a historian and anthropologist of South Asia, referred to as “investigative modalities.” Cohn identified one modality as the “surveillance modality.” This modality reduced Indians to actors in a British-constructed theater of power. Their characters

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48 Mohapatra, The Hosay Massacre of 1884, 33.
49 Mohapatra, “‘Following Custom’?,” 187.
50 Port of Spain Gazette, 25 November 1882.
51 Ibid.
52 TNA CO 384/139 no 287: Stone, Wilson, and Harragin to Freeling, enclosure in Freeling to Earl of Kimberley.
were written by those who imagined how loyal Indian subjects were supposed to act. The scenes were always written with the same pen.\textsuperscript{53}

This modality was a one-act play in the indenture colony. Markers of “Indian-ness” such as race, caste, or ethnicity were reduced to simple caricatures. Indians were slaves to emotional frenzy. Their religious feelings could be easily inflamed. Simply put, they were irrational because of their Indian-ness.

Such analysis allowed them to conclude that the “serious nature of the outbreak at Cedar Hill” (note the use of the language of natural phenomena) was not due to “any general confined movement or to any general feeling of discontent among the immigrant population, although at first sight it may have seemed to bear that character.”\textsuperscript{54} Once again, the Commission sought to efface any proof of a planned effort on the part of Indian workers. Instead, the immediate cause was seen as an intense feeling of hatred between workers and their overseer.\textsuperscript{55}

This conclusion neatly tidied over any anxieties regarding structural worker dissatisfaction. Instead of indicting the entire system of indenture by finding issues with wages or tasks, the Commission narrowed the scope of protest to a vendetta between workers and their boss. The only concession the commission was willing to make was an acknowledgement of what Donald Rumsfeld would call the known-unknown: “With regard to the cause or causes of the Cedar Hill and other disturbances it is impossible to attribute it to one individual cause.”\textsuperscript{56}

Interestingly, the Commission was also willing to disregard the idea that feelings of religious violation led to the protests. They did not find much importance in beard-shaving

\textsuperscript{53} Cohn, “Introduction,” 10.
\textsuperscript{54} TNA CO 384/139 no 287: Stone, Wilson, and Harragin to Freeling, enclosure in Freeling to Earl of Kimberley.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
incident, finding that the Indians did not regard it with much importance. The commission had replaced religious fanaticism with emotional excitability.

With regard to protests that occurred in the immediate aftermath of Cedar Hill, the commission once again sought to erase any notion of organized discontent. The protests were not due to any preconcerted confined movement on the part of the immigrants or even to any general cause of dissatisfaction among them, but to the general feeling of excitement caused by the very exaggerated accounts of the Cedar Hill disturbance which had spread through the District and, very largely in the opinion of the commissioners, to the delay which took place in bringing to trial the Cedar Hill rioters. This was a further reduction of the capability of Indian uprising. Protest was caused by mere excitability and irrationality. In the case of Cedar Hill, they found that the hatred of a certain member of the plantation staff was to be blamed. In general, it was the Indian’s fault that his emotions veered towards excitement and hatred. By concluding that the amount of daily labor required from immigrants was “not excessive,” they erased any culpability on the part of the indenture system. If the colonial economy required sugar production and indenture to thrive, indenture could not by any means be criticized. That would risk the very foundations of the colony.

The only suggestion the Commission had following the protests in the fall of 1882 were related to how Indians voiced their protest in the first place:

It is noticeable that in every case where attacks have been made and overseers or drivers beaten, the immigrants have immediately after moved off in a body with their hoes and cutlasses to San Fernando to complain to the Inspector of excessive tasks or ill treatment. The commissioners desire to point out that in their opinion stringent measures should be adopted to prevent this practice.

57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
This should be familiar. The ways in which Indians chose to protest—carrying the tools of their labor—was a threat to the public order. If the Indians were calmer, cooler, and unarmed there would be fewer problems.

This was a premonition of ordinances that were to come to Fiji after the 1886 Koronivia strike.61 There, the strike involved a group of indentured Indians carried the tools of their trade with them while making a complaint to immigration authorities. Colonial officials saw this as a threatening gesture and found it imperative to prevent it from happening again.62 Later, Fiji would pass legislation to prevent immigrants from laying complaints against their employers if they carried their tools with them while making the complaint.63 The perceived irrationality of Indians, combined with the tools of their trade, made their protest a crime—a belief that was to be exported from the Caribbean to Fiji.

Ultimately the police arrested twenty-eight protesters involved in the Cedar Hill Protest. They were due to be tried in the Supreme Court, but the case fell through due to technical reasons by the state prosecution.64 This inevitably led to more fear on the part of the general public. The Port of Spain Gazette wrote that the twenty-eight could not possibly understand that their acquittal was due to technical reasons. The paper believed that the Indians would believe that they were justified in their action and would “conclude that on the least provocation they can attack the overseers and drivers of estates, and even the Police.”65

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61 See Chapter Seven.
62 TNA CO 384/159 no 108: McGregor to Earl Granville, 8 September 1886.
63 TNA CO 384/159 no 114: “Report on Ordinance No XIV of 1886 intitled [sic] an Ordinance ‘to amend Ordinance No VI of 1878 with regard to Indian Immigrants.’, enclosure in McGregor to Earl Granville, 9 September 1886.
64 Mohapatra, The Hosay Massacre of 1884, 34.
65 Port of Spain Gazette, 16 December 1882 as cited in Singh, Bloodstained Tombs: The Muharram Massacre 1884, 66.
In the postliberal colony, fears of uprising reduced colonial subjects to tropes of fanaticism and hotheadedness. The use of such tropes was not limited to any one colony, but instead circulated throughout the empire. They were also used to fuel repressive measures intended to prevent unrest. Such repression would continue through 1884.

*Labor Unrest Continues*

Due to the failed prosecution in the Cedar Hill case, the Colonial Office encouraged Trinidadian officials to clamp down on discontent by issuing harsh punishments to workers caught protesting.\(^{66}\) For example, the Assistant Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office, Edward Wingfield, saw that the court case had been a “failure of justice.” He furthermore expressed “a hope that the leniency with which the Cedar Hill Coolies have been treated may not have the effect of encouraging similar acts of violence.”\(^{67}\) This exact phrase was repeated in the Colonial Office’s official reply to Governor Freeling.\(^{68}\)

There was no leniency to be found. One case, for example, involved a teenage worker charged by his overseer for leaving work without just cause. This was despite the fact that the teenager was suffering from a sore on his ankle. When his mother and sister came to attend his case in court, they too were arrested for leaving the estate without permission. The entire family was jailed for seven days.\(^{69}\)

But these tactics did not stop the unrest from continuing. Another protest occurred on the Petit Morne estate in July 1883. There, workers objected to their task being increased from 3000 square feet of weeding to 4500 square feet. The group marched to town with their working tools

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\(^{66}\) Mohapatra, *The Hosay Massacre of 1884*, 34.

\(^{67}\) TNA CO 384/144 no 7: Minutes of Edward Wingfield, 13 January 1883.

\(^{68}\) TNA CO 384/144 no 7: Draft response

\(^{69}\) Mohapatra, *The Hosay Massacre of 1884*, 35.
and refused to work until their work driver was removed and replaced with one they could elect.\textsuperscript{70} The next month, forty workers from the Usine St. Madeleine estate marched to the Protector of Immigrants’ office to complain about work conditions. However, a magistrate arrested them and charged them with breach of contract due to vagrancy. While the magistrate believed they had a right to file grievances, he argued that fewer should have gone to file their complaint.\textsuperscript{71}

Once again, fears began to spread that Hosay would be an occasion for violence. Colonial officials considered instituting rules curtailing the Hosay festival in 1883, including prohibiting Indians from entering San Fernando. However, both the planters and the government thought it would be wrong to interfere with the Hosay procession, with planters seeing the day as a source of amusement for their workers.\textsuperscript{72}

Again, the Hosay festival came and went without an issue. But the colony was still scared that something might occur at any moment. As the \textit{Port of Spain Gazette} put it in a January 1884 editorial: “The danger is imminent, alarming symptoms strike every observing mind; the language of the coolies on estates is most threatening, and not a month passes without a riot somewhere.”\textsuperscript{73} The colony’s fears would continue into the 1884 Hosay festival, with tragic results.

\textit{The Hosay Massacre of 1884}

On October 30, 1884, troops near San Fernando opened fire on a Hosay procession attempting to enter San Fernando. San Fernando had the only path to the ocean and the group wished to bury

\textsuperscript{70} Mohapatra, \textit{The Hosay Massacre of 1884}, 35.
\textsuperscript{71} Karen S Dhanda, “Indentured Labor and the Integration of Trinidad into the World Economy” (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 2000), 286.
\textsuperscript{72} Anthony De Verteuil, \textit{The Years of Revolt: Trinidad 1881-1888} (Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago: Paria Pub. Co., 1984), 152.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Port of Spain Gazette}, 19 January 1884 as cited in Singh, \textit{Bloodstained Tombs: The Muharram Massacre 1884}, 76.
their tazia at sea as they had done every year. They were either unaware of the new ordinance or they figured that years of precedent were on their side. According to the official report on the event, the procession was carrying lighted torches on their way into the city. They refused to disperse, even after police officers read the riot act. The police opened fire. Twelve people were killed. 107 were treated for injuries relating to buckshot wounds.

In the months prior to the Hosay Massacre, colonial officials had built upon previous ordinances regarding festival regulation. J. Scott Bushe, who previously served as the colony’s Colonial Secretary, had been acting as the colony’s interim administrator until a new governor was appointed. He wrote to the Colonial Office that he had ordered the Immigration Department to make an inquiry with the colony’s Muslims as to what regulations were proper and did not interfere with religious rites. Bushe gleaned from a Stipendiary Justice of the Peace that it was in the South of Trinidad (the Naparimas) where Hindus would take part in the festival and attempt to “foster dissatisfaction.” Given that, he decided to have one of the Royal Navy’s ships docked in the harbor in San Fernando during the Hosay festival.74

He also drafted regulations to prohibit any procession from entering Port of Spain or San Fernando. Furthermore, no procession would be able to cross a high road or public road without explicit permission. Immigrants in plantations or villages were required to choose headmen (vetted by magistrates) who were to control the crowd, take charge of the procession, and relay instructions from magistrates. Processions on plantations were to be limited to members of that plantation only; no immigrants not residing on a plantation could bring a tazia onto that plantation without prior approval. Finally, the regulations attempted to curtail participation. No

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74 Bushe to Earl of Derby (No. 3), 4 September 1884, in Correspondence respecting Coolie Disturbance in Trinidad at Mohurrum Festival; Report by Sir H.W. Norman PP C. 4366 (1884–85), 3.
one other than Indian immigrants or their descendants were allowed to interfere with processions.\textsuperscript{75}

The last point seemed to explicitly target black participation in Hosay. Black Trinidadians had participated in Hosay from the 1850s onwards. Some participated in stick fighting that was not dissimilar to the “jamet” bands of Carnival. Others helped carry tazias or assisted in the drumming, while more came simply to witness the event.\textsuperscript{76} Colonial officials were thus hoping to prevent any showing of racial solidarity or intermixing during the 1884 Hosay celebration.

In his report to the Colonial Office, Bushe also included a note from the previously mentioned Stipendiary Justice of the Peace. In that note, the Justice wrote that he had attended a meeting of Muslim headmen from various villages and estates. He found that Hindus attended Hosay as an amusement, but decided to report that their demeanor was “menacing.”\textsuperscript{77}

Colonial officials wanted to transform the 1884 Hosay festival from a display of ethnic unity to a narrowly-defined religious occasion. Any chance of ethnic and religious solidarity or fanatical Hindu violence would be stamped out.

Realizing that British policy was one of religious neutrality, thirty-two petitioners sent a grievance to Bushe. They viewed the regulations “with sorrow and alarm” and argued that they “believed the English Government countenances and gives tolerations to the religious creed of all who dwell within her wide domain.”\textsuperscript{78} Bushe replied that he regretted the misapprehension

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Regulations made by the Lieutenant-Governor under provisions of the Ordinance No. 9 of 1882 for the government of the Mohurrum Festival, enclosure in Ibid., 3–4.}
\footnote{Singh, \textit{Bloodstained Tombs: The Muharram Massacre 1884}, 7.}
\footnote{Hobson to Acting Colonial Secretary, enclosure in Bushe to Earl of Derby, 4 September 1884, in \textit{Correspondence respecting Coolie Disturbance} PP C. 4366 (1884–85), 5.}
\footnote{Sookoo et. al. to Bushe, 22 September 1884, enclosure in Bushe to Earl of Derby, 6 November 1884, in Ibid., 8.}
\end{footnotes}
towards the regulations, but argued that they did not infringe upon religious rights and were solely concerned with ensuring order and calm throughout Trinidad.⁷⁹

Order did not prevail on October 30. On November 3, Bushe sent a telegraph to London:

Regret to inform you of serious outbreak of Coolie immigrants; police compelled to open fire; twelve dead, about one hundred wounded; majority slightly wounded. Coolie immigrants completely dispersed; all quiet.⁸⁰

The telegraph reads as a narrative in itself. It began with an “outbreak”—not a protest or planned action. The telegraph used the terminology of disease, as if the protest were a contagion with a mysterious epidemiological origin. Here the outbreak was not among the immigrants, but simply of the immigrants. They had broken out of order and their fanaticism had been unleashed. In such a situation, there was no choice but to open fire. In fact, the state was compelled by such an outbreak to open fire. The carnage was judicious. Only twelve dead, the majority slightly wounded. And it was well worth it—the outbreak had dispersed itself. All that remained was quiet.

