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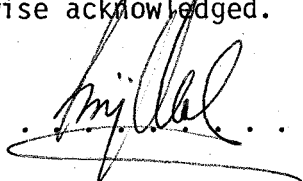
ORIGINS AND BACKGROUND OF FIJI'S NORTH  
INDIAN INDENTURED MIGRANTS, 1879-1916.

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
Australian National University.

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This thesis is based on my own research  
except where otherwise acknowledged.

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## ABSTRACT

Between 1879 and 1916, some 60,965 Indian indentured men, women and children were introduced into Fiji, of whom 45,439 — the subject of this study — left from Calcutta and the rest from Madras when recruitment was started there in 1903. Indian indentured emigration to Fiji was a small but significant part of a larger process of labour emigration from India, which began in 1834. The labourers were introduced into the colonies on a fixed contract to meet the shortage of labour caused either by the abolition of slavery, the inability or unwillingness of the indigenous people to meet the growing needs of the plantations or by the failure of other sources of supply.

The story of the experience of the indentured labourers in Fiji, as indeed in other former colonies, is by now well known. Somewhat less is known about their social and economic background and their motivations for emigration. This study represents an attempt to understand these aspects. Various questions are discussed: the reasons for introducing Indian labourers into Fiji, the structure and evolution of the indenture system, the changing regional origins of the emigrants, the nature and patterns of internal migration in the United Provinces from where the majority of the emigrants came, the social and caste background of the labourers, their precarious economic position in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the emigration of women and families.

The picture which emerges from a computerised analysis of the data in the Emigration Passes, and from folksongs and other conventional sources, goes against the grain of mythology as well as the current interpretation of indentured emigration. Contrary to the prevailing



opinion, it is shown that the emigrants were not invariably of low social origins. It is suggested that the strata from which they originated were increasingly being subjected to unprecedented changes brought about by British penetration of Indian society. Emigration seems to have offered one of the alternatives to cope with the consequent vicissitudes of rural life. The extent to which spatial mobility was prevalent is shown by the fact that a very large proportion of Fiji's migrants had already left their homes before they were registered for emigration. Not only men but women and families also emigrated in large numbers and they, too, were a part of the uprooted mass. The important role of the recruiters in inducing emigration is acknowledged, but it is suggested that the degree of their influence has been exaggerated. In short, this study demonstrates that indentured emigration was a much more complex and differentiated process than has often been realised.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ABBREVIATIONS

C., or Cmd.	United Kingdom Command Paper
CP	Central Provinces
E.P.	Emigration Proceedings of the Departments of Revenue, Agriculture and Commerce (1871-1879), Home, Revenue and Agriculture (1879-1881), Revenue and Agriculture (1881-1905), Commerce and Industry (1905-1920).
G.D.	General Department
H.L.	Home Legislative Department
H.P.	Home Public Department
<i>IESHR</i>	<i>Indian Economic and Social History Review</i>
NAI	National Archives of India
<i>PP</i>	United Kingdom <i>Parliamentary Papers</i>
<i>PR</i>	<i>Protector of Emigrants' Annual Reports on Emigration from the Port of Calcutta to British and Foreign Colonies</i>
<i>Resolutions</i>	<i>Resolutions on Immigrant Labour in the Assam districts of Eastern Bengal</i>
<i>RCL</i>	<i>Royal Commission on Labour in India</i>
UP	United Provinces (of Agra and Oudh)

## GLOSSARY

Assessment	The fixing of land revenue
<i>Begari</i>	A system of forced labour
<i>Bigha</i>	A measure of land, usually 3,000 square yards
<i>Chaprassi</i>	An ordinary messenger in an office, <del>assistant</del>
<i>Chaukidar</i>	A guard or watchman
Collector	The administrative head of a district
<i>Dharma</i>	Religious duty
<i>Fakir</i>	A Muslim religious mendicant
<i>Jajman</i>	The family or family head receiving certain traditional, standardised services from <i>kamins</i>
<i>Kaccha</i>	Unripe, built of unbaked bricks, incomplete
<i>Kamin</i>	A village artisan or servant who works for a <i>jajman</i> and receives a share of the harvest in kind.
<i>Karma</i>	Fate, the effects of former deeds, performed either in this life or in a previous one, on one's present and future condition
<i>Khariif</i>	Autumn harvest
<i>Khudkasht</i>	Resident, settled, prioprietary (land)
<i>Lakh</i>	One hundred thousand (1,00,000) by Indian system of counting
<i>Mahajan</i>	A merchant, banker, village money-lender
<i>Mahal</i>	A revenue paying unit, usually assessed as a single unit at settlement, belonging to one or several co-sharing landowners
<i>Nazrana</i>	Customary tribute or gift from a tenant to his landlord
<i>Pakka (Pucca)</i>	Ripe, built of baked bricks, complete, permanent
<i>Purdah-nashin</i>	Observance of seclusion behind a veil or curtain, usually by Muslim women