Following a review of the day, Bushe was convinced that if the police had not opened fire, they would have been overwhelmed. This would have led to between 3,000 and 4,000 Indians rushing into San Fernando, “joined by the rough element.” Twelve dead would have been insignificant compared to the chaos that could have ensued.⁸¹

Nevertheless, there had to be an official investigation into the matter. That November, a Trinidadian had sent an account of what he called “an atrocius massacre” to the President of the British Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. The Society forwarded the account to the Times, which

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⁷⁹ Pyne to Sookoo et. al., 26 September 1884, enclosure in Ibid., 8–9.

⁸⁰ Bushe to Earl of Derby (No. 5), 3 November 1884, in Correspondence respecting Coolie Disturbance PP C. 4366 (1884–85), 6.

⁸¹ Bushe to Earl of Derby (no. 7), 24 November 1884, in Ibid., 12.
printed it less than a month after Hosay. The Colonial Office felt pressured into conducting an investigation into a potential scandal. They chose Sir Henry W. Norman, then the Governor of Jamaica, to conduct the investigation. Norman had formerly been an officer in the Indian Army and had retained a basic knowledge of Hindi.

Norman’s conclusions were unsurprising. He found that, given the circumstances, the police behaved with “steadiness.” While the loss of life was unfortunate, the only way to prevent the loss of life in the future would be to carry on the present rules indefinitely. He saw the causes of the Hosay Massacre were in the actions of the Indian participants. Part of the problem was their perception of themselves. He found that Indians had an “exaggerated idea” of their power. One of the solutions to preventing future unrest would be dampening that sense of power. Norman also concluded that Trinidadian officials had done nothing to violate the religious freedom of the Indians. He instructed the Protector of Immigrants to impress upon the Indians that these rules did not constitute a religious violation and must be obeyed in all circumstances.

The colonial government had to be resolute in preventing unrest. Norman wished that all Indians, both indentured and free, should be aware of the colony’s determination. The use of force was always to be on the table and he recommended a force of police and troops “at least as large as were employed on the 30th October” available for every Hosay in the future.

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82 Kale, *Fragments of Empire*, 151.
83 Earl of Derby to Bushe (No. 8), 16 December 1884, in *Correspondence respecting Coolie Disturbance* PP C. 4366 (1884–85), 35.
84 Norman to Earl of Derby (No. 10), 13 January 1885, in Ibid., 43.
85 Ibid., 47.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
Norman also connected the Hosay Massacre to the idea that Indians had grown haughty in their ability to protest grievances with their agricultural implements:

I think too, that the circumstance of bodies of Coolies being allowed to come to the Immigration Office to prefer complaints in an overbearing way, carrying their cutlasses and other agricultural implements, without punishment, has encouraged among them the notion that they are powerful and could do what they pleased. The strategy was the same as always. Blame was refocused onto the individual shortcomings of Indian immigrants. In the face of irrationality and aggression, the state’s use of violence was inevitable. Had the Indians merely acted as docile laborers in the indenture colony, the police would not have fired upon them in order ensure the public order. The security of the state was always paramount.

*Risks in Fiji*

There were only two instances of organized protest among Indian indentured laborers during the forty years of indenture in Fiji. The first occurred in 1886 and the other in 1907. Some have increased that number to four, finding another strike in 1886 and another in 1888. However, Brij Lal, a leading historian of indenture in Fiji, played down the significance of those strikes, finding them spontaneous, local, and lacking in leadership and strategic goals.

There were other demonstrations of force among Indian indentured laborers in Fiji. These were mainly incidents involving small groups of workers fighting against plantation authorities. In the early 1900s, groups of Indians attacked overseers and *sirdars* on plantations. In 1901, seventeen laborers attacked a European overseer. In 1903, five immigrants were convicted of

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89 Ibid., 48.


92 Lal, “‘Nonresistance’ on Fiji Plantations,” 187.
wounding overseers. In 1905, three immigrants were convicted for murdering their overseer.\(^{93}\) It appears that while Fiji lacked mass protests, smaller targeted attacks were more common.

In terms of larger actions, the 1886 Koronivia strike was discussed at length in the previous chapter.\(^ {94}\) The strike resulted in the colonial state passing legislation to prevent workers from gathering en masse to protest their conditions. They were further barred from carrying their agricultural tools when making a complaint—an echo of the response to protest in Trinidad. Agricultural implements were seen as weapons, and as such, the public order and safety hinged upon Indians not carrying the tools of their trade. This policy connection reflected the ways in which indenture policy circulated throughout the empire and globe.

To return to Fiji: its largest strike was perhaps the 1907 Labasa Strike. Some sixty Punjabi and Pathan immigrants were brought to the colony months before the strike. They were sent to work in Labasa, an inland cane-producing area in Vanua Levu, Fiji’s second largest island. On April 15, a group of fifty-five to fifty-seven of them made their way to the courthouse. Upon arriving, they were told that they had violated the law by coming in a large group, but that if five or six stayed, they would not be charged. They agreed and the group disbanded, leaving five at the courthouse. The five complained that the recruiting agents in India had told them that they were going to work as government clerks or domestic servants. When they arrived, they were sent to the fields. On top of that, they were paid poorly, consumed food that was not “proper,” and received harsh treatment.\(^ {95}\)

After hearing their complaints, the stipendiary magistrate told the group to return to their plantations. They complied, but they also continued to refuse to work. On April 19, ten of the

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\(^{93}\) Vijay Naidu, *The Violence of Indenture in Fiji* (Suva, Fiji: World University Service in association with the School of Social and Economic Development, University of the South Pacific, Laucala Campus, 1980), 60.

\(^{94}\) Lal, *Chalo Jahaji*, 176. See also Chapter Seven.

\(^{95}\) TNA CO 83/85 no 55: Thurn to Earl of Elgin and Kincardine, 8 May 1907.
Punjabi strikers assaulted a few workers who crossed their picket line. When the assaulters were arrested, a group of thirty to forty Punjabis made their way to the police station and demanded to be arrested in solidarity. When this request was denied, they returned to their plantations, but refused to disband.

Plantation management (the Colonial Sugar Refining Company or CSR) called the police. Colonial officials note that the group then armed themselves with sticks, knives, and hoes and attempted to march forward to attack the police. In response, the police fired, injuring three of the workers. That night, the stipendiary magistrate decided to send the strikers to Suva where their complaints could be properly investigated. The decision was made to keep the “public peace of the colony.”

Upon arriving in Suva, the men were arrested for causing a disturbance and were promptly sent to the quarantine station on Nukulau Island. However, the ten strikers who had been arrested in Labasa had in the meanwhile procured legal representation. Crompston, their lawyer, took up their case and tried to persuade the colonial government to pay the strikers £21 to cover the costs of treating their injuries. In return, the Punjabis would quickly go back to work. Because the primary concern of the strikers was that they had been lied to in India, colonial officials felt that they might lose a case tried in court. If the workers insisted that they had been lied to before entering their contract, their indenture contracts would be rendered void, and the immigration ordinance used to try them for causing a disturbance would not apply.

The colonial government settled the case. All charges against the strikers would be dropped if the workers agreed to be split up and sent to different CSR plantations throughout the

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96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
island. None of the workers received compensation, though the wounded men received some remuneration “out of grace.”

One historian had written that Labasa strike “was the most serious and sustained protest in the course of Fiji Indian indenture” but was “struck by the limited objectives of the strikers and the leniency of the colonial government’s response.” However, to understand the government’s response, however, we must turn to another case of unrest among Punjabi migrants to Fiji.

In 1903, six men were found to be constantly fighting on the plantation to the point of being a “suppressed mutiny.” In response, the Governor, along with the Agent General of Immigration, cancelled their indentures and returned them to India. The Colonial Office noted that while Punjabis had “done a all right so far in Trinidad,” conditions were different in Fiji. In particular, it was felt that the Agent General of Immigration should pay “particular attention to the plantations where these coolies are indentured.”

Why would the colonial state pay attention to Punjabi immigrants? Why did the state settle the case so quickly? The idea that Punjabis were to be singled out for their characteristics was derived from the martial race theory. The theory found that individuals from certain areas in South Asia tended to be more martial and loyal to the colonial state. The martial race theory was formed in the post-1857 era when the colonial state required new recruits for the Indian Army. At that point, military recruitment shifted to the Punjab. It became a primary site of recruitment because (1) Punjab was the border frontier to Russian expansion and (2) was also far away from

99 Ibid., 358.
100 Ibid., 362.
101 TNA CO 83/77 no 83: Jackson to Chamberlain, 16 July 1903.
102 TNA CO 83/77 no 83: Minutes, 25 August 1903.
103 For more on martial races, see Omissi, “‘Martial Races.’”
the trauma of the eastern mutinous areas, which were coincidently thought of as being filled with effete and cerebral men.

Military recruitment in the Punjab eventually led to the development of Punjabi infrastructure. Rural peasants in the Punjab were given patron-style benefits: they joined the army and in return the government gave them special treatment through investment in agricultural infrastructure.\textsuperscript{104}

The martial race theory was a quintessential feature of the post-1857 colonial state. It also was an Indian trope that circulated in the British Empire. On one hand, there were fanatical and emotional Indians, on the other hand were the martial Punjabis. The special treatment these Punjabis received were not limited to the subcontinent. Indians, and especially Punjabis, served in the Empire’s military in Abyssinia in 1867, Egypt in 1882, Sudan in 1885, and Somaliland in 1901–04, and additionally served as police in the Malay Peninsula.\textsuperscript{105} The Punjabis were subjects, objects, and agents of empire.

It is a chief contention of this dissertation that indenture colonies did not exist in a vacuum. These colonies were always part of a larger imperial and world. The empire was a circulation of goods, officials, labor, ideas, ideologies, and typologies. The reduction of Indians to mere fanatics was a key feature of the colonial response to protest, but this was not the only trope used. By building upon martial races and Punjabi special treatment, colonial officials in the indenture colonies were able to single out Punjabis as special.

The security of the postliberal colony was a paramount concern. When governing irrational and excitable Indians, they had to stamp out the possibility of any form of organized resistance. For Punjabis, however, this meant dealing with them in a more measured fashion.

\textsuperscript{104} Rajit K. Mazumder, \textit{The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab} (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003).

\textsuperscript{105} Metcalf, \textit{Imperial Connections}.
rebellion of martial Punjabis could result in widespread chaos. Fiji thus provides a more nuanced view of the postliberal state. The reduction of Indians to typologies varied, but still adhered to ideas of innate Indian-ness. And such typologies would influence the response to protest.

Did Mahabir take up arms and protest his condition? Perhaps he did, but he always did so knowing the grave dangers of his position. He could have been attacked by the police, arrested, or shot and killed. Or perhaps he was lucky. Perhaps he hailed not from Bihar or the United Provinces, but from the Punjab. In which case, his protest would have been greeted differently. Graciousness and care would be taken when dealing with his claims.

But Mahabir’s protests were not random, nor did they stem from his fanaticism. They were extremely measured. And how could they not be? He saw his brothers being arrested for leaving the plantation. He saw his brothers being shot by the police. And maybe he had heard stories of those shot and killed by the empire in places as far as Australia, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia.

The response to his protest would be the same as it was in other parts of the empire, including South Asia. Colonial officials used their power to repress, arrest, and kill. In the aftermath of their actions, they would strip away the complexities of labor unrest. They would reduce the desire to protest and “riot” to functions of Indian typologies. Mahabir was religious, fanatical, and excitable. Preventing protest meant always keeping those characteristics in mind. This was a turning point in the process of controlling labor. Controlling labor now meant controlling the very characteristics of the Indians themselves.

The 1884 Hosay Massacre was an example of such state power. When it came time to investigate its killings, the indenture colony saw only what it had seen all along: unruly and
discordant Indians who needed to be controlled at all costs. Command and control was at the heart of the postliberal indenture state. And it was seen here with deadly results.
Chapter Nine
Controlling the Infected

On April 27, 1881, Sanford Freeling, the Governor of Trinidad, received a message via telegraph from London. The message simply read, “Malignant type fever reported broken out Trinidad – is this true.”\(^1\) The colony’s surgeon general quickly put together a report that concluded that there had been a few cases of “Haemmoragic Malarial Fever” on a handful of estates. Some of those cases had been fatal. But there was nothing to worry about. These cases were due to natural causes and there was no danger of a spreading infection.\(^2\) In the letter that accompanied the

\(^1\) TNA CO 384/134 no 128: Freeling to Kimberley, 27 April 1881.

\(^2\) TNA CO 384/134 no 128: Surgeon General to the Private Secretary, enclosure in Freeling to Kimberley, 27 April 1881.
Surgeon General’s report, Governor Freeling hastened to add that “the general health of the island is good.”

There was a sense of urgency in Freeling’s reply—a need to reassure London that all remained under control in the colony. There was no malignant fever to report, only the deaths of a few immigrant Indians on a few plantations. Their deaths were only an isolated incident. The colony’s labor supply was not threatened. The public health and the security of the island’s labor were under control.

But death and disease defined the lives of indentured workers. Mahabir had to contend with the ever-present danger of hookworm infection, leprosy, and sexually transmitted infections. Beyond the threat of infection, he had find ways to deal with the trauma of everyday life. The brutality of life on the plantation was enough to drive men and women to the depths of despair. Mental illness was a common feature of indenture, and one that tended to be ignored by plantation and colonial officials.

We will now turn our attention to medicine, colonialism, and public health in Fiji and Trinidad. Until the late nineteenth century, public health was not an important concern for imperial officials around the globe. This point of view changed with a paradigm shift in the understanding of disease. Illness was no longer thought of as a product of miasmas, but instead related to bacteria, viruses, and parasites. Colonial officials recognized that research conducted at institutes such as the London and Liverpool Schools of Tropical Medicine could save the colonies from disease.

The connection between public health and indentured labor began during the Gordon administration in Trinidad and Fiji. In Trinidad, Gordon set up a system of hospitals under the

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3 TNA CO 384/134 no 128:Freeling to Kimberley.
aegis of the Hospitals Ordinance. This ordinance served as an attempt to wrest control of the immigrant’s body through estate hospitals and routine inspections by a medical officer. In Fiji, Gordon established a quarantine station on the island of Yanuca Lailai to prevent the spread of contagious disease to the populated parts of the island.

Colonial officials made the threat of illness quite clear following the rise of disease science and public health. Their colonial gaze would use new technological advances such as x-rays and microscopes to see into the bodies of indentured Indians. This new all-seeing eye was to help them prevent the spread of disease.

We will look at regulation surrounding the ankylostomiasis hookworm as well as sexually transmitted infections (STIs). With an eye towards global trends in disease management, we will find that colonial officials branded Indians as disease carriers due their innate characteristics. While there may have been a paternalistic drive to protect Indians from the threat of illness, the legislation that followed utilized repressive and coercive means. As we have seen, this was a hallmark of the post-liberal era. Colonial officials sought to punish indentured Indians rather than treat the underlying causes of the disease. We will end by seeking to understand indenture and mental health. Was it possible for the indenture colony to critique itself?

Public Health and Colonial Rule

Understandings of public health and global empire are indebted to theories first developed by Frantz Fanon and Michel Foucault. Both, however, focused more on the psychiatric element of state power and medicine. “The truth is that colonization, in its very essence,” Fanon wrote in

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4 See Chapter Five.
5 See Chapter Six.
The historian of medicine, Charles Rosenberg, summed up the Foucauldian position quite well when he wrote: “Medical knowledge is not value-free . . . but is at least in part a social constructed and determined belief system, a reflection of arbitrary social arrangements, social need, and the distribution of power.”

Given these conclusions, it becomes easier to see how much of late-nineteenth-century colonial regulation was enacted upon the bodies of the colonized. Some of this regulation was created through measures intended to safeguard the public health. Medical science was a way to create a more comprehensive understanding—and hold—over the lives and labor of the colonized.

As we have seen, knowledge gathering had been part of the colonial project for some time. To know the subject was to rule the subject—in the past this had meant amassing state knowledge about language, culture, and religion. The science of public health transformed this impulse into empirical data regarding disease and good health. Medical knowledge was another frontier in the ever-expanding quest to govern and control the colonized.

Medicine and public health were in direct relationship with the political, commercial, and militaristic aspects of colonial power. There were debilitating diseases lurking in the colonies: malaria, cholera, dengue, chikungunya—the list goes on. Outbreaks and epidemics could have

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destabilized the political order. In response, colonial medical men and the medical services they provided created a “sanitary order.” This was, in essence, a way of supporting the political order by using ideas of sanitation, cleanliness, and disease-prevention.\textsuperscript{10}

Sanitary fact-finding began in South Asia in the years following the 1857 Rebellion. In 1864, for example, sanitary commissions were set up in Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. These commissions examined the health of the army and supervised the introduction of improvements in barracks, hospitals, and stations. They collected facts about disease and epidemics and then submitted their findings to the Government of India.\textsuperscript{11} It is safe to say that this era’s public health legislation did not affect the population at large. Instead, it tended to safeguard those areas deemed important to the functioning of colonial society: the army, government officials, European residents, etc.

At the same time, ideas about public health and medicine were grafted onto those of race and class. Annual reports by the health officer in Bombay highlighted the fact that the poorest parts of the city had the highest death rates. Those areas were seen as teeming with crowded homes lacking proper ventilation and mounds of filth lining the streets. Colonial authorities determined that only the people were to blame: their lack of interest or knowledge about elementary hygiene fostered disease. In an outbreak of plague in 1896, officials saw all their fears confirmed: the poor were dying from plague because to their own behaviors.\textsuperscript{12}


This kind of understanding provided an opportunity for state-driven medical intervention. The army and the jails became key sites of medical observation where officials could tinker with methods of intervention. It must be underlined that medicine, medical practice, and science were not merely about dispassionate interest in the scientific method. Rather, these processes were deeply connected to the buttressing of colonial rule.\textsuperscript{13} The body was used for the colonial state’s creation of its own authority, legitimacy, and control.

Of course, the process of cataloging and medicalizing bodies was not limited to South Asia. It was occurring throughout the Euro-American world (and their colonies) during the late 1800s.\textsuperscript{14} As noted previously in this dissertation, the use of quarantine islands to receive immigrants was not only deployed in indenture colonies such as Fiji, but also in the United States on Ellis Island and Angel Island. The reception of sick immigrants was colored by theories of race and national origin. Doctors in the Public Health Service in the United States, for example, saw increases in trachoma infections as related to where the immigrant came from and the characteristics of his people. As one physician wrote, “No alien is desirable as an immigrant if he be mentally or physically unsound, while on the other hand, mental and physical health in the wide sense carries with it moral, social, and economic fitness.”\textsuperscript{15}

In the African continent, for example, one strand of colonial medical thought saw the primitiveness of certain African societies as a cause for disease. People in those colonies became sick because their societies were sick. This idea later gave way to more culturalist understandings of disease. During the uneven process of urbanization and modernization, some colonial observers believed Africans became ill because they had departed from their native

\textsuperscript{13} David Arnold, \textit{Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India} (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 8.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 9.

ways. Crossing the chasm of difference—from village to modernity—inflicted chaos upon the body. In both of these examples, there was no room for individuality: ideas of colonial subjects as a collective formed a basic understanding of medicine.\footnote{Megan Vaughan, \textit{Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness} (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 201–2.}

The importance of medical science only grew over time. Joseph Chamberlain, who became the Colonial Secretary in 1895, saw the control of disease in the tropics as a core component of the colonial project. He supported the Scottish physician and parasitologist Patrick Manson’s efforts to establish the School of Tropical Medicine. Chamberlain saw the support of research into tropical medicine as part of the “awakening of the Imperial conscience.”\footnote{Pratik Chakrabarti, \textit{Medicine and Empire, 1600–1960} (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 153.}

Tropical medicine would take multiple forms. The London School of Tropical Medicine encouraged public health based upon research for individual prevention and treatment on specific diseases, while the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine advocated basic changes and measures with regards to public health and the environment.\footnote{Michael Worboys, “Manson, Ross and Colonial Medical Policy: Tropical Medicine in London and Liverpool, 1899–1914,” in \textit{Disease, Medicine, and Empire: Perspectives on Western Medicine and the Experience of European Expansion}, ed. Roy Macleod and Milton Lewis (New York: Routledge, 1988), 33.}

Both views would be seen in the indenture colonies. However, they were inflected by the postliberal impulse for order and labor security. In the case of the ankylostomiasis hookworm, this could mean favoring punishment over treatment.

\textit{Ankylostomiasis}

In 1910, a Kuala Lumpur based journalist, J.D. Samy, wrote an account of Indian indentured
laborers in British Malaya. He saw a grim life for the indentured: “working during the mid-day sun, men suffering from ankylostomiasis, malaria, beri-beri.”

Ankylostomiasis had a global reach. The disease was caused by the ankylostomiasis hookworm. Infection was characterized by dermatitis at the point of infection followed by the development of a lesion. The point of infection tended to be the foot, as the hookworm was contracted by walking barefoot over contaminated soil. This led ankylostomiasis to gain the nickname of “ground itch.” One of the primary symptoms of infection was an iron-deficiency anemia. If left untreated, iron-deficiency anemia could result in death.

Agricultural laborers in India suffered from ankylostomiasis in great numbers. In 1915, the Rockefeller Foundation in India funded an effort to combat the disease through their programs to curb poverty. In their report, they estimated that over 98 percent of the 11,500 soon-to-be-indentured workers at the Negapatam Emigration Depot in Madras harbored the hookworm.

The disease had been studied in South Asia for some time before the Rockefeller report. In 1888, the sanitary officer in Assam made a request for a special officer to study the causes of kalaazar (visceral leishmaniasis) among migrant laborers on tea plantations. G.M. Giles, the medical officer sent to Assam, determined (wrongly) that kalaazar was ankylostomiasis, as the hookworm was present in the stools of the afflicted. He argued that the causes of the disease were twofold: the disease only affected Indians involved in low-grade cultivation (noting that the


20 Today, the disease is commonly referred to as ancylostomiasis. This chapter uses “ankylostomiasis” to reflect its spelling in the colonial archive.


danger was “nil” for Europeans) and that its root cause was the introduction of migrant labor into areas where the cases were hitherto unknown.23

Giles’ findings were rejected, as they implied that British rule was causing the spread of a disease. The secretary to the chief commissioner of Assam argued that Giles failed to account for the influence of climate, acclimatization, and innate immigrant morbidity.24 Colonial rule was never to be indicted. However, the study points to the fact some officials in India were roughly aware that ankylostomiasis afflicted migrant laborers. Given its prevalence in migrant laborer populations, the hookworm soon made its way to Trinidad.

In 1888, The British Medical Journal, described Dr. Beavan Rake’s ankylostomiasis case in the Leper Asylum in Trinidad. Rake was a doctor of some repute and acted as the Superintendent of the Cocorite Leper Asylum. In an inquiry into the state of immigration in Trinidad, he was lauded as a distinguished authority on leprosy. His expertise was called upon in India, where he had served in that colony’s Leprosy Commission.25

According to The British Medical Journal article, Rake had treated “B., aged 40, Hindu . . . on June 14th, 1887.” B. suffered from a tuberculated leprosy, ankylostomiasis, and tuberculosis. After nearly five months of care, the patient died on November 7. In his remarks, Rake commented on the spread of ankylostomiasis to the West Indies:

I am not aware that ankylostomiasis has been described in Trinidad before. Doubtless a careful search in anaemia necropsies in future will bring more cases to light. Mr. Strachan described it in Jamaica two years ago . . . by a strange coincidence, two days after the necropsy I received the Lancet of October 22nd, in which it is stated (p. 821) that Dr.

24 Ibid., 86.
25 BL IOR V/27/820/10: D.W.D Comins, Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1893), 42.
Kysney finds that what is called beri-beri in Ceylon is identical with ankylostomiasis, the former probably including several conditions.\textsuperscript{26} By the late 1880s, a disease associated with migrant laboring populations in India had now arrived in the indenture colonies. However, it is difficult to ascertain whether the disease had actually arrived in the colonies at this time, or whether the disease had not been recognized until that point. In British Guiana, for example, no immigrant was treated for the disease prior to 1897. From 1899–1903, less than 1 percent of 243,450 cases on estate hospitals were for ankylostomiasis.\textsuperscript{27}

In the late 1890s, however, the disease was listed in yearly colonial sanitary reports. Because ankylostomiasis presented most commonly as anemia, it is possible that there were undocumented cases of infection prior to the recognition of the disease by colonial officials. In 1875, for example, the leading causes of deaths among immigrants included anemia and exhaustion.\textsuperscript{28}

By 1898, the estate hospitals in Trinidad began to treat ankylostomiasis, and in 1906, the Special Committee on the Labour Question in Trinidad noted the effects of the infection.\textsuperscript{29} The early 1900s saw a larger effort to combat the disease. One of the first measures was to monitor Indians on the ships from India. To aid in this effort, by 1907 every ship dispatched from Calcutta had to have on board a microscope to aid in the treatment and diagnosis of ankylostomiasis.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{26} C. B. Keetley et al., “Reports Of Hospital And Surgical Practice In The Hospitals And Asylums Of Great Britain, Ireland, And The Colonies,” \textit{The British Medical Journal} 2, no. 1443 (1888): 423.

\textsuperscript{27} Weller, \textit{The East Indian Indenture in Trinidad}, 94.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 91.

\textsuperscript{29} Steven Paul Palmer, \textit{Launching Global Health: The Caribbean Odyssey of the Rockefeller Foundation} (University of Michigan Press, 2010), 43.