<i>Patwari</i>	A record-keeper or village accountant who keeps the revenue account of one or more villages
<i>Rabi</i>	Spring crop
<i>Raiyat</i>	A peasant
<i>Sahukar</i>	A banker or money-lender
Settlement	The assessment of land revenue by the British, usually for 30 years in the UP
<i>Sewak</i>	Servant, helper
<i>Sir</i>	Land cultivated by the owner
<i>Taluqdar</i>	A holder of an estate, or <i>talua</i>
<i>Tehsil</i>	Subdivision of a district under the British. There are usually three to six tehsils in a district.
<i>Thana</i>	A police outpost
<i>Varna</i>	Class or division of the four classical Hindu divisions of society: Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya, Sudra
Zamindar	Landholder/landowner who controls land and is responsible for the payment of assessed land revenue to the government
<i>Zillah</i>	District

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VOLUME I

(TEXT)

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION : AVATARS OF INDIAN INDENTURE HISTORIOGRAPHY

Overseas Indians today constitute a major part of the larger mosaic of Asian settlements throughout the world. Substantial numbers of them, especially in the West Indies, Fiji, Mauritius, Natal and other such former 'sugar colonies', are descendants of indentured labourers who were exported from India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to meet the shortage of labour caused either by the abolition of slavery or by the inability or unwillingness of indigenous populations to work on European plantations. The history of indentured emigration — 'those floating caravans of barbarian tourists'<sup>1</sup>, as someone remarked rather uncharitably — no longer rests on the fringes of modern historiography as an unwanted stepchild of either British colonial or modern Indian history. In recent years, much new literature has emerged on overseas Indians which has made their study a composite, relatively autonomous and highly rewarding field of scholarly enquiry.<sup>2</sup>

Individual historical studies on indenture are available for most major overseas Indian communities. Some such as those for Fiji and to a lesser extent Trinidad, are rich and sophisticated, while for others such as Guyana and Mauritius, two of the largest and oldest importers of Indian indentured labour, surprisingly less so. For yet others such as Natal and Surinam, serious historical research is still

in its infancy and at present only the barest outlines are available. These studies have on many occasions been supplemented by several comprehensive comparative accounts which have attempted to portray the process of indentured emigration as an integrated whole. Besides historians, other social scientists, especially anthropologists, have also made admirable studies of the social and cultural evolution and social structure of overseas Indian communities.<sup>3</sup>

Many methods and approaches have been used, differing moral postures adopted and a conflicting variety of themes emphasised, which is not altogether surprising since indenture itself posed a number of vexatious social, moral and ideological problems for all connected with it at the time of its existence. Indeed, the legacy of problems bequeathed by indenture remains as unresolved today as it was at the turn of the century. Yet, despite the recent outpouring of scholarly studies, certain lacunae still exist in our knowledge of some important aspects of Indian indenture experience. Perhaps the most notable of these relate to the origins and background of the indentured emigrants in India. This study attempts to deal with these questions in some detail.

But before we turn to its subject and scope, it is relevant for our purposes here to dwell at some length on the 'state of the art' in overseas Indian historiography, primarily to put our study in some perspective. A comprehensive review of all the literature even in this new and fairly restricted field cannot be attempted here; instead, I have chosen to focus on relatively well-known and representative works to highlight the important themes. A cautionary remark is in order. It is easy to criticise other scholars for their intended and unintended omissions and differences in emphasis



and structure of argument to illuminate the significance of one's own work. This is not my intention here. All the works discussed below and others that have been left out have, in their own ways, deepened our understanding of aspects of Indian indenture experience. These pioneering studies traversed a rough terrain, and opened up new areas for investigation. My work builds on them, employs additional sources and tries to map out one segment of the field more systematically than has sometimes been done.