\textsuperscript{30} TNA CO 295/440 no 76: Jackson to Elgin, 26 February 1907.
Why was there a twenty-year delay between the discovery of ankylostomiasis in Trinidad (in 1887) and the implementation an effort to combat it (in 1907)? Part of the delay had to do with changes in the nature of science itself. Medicine was moving away from theories of disease grounded in climate or miasmas to the concepts of bacteriology, parasitology and medical entomology.\textsuperscript{31} These changes, combined with the idea of the “medical mission” in the colonies, led to the creation of the London and Liverpool Schools of Tropical Medicine. A paradigm shift had occurred.\textsuperscript{32} An initiative for combating ankylostomiasis came only with the development of the colonial medical service and the paradigm shift in understanding disease.\textsuperscript{33}

The shift in scientific understanding allowed for ankylostomiasis to be seen and documented by the state. In this case, the visibility was quite literal. Arming each ship’s Surgeon Superintendent with a microscope meant that he could find the hookworm in any infected immigrant. The microscope was not only a tool for diagnosis, but was also a way to extend the colonial gaze into the body of the indentured. Using new technologies to exert medical and cultural control over colonized populations was not new. Anti-footbinding campaigns in China used the x-ray as a tool to enforce cultural change. The barriers of the flesh were no match for the penetrative gaze of the x-ray.\textsuperscript{34}

Diagnosis en route was not merely a means to ensure the wellbeing of the Indians. Each laborer on a ship bound for Trinidad or Fiji was an investment and an integral part of the colonial economy. Each body had to be in a state fit for laboring and no time was to be wasted for

\textsuperscript{31} Arnold, “The Medicalization of Poverty in Colonial India,” 497.

\textsuperscript{32} For more on the paradigm shift, see Thomas S. Kuhn, \textit{The Structure of Scientific Revolutions} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

\textsuperscript{33} Palmer, \textit{Launching Global Health}, 43.

convalescence upon arrival. Ankylostomiasis had proven to be a problem in indenture colonies. Reports on emigration in Ceylon and Malaya both emphasized the high rate of infection among Indian immigrants. By providing the microscope on ships bound for the indenture colonies, ship’s surgeons were able to gaze into the bodies of the immigrants to find and cure a debilitating disease that prevented workers from doing the task for which they were hired. Agricultural production could continue undisturbed.

Finding and treating ankylostomiasis on ships did little to address contraction in the colony itself. The most thorough examination of the presence of ankylostomiasis in Trinidad came in a 1908 report from the Surgeon General, H.L Clare. He opened his report by remarking that the colony had only given a half-hearted effort to control the disease, calling it “spasmodic and desultory.” Clare suggested six goals for the colony: prevention of soil contamination by human excretion, providing microscopes on estate hospitals for diagnosis, education of the laboring population on the nature and prevention of disease, treatment of individual cases, universal preventative treatment, and the collection of statistics on the prevalence and distribution of the disease in the colony.

When reflecting upon his six goals, Clare concluded eradication could be achieved by preventing soil contamination by infected human excrement. Universal preventative treatment was ruled out as being too onerous. Pre-departure treatment would have been a better route. Noting that “reliable observers” declared that 75 percent of immigrants were infected before

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36 TNA CO 295/446 no 329: Report by the Surgeon General, enclosure in Knaggs to Crewe, 9 October 1908.
37 Ibid.
departure, he bemoaned the fact that ship surgeons superintendent and medical officers were disinclined to treat Indians prior to departure or on board ships.\textsuperscript{38}

Indeed, officials in India were hesitant to consider treatment prior to departure, as it would have slowed down the immigration process. A suggestion made by the Sanitary Commissioner of India in 1911 was to procure a blood sample from each immigrant. If there were more eosinophils (a type of white blood cell) present, the immigrant was to be treated with Beta Naptha, thymol, or a Eucalyptus Oil mixture.

This idea was seen by the Emigration Agent in India as “most disastrous” as it would “amount to a partial paralysis of colonial emigration work in India.”\textsuperscript{39} In the end, it was the Indians themselves who were to be blamed:

All prophylaxis is doomed to failure that omits to take into primary account the continuously increasing propagation of the disease by the habits of the class it most largely affects, and unfortunately the radical measures that alone and of themselves can command success are inimical to the customs of the East Indian and are subservice of the time honoured though filthy habits of the general population.\textsuperscript{40}

According to the Emigration Agent, only persistent and compulsory measures were to rescue the Indian—and the general health of the economy—from the disease. These efforts would in turn achieve a reduction in the number of infected individuals.\textsuperscript{41}

This process would not come through education or knowledge of the disease. Instead, it was to come via the compulsory use of latrines in the immigrant barracks and the fields. Clare had acknowledged the bulwark of culture in his report. He found that lax attitudes towards “caste and other East Indian prejudices and habits” were to blame for the disease’s spread. The Indian was once again bound by his Indian-ness. Left alone, he could never overcome the constraints of

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} TNA CO 295/469 (Emigration Agent): Marsden to Under Secretary of State, 13 September 1911.
\textsuperscript{40} TNA CO 295/446 no 329: Report by Surgeon General.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
his culture. Clare recommended an insertion into their contract that would prevent Indians from relieving themselves in "any other part of the plantation except in the place therefor provided."\(^{42}\)

This idea was enshrined in Ordinance No. 2 of 1913, which amended the Immigration Ordinance in force. The amendment called for the construction of latrines by plantation owners. The amendment further mandated that all Indians had to use the latrines to relieve themselves. If they did not use the latrines, they could face a penalty of £10 or up to two weeks in prison with or without hard labor.\(^{43}\) Each immigrant now faced the full force of the law.

The Lal and McNeil report, which looked into the conditions of indentured Indian workers, was published in 1914. The report was an official response to increasing Indian demands to end the immigration system.\(^{44}\) With regard to latrines in Trinidad, the report noted that while they were not prevalent, they were being built and provided by plantation owners.\(^{45}\) They also found one small estate that provided boots to protect the immigrants from contaminated soil. However, they shied away from suggesting the widespread use of boots, as they did not know whether Indians would wear them.\(^{46}\) In Fiji, they found that dysentery, tuberculosis, febricula, skin diseases, and hookworm were the primary ailments among indentured Indians.\(^{47}\)

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\(^{42}\) Ibid.

\(^{43}\) TNA CO 297/20, No. 2. —1913, “An Ordinance to amend the Immigration Ordinance No. 161, and the Immigration Ordinance, 1912 (No. 56),” 14 March 1913.

\(^{44}\) For more on the Indian nationalist response to indenture, see Chapter Ten.


\(^{46}\) Ibid., 13.

Fiji had its fair share of ankylostomiasis deaths. In 1893 and 1894, it caused over half the reported deaths among Indian immigrants. In the 1894 Annual Report on Immigration, Horace G.C. Emberson, the Agent General of Immigration surmised that the districts of Rewa and Navua had soil and climate conditions that were possibly favorable to the spread of the disease. In the Reports for 1895 and 1896, the Agent General continued to make special note of the deaths from ankylostomiasis, but by 1897, these deaths were listed in the larger statistics on mortality. By 1914, the Chief Medical Officer, G.W.A. Lynch, found that Indians were reluctant to wear boots due to difficulties in wearing them.

Boots on one hand, latrines on the other. The problem always seemed to lie in the behavior and culture of the Indians. Officials were unwilling to recognize the extents to which Indians did try to protect their health. Hilda Mary Steadman, a Methodist missionary in Fiji, observed that Hindu and Muslim adults went as far as to attend Sunday school and service to collect free medicine distributed after the service. Instead, the spread of disease was the fault of Indian behavior. That behavior could only be changed through authoritarian measures.

No colonial official, except for perhaps G.M. Giles, pointed to the actual problem: labor migration. The long hours spent toiling in fields exposed Indians to a number of ailments. However, investigations and conclusions could not indict the colonial project. All that was to be done was to point to the failings of the body of the indentured. While there were suggestions here

48 Lal, Chalo Jahaji, 277.
51 TNA CO 83/120 (no 138): report on the measures taken in Fiji for dealing with Ankylostomiasis, enclosure in Escott to Secretary of State for Colonies, 20 April 1914.
and there for preventative treatment, little was done to educate Indians about the nature and transmission of the disease. Instead, any legislation to counter the disease was to be enacted upon their bodies. Indians would be punished for the diseases they contracted. And there were plenty of diseases to be found.

*Sexually Transmitted Infections*

In 1897, B. Glanville Corney, the Chief Medical Officer in Fiji, submitted a report on the presence of sexually transmitted infections among Indian immigrants. He detailed statistics on hospital admissions in 1895 and 1896. In 1895, for example, 8.5 percent of monthly visits to estate hospitals were due to cases of syphilis. 7.25 percent were for gonorrhea. He went on to detail the actual number of hospital admissions for syphilis, chancroid, and gonorrhea. He concluded that it was only the “continuous vigilance” from colonial medical officers that kept infection rates low. Indians were encouraged to go to a hospital as soon as symptoms arose, but Corney was rankled by the few who did not “respond readily enough.” Those included sex workers, mothers, and single men unwilling to risk losing wages by leaving the plantation. He bemoaned the fact that these groups often spread the infection throughout the Indian community.

Why did the Chief Medical Officer go into such detail on sexually transmitted infections? There seemed to have been a particular focus on the spread and management of STIs among immigrant Indians in Fiji. However, STIs were of great concern to officials throughout the empire, as the nature of the infections brought forth anxieties about the consequences of

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53 These were referred to as venereal diseases in the colonial archive, but will here be referred to as sexually transmitted infections, or STIs.

54 TNA CO 83/67 no 122: Corney to Colonial Secretary, 15 October 1897, enclosure in O’Brien to Chamberlain, 15 November 1897.

55 Ibid.
sexuality and sexual behavior in the colonies. STIs were not viewed simply as contagious diseases. These were infections associated with racial degeneration and “primitive” people. STIs were antithetical to the colonial project of modernity and progress.56

STIs were also the grounds for the policing of women in colonial India. There, any woman deemed to be a prostitute fell under the jurisdiction of the Contagious Diseases Acts (CDA), passed between 1864 and 1869. The CDA required any prostitute to undergo a mandatory and invasive medical inspection every year in order to receive a license to be a prostitute. The act was rooted in fears of the results of miscegenation as well as the protection of European populations.57

The policing of STIs were deeply connected to ideas of sexuality and rule. What were the proper spaces for sexual behavior? How was sexual behavior to be controlled? What was the colonial state to do with the infectious results of sexual behavior? And while these were questions that occupied the minds of those legislating in the metropole, they took on a particular inflection in the colonies. Ideas of Victorian sexuality, for example, were important in the creation of what was and what was not considered “women’s work.” In the colonies, these ideas were infused with notions of race, gender, and domesticity that allowed for the further delimitation of sexual identity.58

By 1898, considerations on STIs in Fiji moved beyond a mere collection of statistics. The colony began to consider an Ordinance titled: “an Ordinance providing for the compulsory

57 See Levine, Prostitution, Race, and Politics; Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power.
58 See Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest (New York: Routledge, 1995).
examination and detention in hospital of Indian Immigrants suffering from venereal disease.”

The Contagious Diseases Act in India had mandated the compulsory examination of any prostitutes in India. In Fiji, this would be extended to all immigrant Indians as colonial officials believed there to be no class of prostitutes. Instead, the “morals of many of both sexes leaves much to be desired.” This belief in the inherent promiscuity of all Indians led officials to draft an ordinance that would apply equally to all Indians.

The Ordinance had the full support of the Attorney General, the acting Receiver General, the Chief Medical Officer, the Agent General of Immigration, and the managers of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (the largest employer of Indian laborers). The Governor had a few passing reservations. He believed that compulsory hospitalization might induce some immigrants to hide their infections. Furthermore, the fact that many STIs lacked effective treatments made compulsory hospitalization tantamount to a life imprisonment.

To his first reservation, Governor O’Brien hoped that his belief would be falsified after the law was passed. To the second reservation—that of the ordinance leading to imprisonment for life—O’Brien found that some discretion could be given to the Medical Officer to create an alternative to detention until a cure could be found. It may not have been perfect, he concluded, but the benefits to all outweighed the hardship to some.

The Ordinance provided a Government Medical Officer the power to examine any immigrant if given written application by any employer or if he had any reason to believe that an immigrant had contracted an STI. If the Officer found evidence of an STI, he was to produce a

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59 TNA CO 83/69 no 86: O’Brien to Chamberlain, 4 November 1898.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
certificate attesting that fact, which would then be forwarded to the employer of the immigrant. After that, the immigrant was to be sent to an estate or public hospital to be detained until cured.63

Immigrants were not to receive pay for time spent in the hospital, but their indenture would not be extended for the time spent under care. If an immigrant refused to go to the hospital, or if the immigrant left the hospital before or during treatment, he or she could be taken or returned to the hospital by a police constable and be liable for a fine of £10 or imprisonment (with or without hard labor) for up to three months.64

Upon receiving the ordinance, the Colonial Office agreed with the tenets of the legislation. E.H. Marsh, a private secretary to the Colonial Secretary, scoffed, “The governor says there is no class of ‘notorious prostitutes’—probably because there is no class significantly the other way to provide the necessary contrast.”65 There was a widespread belief that indenture rendered all Indians sexually promiscuous.

This belief was rooted in the skewed gender ratios in indenture colonies. There were far more men recruited than there were women. Women were thus able to use a certain amount of sexual leverage to explore relationships outside of traditional monogamy. They were also able to secure benefits for themselves: gifts, capital, and protection from others.66 Nevertheless, indenture was experienced not as a brave new world in terms of sexual morality—any leverage and freedom women did have was counterbalanced by a great amount of pain and violence

63 TNA CO 83/69 no 86: An Ordinance to amend the Indian Immigration Ordinance 1891–1895, enclosure in Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 TNA CO 83/69 no 86: Minutes of E.H. Marsh, 23 December 1898.
66 Bahadur, Coolie Woman, 86–93.
inflicted upon their bodies. Indentured men did not hesitate to maim or kill women for any perceived slight.\textsuperscript{67}

The sexual behavior of the Indians did attract the attention of both missionaries and nationalists. In their 1918 anti-indenture report, C.F Andrews (a confidante of Gandhi) and W.W. Pearson dedicated a portion of their screed to the nature of relationships in the indenture colonies as proof that indenture skewed the natural order of things. They were greatly disturbed by how Hindu women in Fiji passed “from one man to another and has lost even the sense of shame in doing so.”\textsuperscript{68}

The Reverend J.W. Burton, a missionary with the Methodist Church in Fiji for nearly seven years, wrote in his \textit{Our Indian Work in Fiji}: “Vice, misery and open wickedness abound; dirt, fifth and vile stenches greet one at every turn. Coarse, evil-looking women throw their jibes at criminal-faced men, or else quarrel with each other.”\textsuperscript{69} At another point, he wrote more clearly on the matter: “No established marriage laws obtain. A woman will stay with a man just so long as she pleases and when a better husband appears—that is one who can give more jewellery and demand less work—she goes to him.”\textsuperscript{70} Presbyterian missionaries in Trinidad expressed similar sentiments: “They have great freedom of intercourse and much evil example around them. Sad to say they often shew themselves to be as degraded as they are ignorant.”\textsuperscript{71}

It was believed that the imbalance between the sexes caused licentious behavior among women. In response, Fiji developed laws requiring the forced examination of those suspected of

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 108.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 29.
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infection by STIs. This was similar to legislation passed in other parts of Britain’s global empire. However, colonies such as India only required prostitutes to be subjected to compulsory examination to reduce the spread of STIs. Here, all Indians were seen as conducting themselves as prostitutes and the law reflected this perception. STIs could only be controlled by assuming that any and all Indians were carriers of sexual contagion.

The bodies of the colonized were to be controlled by force to ensure a sense of colonial order and public health. While STI legislation in other colonies may have reflected fears of improper sexual relations, legislation in the indenture colony took these fears and added them to ideas about work and the plantation. Individuals suspected as harboring STIs were to be removed from their plantations and examined by a medical official by the force of law. If they were infected, they had to undergo mandatory treatment. If no treatment existed, there was the possibility that they could be held against their will indefinitely.

Infected bodies were unproductive and risky bodies. Sex and sexuality had the possibility of destabilizing agricultural production. As such, the bodies of the indentured were always to be open to surveillance by the colonial state. But, as we will see, it was not only bodies that represented a problem, but also the mind.

*Mental Illness*

“There is an insane Indian woman who wanders about,” wrote the reporters in *The Suva Times* in October 1881 (just two years after the *Leonidas* had landed), “choosing the most populous parts of town, in a state of sometimes more than semi nudity.” Her presence was considered offensive: “She has long been an eyesore to residents . . . she was removed to the Immigration Depot in the hope that she would not offend the general public. But now she has found her way into town and
daily squats herself with her child.” The only solution to her presence was for “the Colonial Secretary or the Chief Medical Officer to relieve us of this burden.”

She would appear a few more times in *The Suva Times*. She featured in the next week’s issue in a letter to the editor. “In this comparatively young township of Suva we are not without or shames as well as our shams,” it said. “It is a pity, I think, that one poor, helpless, homeless creature should be amongst us whom no one chooses to care for.”

In March of the next year, the paper wrote, “Once more it becomes a duty of the Press to call attention to the case of the wretched Indian woman who has been a disgrace to our civilization during the past two years.” Complaining that “she has taken up her quarters in the Supreme Court verandah,” they complained that “It is a splendid rostrum but it might be better occupied than in the eloquence of a lunatic Indian.” The only solution would be to have the new director of the Immigration office “manage to arrange things so that she will be fed and housed comfortably.”

She made one final appearance in the papers after an absence of a few months: “For some weeks some care seems to have been taken of her.” But alas, “The Fatuous Indian woman with her child is again at large in all the naked beauty of her charms.”

In all four appearances, the paper called to remove the woman from society and to place her in the care of the state away from the eyes of the public. The public countenanced the presence of migrant laborers, but they were to be whisked away when such an arrangement

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72 *The Suva Times*, 29 October 1881.
73 *The Suva Times*, 5 November 1881.
74 *The Suva Times*, 11 March 1882.
75 *The Suva Times*, 27 May 1882.
violated the public order. Perhaps her presence compelled those in charge to reflect on the traumas of indenture. What did labor migration do to the body? What did it do to the mind?\textsuperscript{76}

As previously mentioned, Frantz Fanon and Michel Foucault argued that the modern state was deeply invested in establishing normative standards for mental health. Those who adhered to these standards were seen as functioning members of society. Those who deviated from these strict standards were to be removed from society and sent to hospitals and asylums for treatment.

The question of what to do with so-called insane or lunatic immigrants captured the attention of authorities in both Trinidad and Fiji. The spread of ankylostomiasis was deeply connected to the spread of migrant labor. Similarly, one cannot disconnect indenture and mental illness. In fact, it was most likely the case that the trauma of voyage and indenture that led to the manifestation of their symptoms.

The Emigration Agent for Fiji in India hinted to this in 1885 when he reflected that those who began to suffer from mental breakdowns upon arrival did not display any symptoms of mental illness when they left India.\textsuperscript{77} Back in 1883, the presence of seven mentally ill indentured Indians caused the Governor of Fiji to write to the Colonial Office begging for instructions as how to deal with them. The Governor’s own suggestion was to return them as soon as possible to India on the colony’s dime.\textsuperscript{78}

This was contrary to the efforts seen in Trinidad, where the Belmont Lunatic Asylum in Port of Spain opened in 1858, housing 48 inmates in 1860 and 500 by 1899.\textsuperscript{79} Fiji would not

\textsuperscript{76} Sudesh Mishra, “‘Bending Closer to the Ground’: Girmit as Minor History,” \textit{Australian Humanities Review}, no. 52 (May 2012): 13.

\textsuperscript{77} NAF CSO MP 1885/2866: Emigration Agent to Agent General of Immigration, 14 September 1885, enclosed in NAF CSO MP 1886/241.

\textsuperscript{78} TNA CO 384/143 no 119: Des Voeux to Derby, 27 September 1883.

\textsuperscript{79} Letizia Gramaglia, “Migration and Mental Illness in the British West Indies 1838–1900: The Cases of Trinidad and British Guiana,” in \textit{Migration, Health and Ethnicity in the Modern World}, ed. Catherine Cox and Hilary
have its own asylum for the mentally ill until 1887. Until then, it attempted to aggressively repatriate any mentally ill Indians.

The woman mentioned in the Suva Times had a name: Sookdaie. She was recorded in a table alongside other mentally ill immigrants with the following remark: “this woman wanders about the town, seemingly under no restraint.” The table also included an immigrant by the name of Monsowmie. She was perhaps named previously as Masoni who “was seen to set fire to the hut behind her own and then run to her own quarters.” She had previously threaten to burn several houses “in revenge for some things which she asserted had been stolen from her.” They would be sent back to India, far from the colony that had driven them to the point of madness.

It is no coincidence that, of the eight Indians listed in the table, five were women. In Trinidad in 1887, thirty-two Indian patients were admitted to the Lunatic asylum, sixteen of which were women—a ratio far higher than the male to female ratio in the colony of three to one.

Women were killed with great regularity by men driven to despair over relationships and sex. Those who weren’t killed were usually maimed and disfigured by cutlasses and cane knives. These men were driven to a blind rage in a new world where their sexual dominance was not guaranteed. At the same time, such infidelities took place in an indenture society where

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81 NAF CSO MP 1885/668, enclosed in NAF CSO MP 1886/241.

82 NAF CSO MP 1882/2297, Superintendent of Police to Colonial Secretary, 4 October 1882.

83 Gramaglia, “Migration and Mental Illness in the British West Indies 1838–1900,” 68.

84 Bahadur, Coolie Woman, 109.

85 See Lal, “Veil of Dishonour.”
men and women were, by the force of law, to be in the field, the hospital, or the jail. Such structures had driven them all to the brink of madness. As the Guianese folk song went:

It drives one out of his mind,
British Guiana drives us out of our minds.
In Rowra there is the court house,
In Sodi is the police station,
In Camesma is the prison.
It drives one crazy,
It is British Guiana.
The court house in Wakenaam,
The police station in Parika
The prison in Georgetown,
Drive you crazy.86

Such a sentiment was reflected in the suicide statistics in Trinidad and Fiji. The suicide rate in Trinidad for the general Indian population hovered around 134 per million in 1914. For the indentured that value stood at 400 per million. In Fiji, the rate was similar: 147 per million for the general population, but strikingly higher for the indentured at 926 per million.87

A 1902 report on suicides reflected all such despairs. It included Dhaniram, who hanged himself after “his wife and he quarreled, and . . . he by shaking her [his wife] violently (a mode of causing death said to be peculiar to Central India) brought on cerebral compression.” There also was Munia, who “being blind committed suicide by hanging himself in despair” while in the plantation hospital. It too included Mangal Singh, who hanged himself in the jungle after he “had been in hospital for 6 weeks with large open sores.”88

Women’s trauma, like Sookdaie’s, seemed to manifest as mental illness. Men’s, like Mangal Singh’s, manifested in suicide. To recognize Indians’ suffering beyond piecemeal treatment or recognition in statistics and reports would require recognition of indenture’s role in

87 Report to the Government of India on the conditions of Indian Immigrants, PP Cd. 7745 (1914–16), 315–317.
88 TNA CO 83/79 no 108: Deaths by suicide of indentured Indian immigrants recorded in 1902, enclosure in Thurn to Lyttelton, 15 November 1904.
incubating such illness. Mental illness was deeply connected to the many traumas of indenture: the journey, the disconnection from an ancestral homeland, the unceasing toil, the constant threat of imprisonment, the imbalance between men and women, and the constant specter of violence. To treat mental illness would require the colony to confront indenture. This was not to happen. Instead, there was the old reliance on ethnographic explanations, as was the case in a 1912 report on suicide. The Agent General of Immigration concluded that the suicides could be linked to the large number of immigrants from Madras.\(^8^9\) It was the fault of the Indian once again. In this case, his Indian-ness led to his suicide.

If disease and STIs led to repressive legislation, mental health led to wholesale erasure. The mentally ill were forcibly placed in asylums or returned them back to India. As Fanon said, colonization and the asylum went hand-in-hand. Placing an individual in an asylum meant that the state (and the public) would not need to countenance the presence of those at the margins—those like Sookdaie who called out an indictment of the colonial project. For those who committed suicide, there was nothing left to do but place the blame on the victim himself.

Day-to-day life is filled with disease and illness. And yet, in Mahabir’s world, he was punished for this very quotidian fact. These were elements keeping him from his work. However, it was the very experience of indenture that exposed him to a myriad of illnesses: ankylostomiasis, STIs, and mental trauma. And yet, these were never seen as being the fault of the system that controlled his restless toil. They were always his fault. He sung of his maddening life late into

\(^8^9\) TNA CO 83/121 no 262: Smith to Colonial Secretary 17 July 1914, enclosed in Escott to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 28 July 1914.
the night. He sung of a world defined by fields, barracks, hospitals, courthouses, and prisons. His humanity was slowly erased. He was first and foremost a laboring body.

In the late-nineteenth-century understanding of disease and public health, it was understood that infected indentured workers could threaten the viability of agricultural production. As a result, infected and mentally unwell individuals had to be removed from the plantation so that others would not be affected.

Disease and infection seemed to be the problem of the indentured subject alone, mainly due to defects that could be traced to ethnographic origins. In all three cases, officials never saw indenture’s role in the creation and spread of illness. All that was left were sick bodies, dragged from one punishment to the next.
Chapter Ten
Global Movements

Would Mahabir’s world of indenture, contracts, imprisonment, and punishment ever come to an end? Who would agitate for his unencumbered freedom? Who would call for the end of the indenture system? Would he take to the streets or would his brothers rise up across an ocean?

In 1913, the Emigration Agent in Benares informed the Colonial Office of a rising movement calling for the end of indentured labor in the British Empire. In the letter, he attached a translation of an anti-recruitment pamphlet he found circulating in his district:

Save Yourself from Depot Wallas
Be Careful !!! Be Careful !!! Be Careful !!!
It is not service but pure deception.
Don’t get enmeshed in their meshes, you will repent.
They take you over seas !!!
To Jamaica, Fiji, Damra [sic], Mauritius
British Guiana, Trinidad and Honduras.
They are not Colonies but jails.
Save, be careful from depot wallas,
They spoil your religion under the pretence of service.
Don’t hear sweet talks, they are your enemies.
Dear brothers,
You will find these “arkatis” at the station, at the bazaar and enquire if you are in need of service. They have not got services to offer. They will take you to Calcutta and sell you in other people’s hands on agreement.
They got money for this, with including talks; by offering sweets they induce you. They say they will offer you service. They take you to sahebs.
Don’t entangle yourself with their cajoling.
Don’t hear what they say, don’t stand near them. They have sub-depots and agencies everywhere. Wherever you go be careful of these people, don’t forget. Circulate this news to all villages.
Satyadeva
Satya Granthamala, Johnstongunj, Allahabad,
Printed at Swadharma Pracharak Press, Delhi

Such a letter was in stark contrast to Indian opinions of indentured labor in the late nineteenth century. Mahadev Ranade, a founding member of the Indian National Congress (INC) and a

1 Ashutosh Kumar, “Anti-Indenture Bhojpuri Folk Songs and Poems from North India,” Man In India 93, no. 4 (December 2013): 510–11.
social reformist, had spoken of the positive potential of the system of labor emigration. Another founding member of the INC, Surendranath Banerjee, had written in his newspaper that indenture was a net positive for Indians. As late as 1892, the paper ran an article on immigration to Fiji that saw the system an avenue of economic advancement for Indians. At that time, members of the INC saw policies such as apartheid rule in South Africa as aberrations from the possibilities that indenture could offer Indians in the British Empire.²

By the early-twentieth century, hope gave way to despair and anger. As this dissertation has demonstrated, indenture, from its very outset, was beholden to ideologies of rule that circulated from South Asia throughout the British Empire. Policies developed at the outset of indenture had echoes of apprenticeship and emancipation. Following mid-nineteenth-century rebellions in the British Empire, indenture policy began to reflect the twin drives of authoritarianism and paternalism that characterized postliberal rule. By World War I, change was now dependent on the voices that were heard around the globe: those of the Indians themselves.

We will examine the agitation surrounding the formal termination of indenture in 1917. It was not Mahabir or his countrymen who called for the end of indenture. Rather, it was India that led to its end. Grassroots protestors, the press, and a nascent group inspired by Gandhi all worked in tandem to ensure the demise of the indenture system in the British Empire.

We will begin by seeing how the anti-indenture campaigns comprised some of the first grassroots anti-colonial protests in India. We will then look at two indentured workers from Fiji, Kunti and Totaram Sanadhya, to see how the Indian-language press played a large role in garnering support for the abolition of indentured labor. The telling of Kunti and Sanadhya’s stories were representative of the ways in which anti-indenture opinion was disseminated in the

Indian public sphere. While Mahabir did not fight for the end of indenture in the same way as his Indian counterparts, his petitions to colonial officials in Trinidad and Fiji did use some of the ideas from the Indian press. We will conclude our exploration by examining the formal end of indenture as Gandhi’s first global nationalist movement.

This chapter provides a concluding point to this global history. If South Asia had been a model for many of the tenets of indenture, the Crown Jewel of Empire would once again influence indenture. Now, the indenture system was dependent on the rising consciousness of the Indian nationalist movement. While indenture had before been a product of colonial rule, the end of indenture retooled this relationship. More important now was the relationship between Indians and the Empire.

Nationalist Historiography

The histories of South Asia have tended to see Gandhi as the prime mover for anticolonial protest. In this rendering, it was only after his return to India from South Africa in January 1915 when the nationalist movement took off in earnest. His Swadeshi and Non-Cooperation movements were among the first examples of mass participation in anticolonial politics.

Briefly, Swadeshi was movement for economic and political self-sufficiency. Its mass participation hinged upon the involvement of the satyagrahi-volunteer. This volunteer took a pledge, typically on Gandhian terms, to assist in the development of a self-sufficient India. Volunteer pledges often included promises to remain nonviolent, to use the spinning wheel, to avoid foreign-spun cloth, and to avoid using British law courts to settle disputes. The pledge

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3 *Satyagraha* can roughly be translated as “truth force.” *Satyagraha* was a core tenet of Gandhian non-violent non-resistance. It was related to the idea of passive resistance, but went further, as it was premised upon the idea of a politics that was grounded in the control of one’s body. This, for example, led ideas such as sexual abstinence (*brahmacharya*) as being part of Gandhi’s *satyagraha* ideal.

form allowed for the *swadeshi* movement to draw together a large swath of Indians both rural and urban. The movement was largely a success until its abrupt stoppage by Gandhi following the Chauri Chaura protest.  

However, the first popular movement at the village level predated Gandhi’s arrival by a few years. This was the campaign for the abolition of Indian indentured labor—a campaign that one historian of indenture rather exaggeratedly said was a movement with more participation than the one for Indian independence.

The anti-indenture movement played an important role in indenture’s demise. The Government of India heard persistent calls for the immediate end of recruitment for indentured labor. They saw that mass meetings were being held in all the large cities. These meetings worried colonial officials. They were comprised of elite and humble folk, Indians and Europeans. As they put it, it included “many, both Indians and Europeans, who are recognised as leaders of thought in this country, but who are not usually willing to take part in public meetings.”

The movement to end indenture reached deep into the Indian landscape. Beyond legislative debates, political posturing, and official communications, the anti-indenture movement disseminated its message through the press, poems, pamphlets, plays, folk songs, and performances. Organizations, including the Indentured Coolie Protection Society and the Anti-Indenture Emigration League, set up shop in small towns and cities, and were active in their cause across the Indian map.

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5 For more on Chauri Chaura see Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922-1992*.
7 Gillion, *Fiji’s Indian Migrants*, 182.
8 Government of India to Secretary of State for India (Extract), 23 March 1917, in Council Paper No. 93, MP 6013/18, Documents on Indian Immigration, Pacific Collection, Hamilton Library, University of Hawaii at Manoa.
9 Sinha, “Premonitions of the Past,” 829.
Folk songs such as the Bhojpuri *bidyesia* (“foreigner”) lamented the nature of labor migration. One such song, translated by the historian Ashutosh Kumar, cried out against the system of recruitment and transportation:

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In the regime of British,
I was compelled to leave country,
White government played a trick O migrant…
To see me innocent an arkati [recruiter] misled me,
Go beyond Calcutta for five years O migrant.
To bring into depot make over the [contract] paper,
Took fingerprints on it O migrant.
In the sailing ship sit with lots of cry
How would I cross the black-water O migrant…
In the dark room the night was not passing,
How do I express my pain O migrant?¹⁰
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Such feelings were reflected in songs sung by the migrants themselves in the indenture colonies. One such folk sung, sung in British Guiana, exclaimed:

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Oh recruiter, your heart is deceitful,
Your speech is full of lies!
Tender may be your voice, articulate and seemingly logical,
But it is used to defame and destroy
The good names of people.'¹¹
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Anti-indenture sentiment in India was perhaps born out of the cries of the indentured heard across the world. Their cries were not the only messages sent globally. The most visible exchange between the indenture colonies and India was that of protest in the public sphere—newspapers, books, pamphlets, and other published material. These forms protest came most often from colonies such as Natal and Fiji. While the former was the site of Gandhi’s first forays into nationalist leadership, the latter was of interest to Gandhi’s lieutenants such as C.F. Andrews.

Trinidad played a smaller role in Gandhian internationalism. Gandhian figures such as C.F. Andrews and Dr. Durai Pai Pandia travelled to the colony to raise nationalist consciousness.

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However, C.F. Andrews went to the colony in 1929 and Pandia in 1941—well after the end of indenture.\(^\text{12}\) For the most part, Indian nationalist presence in indenture colonies during the indenture era was limited to Natal and Fiji.

Natal was understandable. Gandhi had arrived in South Africa in 1893 to take up work as a barrister. His initial forays into protest were not necessarily connected to Indian indenture. However, he spent his penultimate year in South Africa (1913, the year after he had written his influential nationalist text, *Hind Swaraj*) fine-tuning his appeals to mass struggle by mobilizing indentured and working-class Indians.\(^\text{13}\) Such experiences gave him a general awareness of the indentured community and their grievances.

Fiji, on the other hand, became of interest to Indian nationalists through the stories of two individuals: Kunti and Totaram Sanadhya.

*Kunti*

In 1913, Kunti, an indentured Indian woman, was sexually assaulted on her plantation. Her story eventually made its way to the Indian press. Her name became a rallying cry among Indian nationalists. Kunti had been working in an isolated part of her plantation when her overseer tried to grab and rape her. She narrowly escaped his grasp by jumping into a nearby river. Her case was featured in mass-circulating Indian papers and sparked an intense campaign for the abolition of Indian indentured labor.\(^\text{14}\)

The article about her assault, “The cry of an Indian Woman,” was published in the *Bharat Mitra* and the *Allahabad Leader* in India. The article’s author recounted how an overseer attempted to sexually assault Kunti in Fiji’s plantation fields. Though alone at the time, Kunti

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\(^\text{13}\) Sinha, “Premonitions of the Past,” 826.

\(^\text{14}\) Lal, “Kunti’s Cry: Indentured Women on Fiji Plantations.”
was able to escape her overseer and flee. She jumped into a river and was rescued by Jagdeo, a nearby boy in a boat. The article ended with an admonition that Indian women should not attempt to leave India on indenture contracts. It also explicitly encouraged Indian leaders to end the system of indentured immigration.\footnote{Ashrufa Faruqee, “Conceiving the Coolie Woman: Indentured Labour, Indian Women and Colonial Discourse,” \textit{South Asia Research} 16, no. 1 (April 1, 1996): 73, doi:10.1177/02627280960160104.}

Fijian officials were caught off-guard by the case. They were made aware of the assault only because the Government of India had forwarded them the \textit{Bharat Mitra} article. Indian officials demanded that the Fijian government find out whether the article’s allegations were true.\footnote{NAF CSO MP 8779/1913: Gruning to Colonial Secretary, 17 September 1913.}

In their notes on the investigation, colonial officials in Fiji found that the man who had assisted in the writing of the “Cry of an Indian Woman” was S.M. Saraswati, an Arya Samaj missionary who had arrived in Fiji in April 1912.\footnote{NAF CSO MP 8779/1913: Minutes, 8 January 1914.} His presence gives a clue as to why Fiji had received considerably more attention by Indian nationalists than other indenture colonies: global and trans-imperial organizations such as the Arya Samaj had a larger presence in Fiji.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati (no relation to S.M. Saraswati) founded the Arya Samaj in India in 1875. The religious organization, primarily concerned with the fulfillment of Vedic principles, eschewed the worship of the \textit{murti} and instead focused on the oneness of God as exemplified by the \textit{Aum}.\footnote{For a more in-depth analysis of the founding of the Arya Samaj, see Kenneth W. Jones, \textit{Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).} The Samaj was founded as a missionary organization. Its missions were carried out by \textit{upadeshaks}—a combination of a preacher, missionary, and proselytizer—who blended weekly hymns, Vedic fire sacrifice, and sermonizing to reach out to potential
converts.\textsuperscript{19} These upadeshaks were also conveyers of shastrarth—fiery orations and debates with Muslim, Christian, and other Hindu leaders.\textsuperscript{20}

The first Arya Samaj missionaries arrived in Fiji in 1902 and quickly set up a school, though the school’s principals fled back to India after word came out that they married underage girls.\textsuperscript{21} In contrast, the Arya Samaj was not formally founded in Trinidad or Guyana until 1934, leaving the organization’s influence quite limited in the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{22} The Arya Samaj did act as a connection between Fiji and India. In fact, S.M. Saraswati, an Arya Samaji in Fiji, first gave voice Kunti’s experience. Kunti and her husband told the Inspector of Immigrants that S.M. Saraswati had written her story for her.\textsuperscript{23}

Colonial officials in Fiji insisted that Kunti’s story was patently false. They instead concluded that Kunti was an immoral woman who had concocted the entire event in revenge for the dismissal of Sundar Singh, her lover, as the foreman of the plantation. Their evidence included affidavits of several sources, including Sundar Singh’s successor.\textsuperscript{24}

In a previous era, such a statement by officials may have ended any controversy. Colonial officials fell back on their tried-and-true formula: scandals were caused by the moral failings of Indians. At this point in time, however, the Hindi language press was a formidable presence in imperial and Indian life. The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Hindi public sphere in

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 44.


\textsuperscript{22} However, there had been one figure, Bhai Paramanand, who had proselytized in Trinidad as early as 1910 and had later set up a “Hindu School” in British Guiana. Richard Huntington Forbes, “Arya Samaj in Trinidad: An Historical Study of Hindu Organization Process in Acculturative Conditions” (Ph.D. diss., University of Miami, 1984), 20–21.

\textsuperscript{23} NAF CSO MP 8779/1913: Beckhouse to Colonial Secretary, 6 November 1913, enclosure in Gruning to Colonial Secretary.

\textsuperscript{24} Lal, “Kunti’s Cry: Indentured Women on Fiji Plantations,” 56.
South Asia was responsible for widespread changes in society and politics. The writings and journals of Bhartendu Harischandra, for example, were able to introduce new genres and pioneer the creation of new languages and literature in Hindi.  

This public sphere acted as a countervailing force in the British Empire. In this case, the *Bharat Mitra* would not let go of Kunti’s story. In a follow-up article, the paper disparaged colonial attempts to discredit Kunti and heralded instead her as a model for Indian women:

> In this connection we cannot refrain from admiring the patience, bravery and strength of mind shown by Kunti. In spite of her being of the cobbler caste, she has surpassed many well-to-do (high class) ladies by the courage shown by her in jumping into the stream to save her chastity. This will gain for her a place in the list of honourable and brave ladies. Our countrywomen should learn a lesson from the way in which she treated the Immigration Officer. Even on critical occasions one ought to stand by right. […]

> We beg to inform the British Government that it would be impossible to get on without putting an end to the indentured system. Kunti’s case is but one of the few brought to light. God knows how badly indentured labourers are treated.

The response of the Indian press was clear: Kunti was truthful and was also a paragon among women. A closer look at their language, however, shows how the nationalist program against indenture did not focus on radical change. They did not seek to retool social relations nor did they focus on rethinking the relationship between capital and labor. Instead, they were more interested in regaining the honor of Indians cast as “coolies” in the British Empire.

> In this case, caste was still paramount, as evidenced by the conclusion that Kunti was brave “in spite of being of the cobbler caste.” Later campaigns were inflected with Gandhi’s view of village life and organization as a counterforce to modern civil society. Social relations

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26 NAF CSO MP 6609/1914: “Copy of translation of a leading article which appeared in the Bharatmitra of 8th May 1914,” enclosure in Enthoven to Colonial Secretary, 10 June 1914.

embedded in such a life were held up as ideal ways of organizing social structures.\(^{28}\) It was in this context that Kunti had become a part of the nationalist arsenal to end indenture. But why?

The campaign formed around Kunti’s story started in 1913. As early as 1912, the Marwari community (a caste/ethnic group known for their prowess in business and the mercantile trade) in Calcutta had been assisting and reintegrating those Indians who had escaped the immigration depots. They had done so through the Marwari Sahayak Samiti, an organization developed to assist “helpless” Marwaris and other individuals in need.\(^{29}\)

By 1913, however, the Marwari community in Calcutta shifted to actively agitating for the end of indenture. The reason was rooted in another story of a woman wronged by indenture. In this case, a Marwari woman of some wealth had been tricked into signing an indenture contract. When the Marwari community intervened at the Calcutta immigration depot, they found several women who also claimed that they had been tricked into indenture contracts.\(^{30}\)

The circulation of this story led members of the Marwari Sahayak Samiti to form two groups: the Indentured Cooly Protection Society and the Anti-Indenture Emigration League. Thus began the Marwari community’s attempts to end Indian indentured labor. Members of this community, especially wealthy industrialists such as G.D. Birla and Jamnalal Bajaj, would later become active supporters of Gandhi. Birla would contribute nearly a half-million rupees to


\(^{30}\) Ibid., 142.
Gandhi’s Civil Disobedience Movement in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{31} However, anti-indenture campaigning was where the community first entered the foray of nationalist politics.\textsuperscript{32}

It is unsurprising that their campaign to end indentured coalesced around the bodies of women. One of the essential tenets of the nationalist movement was its insistence upon protecting Indian women from westernization. Nationalist and anticolonial movements sought to protect women from losing their essential Indian and feminine virtues. They may have been allowed, or even encouraged, to learn the ways of the West, but they had to remain protected from Westernization entering their sense of being.\textsuperscript{33} In this case, it was indenture—not western values—that threatened Indian women. Indenture took them away from India. Their spiritual compass went awry; indenture would render these women degenerate. Only could a rising India rescue and reform their status.

Women who allowed themselves to be rescued and sided with nationalist ideology were given cultural superiority. Even better were women who used their own efforts to regain a superior culture.\textsuperscript{34} In this case, Kunti was seen as a woman of high standing despite her caste background. Kunti moved from being an indentured woman of the cobbler caste to a shining example of a female Indian nationalist.

Though a powerful image, women were only one of the pillars of the anti-indenture campaign. The Hindi public sphere would also utilize firsthand experience against indenture. That experience would come from Totaram Sanadhya.

\textit{Totaram Sanadhya}

\textsuperscript{31} David Arnold, \textit{Gandhi} (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2001), 151.

\textsuperscript{32} Ray, “Kunti, Lakshmibhai and the ‘Ladies,’” 143.


\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
The Arya Samaji S.M. Saraswati had helped to bring Kunti’s abuse to light by writing “The cry of an Indian Woman.” Saraswati had written the article in the home of a man named Totaram.35 When asked by the Colonial Secretary if he knew anything about Totaram, the Agent-General of Immigrants, Sydney Smith, replied, “Yes, I do.” He recounted that Totaram had come to Fiji in 1893 with no possessions and was indentured to the CSR at Nausori. By 1913 he owned a leasehold of 49 acres of land. At one point Totaram had returned to India with two wives, £150 in cash, and £120 in jewelry. Since his return to India, Smith noted, “he has lent himself to the Native Press. I have beside me now an article cut from a Bombay native paper and headed ‘Totaram’s Story’: it is a column article built on nothing.”36

By the 1900s, Totaram Sanadhya had emerged as a prominent critic of indenture in Fiji. Originally from Firozabad (a small city near Agra in Uttar Pradesh) Sanadhya had served his indenture in Nausori, a town just north of Fiji’s capital, Suva. Following the completion of his indenture contract, he settled in Wainibokasi and married the daughter of a well-off farmer. After completing a course of study while in Fiji, he was regarded by his peers as a pandit.37

The self-taught Sanadhya read the Indian newspapers in Fiji and came to learn of Gandhi’s campaigns in South Africa. Gandhi had caught the interest of many in Fiji: Indians in different parts of the island collected a total of £40 to send to South Africa for Gandhi’s work.38 Sanadhya wrote to Gandhi on behalf of the British Indian Association. His letter was published in Gandhi’s South African paper, the Indian Opinion. The letter called for Gandhi to send an Indian barrister to Fiji to fight for Indian workers.

35 NAF CSO MP 8779/1913: Beckhouse to Colonial Secretary, enclosure in Gruning to Colonial Secretary.
36 NAF CSO MP 6609/1914: Minutes of Sydney Smith, 9 September 1914.
37 Gillion, Fiji’s Indian Migrants, 147.
38 Sinha, “Totaram Sanadhya’s Fiji Mein Mere Ekkiis Varsh: A History of Empire and Nation in a Minor Key,” 175.
Manilal Maganlal Doctor, a Gujarati barrister, answered Sanadhya’s call. Prior to coming to Fiji, Manilal had, on Gandhi’s advice, set up a practice in Mauritius to defend Indian workers. There, he had also set up a political journal to speak for the Indian community.\(^{39}\) Manilal arrived in Fiji in 1912, where he almost instantly commanded the attention of most all Indians in the colony.\(^{40}\)

By being able to bring Manilal to Fiji, Sanadhya proved his ability to be one of the few leaders outside India in the cause against indenture. It is worth considering whether Sandhya rose so quickly in part due to his ability to move between India and Fiji. In 1914, Sanadhya returned to India. It was during this trip that Totaram Sanadhya received an invitation to the home of the writer Benarsidas Chaturvedi. While in staying in Chaturvedi’s home, Sanadhya recounted the contours of Indian indenture in Fiji. Chaturvedi transcribed these stories, which later were collected in a book titled *Fiji Mein Mere Ekkis Varsh* (My Twenty-One Years in the Fiji Islands).\(^{41}\)

The book was published in 1914 in Hindi and was quickly followed up by several editions and translations into Gujarati, Marathi, and Bengali. The book was even turned into a Hindi drama.\(^{42}\) Though critical in the ending of the indenture system, the book was not translated into English until 1991.\(^{43}\)

The book covered most of Sanadhya’s world of *girmi* (Creolized Hindi referencing the English word for agreement). It began with the horrors of recruitment, which included the

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\(^{40}\) Gillion, *Fiji’s Indian Migrants*, 158.

\(^{41}\) Sinha, “Totaram Sanadhya’s Fiji Mein Mere Ekkis Varsh: A History of Empire and Nation in a Minor Key,” 177.

\(^{42}\) Gillion, *Fiji’s Indian Migrants*, 178–79.

various tricks recruiters used to get Indians to sign the indenture contract. The book went on to include how indenture violated caste. Writing on his time at the immigration depot in Calcutta, Sanadhya wrote that, “When I was brought from the cell I saw that Chamar, Koli, Brahman and so forth were all seated in one place and forced to have their meal together. Just about everyone was forced to have their meal on re-used plates.”\textsuperscript{44} Such a point reinforced the idea that nationalist agitation leveraged traditional social values such as caste violation in order to depict indenture as contrary to the normal order of things.

He also spoke against the system of punishment based on incomplete tasks. “The magistrate fines him ten shillings to one pound,” he wrote, “In this way ten to twenty days of these poor people’s wages are lost in fines.”\textsuperscript{45} He even recounted Kunti’s story, pleading to the reader, “Having listened to the story of Kunti, will not our brothers make an effort to stop this coolie-system?”\textsuperscript{46}

He too emphasized the importance of organizations such as the Arya Samaj. “We know quite a burden is put on the Arya Samaj,” he began, “but aren’t these givers of aid to the world, the Arya Samaj, able to send one more religious instructor to Fiji, for the benefit of our foreign-dwelling brothers?”\textsuperscript{47} And why would it be important to send those from abroad to Fiji? He continued, “blessed are those who abandon their self-interest, and take part in the suffering of our overseas brothers . . . If such people went to Fiji, then many troubles of the Indians suffering there would be gone.”\textsuperscript{48} The exchange of people and ideas between India and Fiji would break the bonds of indenture.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 98.
Sanadhya’s book was able to universalize his experience of indenture. His life spoke for all indentured Indians. The dehumanization in the immigration depot, for example, not only reflected Sanadhya’s own horror at inter-caste dining, but also emphasized that everyone had to eat on re-used plates. Furthermore, by recounting the stories of several abused women, Sanadhya was able to open up the lives of disempowered and silenced women to the Indian public.49

However, although Ekkis Varsh was filled with Sanadhya’s stories, it was Chaturvedi who wrote the book. Chaturvedi was deeply involved in the anti-indenture struggle. It goes without saying that Ekkis Varsh never intended to be a simple or transparent documentation of indentured life.50 Instead, the text was always meant to reach a wide audience and introduce them to anti-indenture thought.

By being published in Hindi, the text indeed reached a wide audience. This allowed the movement to end indenture to expand beyond the English-reading public. The book was quite popular among Indian-language readers, especially in the U.P.51 The book’s popularity surged after its third edition, which was published by the Pratap Press in 1916. The press had been associated with the Home Rule Movement. Ekkis Varsh was the first of many Hindi-language publications advocating for the end of indenture.52 Anti-indenture tactics had quite a robust presence in Indian society: societies, songs, pamphlets, articles such as those like Kunti’s, and finally a testimonial-book.

50 Mishra, “‘Bending Closer to the Ground,’” 9.
The text was quickly forgotten following the end of indenture. Still the book remained an important part of the constellation of published and unpublished political works on indenture.\textsuperscript{53} The book was a part of a grassroots vision of abolition developed in the Indian-language press. It was part of a political process that existed wholly outside the confines of metropolitan England. Indenture would reach its end with Indian input.

*Petitions by the Indentured*

The appeals to end indenture were mainly triangulated between India, South Africa, and Fiji. Even so, popular protest, the Indian press, and texts by Gandhian figures had an effect in the Caribbean. In the early-twentieth century, Indians in British Guiana and Trinidad began to form a political consciousness by creating voluntary organizations. These community organizations were not only based around occupations and residential areas, but also around a shared Indian heritage.\textsuperscript{54} In Trinidad, the two main groups were the East Indian National Association and the East Indian National Congress. A middle-class modernizing elite that had entered the merchant and professional classes headed both organizations.\textsuperscript{55}

Beyond these organizations, Indians made ad hoc groups to petition the government to free them from the horrors of indenture. These groups forwarded their petitions to formal organizations so they could gain the attention of colonial officials. In 1916, a group of twenty-four indentured Indians, for example, sent a petition to the United India Society in London. Their grievances parroted many of those found in the circulating literature on indenture: “We

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 186.


practically encounter all imaginable kind of sufferings which can possibly be borne by mankind,” they wrote, “and we are obliged to bear these hardships burdened on us without a murmur.”

Another petition, from thirty-four Indians sent to the West India Committee, used the perceived degraded position of women to buttress their argument. They found it abhorrent that women were allowed to “live as paramours with males of a different race” and that “fathers, nor husbands, nor brothers who are their lawful protectors have no more power over her.”

Another example was from Indian prisoners in Fiji. Thirty-three of stated that “in the gaols of Fiji the religious scruples of Indians according to their castes are not considering the matter of food given to prisoners.” Beef and pork were given to Hindus and Muslims, and an Indian of a “proper caste” did not cook their meals. This led to a situation where “with his religious scruples destroyed, the Indian prisoner when he comes out of gaol is frequently without any self-respect.”

While few of these petitions had their grievances directly addressed, they demonstrated the extent to which anti-indenture sentiment had circulated throughout the empire. Many of the points raised in these petitions were strikingly similar to those being raised by anti-indenture activists in India and the British Empire as a whole. Such similarities lend credence to the idea that petitions were another front in the anti-indenture campaign. However, the most prominent activists remained those in Gandhi’s circle.

*Gandhian Activism*

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56 TNA CO 571/4 (United India Society): Orfy and Khan, et al. to United India Society, 1 May 1916, enclosure in Roy and Mehla to Steel-Naitland, 8 September 1916.

57 TNA CO 571/4 (West India Committee): Bhole, Lila, et al. to Secretary of State for the Colonies, West India Committee, et al., 17 July 1916, enclosure in Aspinall to Under Secretary of State, 31 August 1916.

58 NAF CSO MP 145/1916: Bhrim Ram Maharaj, et. al., to Colonial Secretary, 4 January 1916.
Beyond the Indian-language press, English-language tracts were of great importance as well. The most prominent of these critiques came from Gandhian lieutenants. The first was Henry S.L. Polak’s *The Indians of South Africa: Helots within the Empire and How They are Treated*, published in 1909.\(^5^9\) The second was the Reverend Charles F. Andrews and W.W. Pearson’s *Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji*, published in 1916.\(^6^0\)

Polak was a sub-editor at the Transvaal *Critic* when he met Gandhi in a vegetarian restaurant in Johannesburg in 1904. He quickly joined the Gandhian cause in South Africa and served as an editor of the *Indian Opinion*. His book was published in time for the 1909 Indian National Congress and provided a cogent and vivid account of the indignities faced by Indian immigrants in Natal. His book refused to issue a blanket condemnation of all employers, noting that for some Indians, the material conditions on well-run estates in Natal were far better than in India. He did focus upon the ways in which indenture recruiters tricked Indians into signing contracts. He also wrote on the conditions faced by indentured women—points that would be repeated throughout the anti-indenture campaign.\(^6^1\)

Andrews had some stature in the Empire and India. He first came to India as a missionary. After arriving in India in 1904, he quickly left the Cambridge India Mission to teach in Rabindranath Tagore’s school in Santiniketan. Andrews was of some stature, as he was a friend of Viceroy Hardinge and was considered by many in the Indian government to be a man of upstanding character.

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\(^6^1\) Ray, “The Abolition of Indentured Emigration,” 42–44.
Andrews became interested in Indian indenture after a 1914 trip to South Africa (where he met and befriended Gandhi). Gopal Krishna Gokhale, a leading member of the INC and a proponent for Indian self-rule, had convinced Andrews to take the trip. It was only after Gokhale’s passing in 1915 that Andrews took up the cause of indenture abolition. Andrews’ unofficial report on Fiji came after the Parsi and Marwari community (via The Imperial Indian Citizenship Association of Bombay and the Anti-Indentured Labour League of Calcutta) approached him to conduct an inquiry into conditions in Fiji. He left for Fiji with the blessing of Viceroy Hardinge, letters of introduction from various high officials in India, and the funding of elite Indians. Andrews took with him W.W. Pearson, a fellow teacher at Santiniketan who had accompanied Andrews to South Africa.

Published in early 1916, Andrews and Pearson’s book utilized many of the same tropes previously seen in anti-indenture agitation. However, in this case, the text combined a description of living conditions with a vivid sense of spiritual decline. There was a strong emphasis on the idea that women were both abused and living in a degraded state. The book also focused on other wrongs: murders and suicides were out of proportion to Indians in the colony, sexual morals were ignored in the plantation barracks, and even food prohibitions were violated as Indians were assigned to beef butcheries and Muslims were handling pork.

On the point of women’s sexuality, Andrews’ Report represented a shift in the description of women in anti-indenture agitation. As noted in the previous chapter, Andrews’ focused on how indenture made women sexually promiscuous. Thus, the abolition of indenture

62 Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866–1915) was an Indian nationalist figure from Maharashtra known for his constitutionalist framework for nationalism. He principally achieved his goals through speeches, petitions, and most importantly, the Indian Legislative Council. For an introduction to Gokhale, see Stanley A. Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and Reform in the Making of Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962).


64 Ibid., 272.
was seen as a chance not only to rescue Indian women, but also to reinstate visions of proper womanhood.\textsuperscript{65}

The \textit{Report} was quite influential. The Governor of Fiji, C.H. Rodwell, found it necessary to respond to C.F. Andrews following indenture’s abolition. He wrote that Andrews’ book not only cast an “unjust and unmerited slur” upon the employers and Government of Fiji, but also “upon the European community of this colony.” However, Rodwell found it “impossible to disagree” with criticisms such as how the lines were unfit for occupation by married couples. Nevertheless, it was nearly impossible for the governor to imagine a British Empire without indentured labor. He found the abolition a disservice to all imperial subjects.\textsuperscript{66}

By 1915, Gandhi too joined the fray. After returning from South Africa, Gandhi took up Gokhale’s call to end indenture. Addressing an audience at Bombay’s Empire Theater, Gandhi called for the viceroy to end indenture within a year. At a later conference convened by the industrialist Dorab Tata, Gandhi argued that industry could not be developed in India if laborers were lured out of India into a state of moral decrepitude. By early 1916, he began to use the argument that one of indenture’s principal evils was its centrality in the moral decline of indentured women.\textsuperscript{67}

The combined effect of activism from all corners of Indian society put officials in India and in the Colonial Office on their heels. In a communication between the India Office and the Colonial Office, it was noted that “The growing opposition in India to the system of indentured emigration is a fact . . . the strength and universality of feeling in India on this subject make it a question of urgency, and the Secretary of State in Council accepts the conclusion that indentured

\textsuperscript{65} Bahadur, \textit{Coolie Woman}, 160.


\textsuperscript{67} Bahadur, \textit{Coolie Woman}, 158.
emigration must be abolished.” However, in the same letter, it was suggested that a small inter-departmental committee be formed to consider what could substitute for the indenture system.68 The conclusions of the Inter-Departmental Committee were simple: “the new system will be entirely free and the indentured system together with the titles and characteristics attaching to it will be abolished.”69

By March 1916, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, an orthodox Hindu member of the Legislative Council, quoted liberally from Andrews and Pearson’s Report and called for the end of indenture. With the full force of anti-indenture sentiment now reaching the hallowed halls of the Legislative Council, the Viceroy was now inclined to agree. In reply to Malaviya, Lord Hardinge announced:

No one who knows anything of Indian sentiment can remain ignorant of the deep and genuine disgust to which the continuance of the indentured system has given rise. Educated Indians look on it, they tell us, as a badge of helotry. This is soon to be removed for ever.70

A telegram soon went out to the indenture colonies stating that “the Government of India has decided to abolish indentured Emigration,” though the existing indentures would be allowed to remain until a new system could be devised.71 Hardinge later used World War I as an excuse for ending recruitment all together: on February 15, 1917 he announced that recruitment and transportation of indentured Indians was to be suspended until the seas were safe for travel.


69 TNA CO 323/758: “Report of the Inter-Departmental Conference on Assisted Emigration from India, to British Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Fiji,” enclosure in Long to Chamberlain, 19 July 1917

70 Government of India to Secretary of State for India (Extract), 23 March 1917, in Council Paper No. 93, MP 6013/18, Documents on Indian Immigration, Pacific Collection, Hamilton Library, University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Indenture was never reinstated after the war ended in 1918. By 1920, all Indian indentures were cancelled.

It took a global movement to free Mahabir from the indenture system. The effort to end indenture represented a monumental shift in the workings of empire. No longer was indenture a question to be answered by the Government of India or the Colonial Office alone. Indenture’s final act was written first and foremost by the people of India as one of their first acts of anticolonial agitation. What had begun as a project born out of antislavery was ended by anticolonial nationalists.
Conclusion

The Many Mahabirs

Mahabir had gone missing. Worse yet, he had abandoned two children, Ramraji and Rambaran. On October 8, 1903, the Agent General of Immigrants in Fiji contacted the Superintendent of Police to see if any information had been ascertained about Mahabir’s whereabouts. The Superintendent had heard nothing. “I have notified country magistrates that he is wanted,” he wrote.

The missing person’s case that unfolded was circuitous and confusing. Where could Mahabir be found? A magistrate found that one Mahabir had died at Wailei Lai on September 29, 1903. But there was nothing to indicate that he was the Mahabir the police were looking for. The Agent General then sent a message to the Stipendiary Magistrate in Rewa asking for help in interviewing another Mahabir. This one had a registered number of 17525 and had arrived in Fiji on the ship Moy.

The magistrate replied that Mahabir was in the Suva jail due for release on December 4, 1903. Was this the Mahabir everyone was searching for? The Agent General contacted the Superintendent of Prisons. The Mahabir in the Suva jail had a registered number of 17511. It was a different man.

The search continued. The Agent General told the Superintendent of Prisons to ask whether Mahabir–17511 had any children. He did not. But there was another! The Superintendent told the Agent General to find another Mahabir, this one with a registered number of 17523. He had been from Koronubu Ba. He had been sentenced to fifteen months in

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1 NAF CSO MP 112/1904. All of the following refers to the minutes of various officials in this document.
jail back in 1899 for assault causing bodily harm. Some of the prisoners said he had two children. After his release he left for Nausori. Maybe he could be found there?

The dizzingly array of identities and possibilities could have led the Agent General to madness. Instead, he made a reference sheet:

Particulars of the identity and whereabouts of Mahabirs who arrived by the Moy II 1898.

At Nausori  
I. Mahabir No. 17522 F.N. [Father’s Name] Jiawan. This man is free and employed in the mill at Nausori. Has no woman or children.

In Gaol  

Not Known  
III. Mahabir No. 17523 F.N. Cherai is not known

This is the man wanted  
IV. Mahabir No. 17525 F.N. Jaganath. This is the man wanted by the A.G.I. Description


Each of the Mahabirs seemed to represent parts of the experience of indenture. The first in Nausori seemed to be a best-case scenario. He was an immigrant who had completed his term of indenture and continued to work on the sugar mill. The second case was perhaps the more common destiny for Indian immigrants. He was a victim of the harsh treatment of so-called vagrants and deserters. His body was needed for sugar production, but he would not make himself found. The third Mahabir was arrested for assault. It remains unclear if he had assaulted a fellow worker or a plantation overseer. Had he grown frustrated with his employer and
unleashed his rage? Or was he so demoralized by the indenture experience that he lashed out in anger?²

The final Mahabir experienced physical ailment—perhaps mental illness as well—that was a hallmark of Indian indenture. His “sickly and consumptive” complexion and the rheumatism in his hips spoke of the fact that disease and infection went hand in hand with indenture. His disappearance spoke to the pervasive presence of mental illness in indenture. Was his death related to his ailments? Or was his death one of the many suicides that occurred among Indian men in the indenture colonies?

The final Mahabir’s “sickly and consumptive” complexion and rheumatism in his hips speak to the physical toll of indenture. Bodily wear, disease, infection, and mental illness defined the Indian experience on the plantations of the British Empire. His disappearance was both noteworthy and quotidian. Was his death related to his ailments? Or was his death one of the many suicides that occurred among Indian men in the indenture colonies? One wonders if his death and disappearance would have been noticed at all, were it not for the case of the missing Mahabir.

We have followed a Mahabir throughout the history of indenture. Our fictitious Mahabir, who has served as a guide through different parts of the indenture experience, was in fact not too far off from the real experiences of each Mahabir in Fiji. Their world was one of constant toil and hardship, but the global currents of empire always defined the contours of his world. Law, regulation, public health, and ideas of rule circulated throughout the empire in the same way as people, goods, and labor.

² Bahadur, Coolie Woman, 124.
This dissertation has argued for South Asia-centric global history of Indian indenture in the British Empire. While recent scholarship has shown that indenture was linked to other forms of thinking in the British Empire and South Asia, the majority of work on Indian indenture has long viewed the process through the lens of the “new system of slavery” or as one of conscious choice on the part of the indentured migrants themselves. What fell into the background was the actual mechanics of the indenture system itself. How was it embedded in larger processes in the British Empire? How did the colonial experience elsewhere influence the mechanics of indenture?

Scholars have been grappling with the effects of resistance and rebellion in the British Empire for quite some time. This dissertation has been indebted to the work of those such as Thomas Metcalf, whose work on difference and liberalism in the Indian context pointed to the disillusionment in colonial governance after 1857. Beyond the South Asian context, work on post-emancipation societies in the Caribbean has helped in understanding how difference and rebellion led to the gradual demise of the liberal project.

This dissertation too remains indebted to the work of Nicholas Dirks. In his analysis of the post-1857 “ethnographic state,” he made clear that the discursive disillusionment with native society was embedded in the power and praxis of the colonial state through the ethnographic survey, along with other forms of state power. This dissertation has also built upon the work of

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3 For a concise introduction to the historiography of Indian indentured labor, see Hurgobin and Basu, ““Oceans without Borders,”” 8–9.
4 Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj.
6 Dirks, Castes of Mind.
Karuna Mantena, who demonstrated how rebellion played out in the transition from liberal imperialism towards a conservatism built upon the protection of native society.\footnote{Mantena, \textit{Alibis of Empire}.}

By looking at Trinidad and Fiji—two colonies that, despite their distance, shared much in common when it came to indenture—this dissertation was able to trace the beginnings of indenture, through the postliberal turn, to its final end in a global anticolonial movement. Indenture was a process of turning indebted peasants into indentured workers. And yet, this process was never static. It moved with the currents of the Empire and colonial rule.

It is tempting to write off the histories of small places. Islands like Fiji and Trinidad take up little space on a map of the world, their presence dwarfed by the oceans that surround them. But to view them as isolated outposts of a global empire would be misguided and incorrect. These colonies were deeply connected to the wider world. Movements in colonial rule in South Asia influenced law and regulation in other colonies. Moreover, the indenture colonies were influencing the globe in their own right. The system for sending remittances abroad can be traced back to the British Caribbean. Methods for managing indentured laborers in Fiji influenced methods in the Caribbean and vice versa. Mahabir’s world may have been one of drudgery and sweat, but this world was anything but isolated. It was an active part of a global empire.

But what happened to Mahabir in Fiji? Ultimately, Mahabir was never found. Though Fijian officials were able to bring up vast amounts of surveillance data on the various Mahabirs, state power was never complete or absolute. With the Governor’s approval, the Agent General took the children away in order to “deal with them as orphans and give them to one or two of the many applicants.”
As we have learned, there were countless Mahabirs throughout the time and space of Indian indenture. As they were transformed from peasants into laborers, their lives were often filled with nothing more than restless toil. But their world of toil was never a historical constant. It was always shaped by the currents from waters far and wide.
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