At the risk of some oversimplification, it is possible to discern three major interpretations of Indian indenture. The first takes an essentially sanguine view of the process and emphasises progress and improvement in the condition of the indentured migrants, while underestimating their suffering and degradation. The second takes quite the opposite view, arguing that the indenture system was simply another version of slavery; while the third, combining deep human sympathy for the plight of the downtrodden and oppressed with scholarly objectivity, suggests that although there was much suffering, the migrants nevertheless did derive considerable social and economic benefits from emigration to and settlement in the colonies. Let us take each of these interpretations in turn.

The first of these interpretations, not surprisingly, found considerable support among a section of British officials right from the outset of indentured emigration. Typical of their views was the assertion of the Sanderson Committee in 1910:

It may be confidently stated that as a general rule the immigrants in all the colonies to which they go improve in health, strength and independence of character ... These results, even though they may affect only a fractional proportion of the vast population of India, cannot be regarded otherwise than with satisfaction.<sup>4</sup>

The sanguine view of indenture was also endorsed by some Indian observers familiar with the social and economic conditions of rural India. Kunwar Maharaj Singh, Deputy Commissioner of Bahraich district, was favourably impressed by the change in the character and outlook of the Indians in British Guiana. 'There are no caste restrictions or purdah', he wrote 'and the Colonial Indian, man and woman, has a somewhat higher standard of living and is certainly more independent than his confrere in India'.<sup>5</sup>

Such favourable views of indenture find cogent exposition in the works of some British scholars. Their main line of argument is that imperial efforts in transplanting Indians in the colonies were not entirely in vain, despite the suffering and hardship involved, for the emigrants themselves were among the chief beneficiaries of the opportunities offered by the colonies. I.M. Cumpston advocated this view in her *Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834-1854*.<sup>6</sup> The title, it can fairly be said, is a misnomer, for the book is not as much about the indentured labourers as it is about the nature of imperial policies and activities in respect of indentured emigration, and the complex problems of setting up and administration of the indenture system. In this regard the book is a masterly and unsurpassed study but Indians somehow remain curiously on the periphery, as pawns in the game of chess played by imperial bureaucrats. Cumpston does occasionally indicate that she is aware of the paradoxes and contradictions in the indenture system, and their implications for the emigrants, but argues that both the imperial and colonial governments were much ahead of their time in protecting the labourers' interests:

The need to protect him [the indentured labourer] at all stages from the consequences of his own ignorance caused the initial private speculation to be superseded by close governmental control of the traffic, at a time of very general belief in the principle of non-interference in the individual liberty of movement.<sup>7</sup>

George R. Mellor, another British scholar, makes the same point:

From the modern standpoint, the restrictions and sanctions may appear somewhat harsh but *autres temps, autres moeurs* — in England it was not until 1875 that master and servant became, as employer and employee, two equal parties to a civil contract, and that imprisonment for breach of agreement was abolished.<sup>8</sup>

Cumpston goes further than other observers by emphasising the benefits of indenture for India itself. Thus she writes: 'the return of Indians to their own country enriched with savings, with new skills and experience was one of the contributing factors to Indian restlessness under alien government and the rapid appearance of nationalism and growing demand for independence'.<sup>9</sup> This assertion would have been extremely flattering to the indentured labourers, but as any student of Indian history knows, this is an exaggeration. There were, to be sure, one or two stray cases such as the Fiji returned emigrants Baba Ram Chandra and lesser known Hafzal Khan,<sup>10</sup> who were involved in peasant agitation in India; but their influence on political events there was not of much national consequence. This writer is not aware of many wealthy returned emigrants either from Fiji or the other colonies who contributed much to the nationalist movement. Those Indians who chose to remain in the colonies, Cumpston asserts, became transformed individuals with unsurpassed opportunities, incentives to industry, and permanently released from irksome, oppressive social customs, caste prejudices and general social degradation.<sup>11</sup>

It cannot, of course, be denied that the system brought considerable material prosperity to the indentured emigrants and their

descendants. It is also true, as we shall see shortly, that many writers have not given this aspect due importance partly, one suspects, because it was the view propagated by the imperial and colonial governments themselves. But any generalisation about progress and improvement in the condition of overseas Indians across the board is hazardous for there were variations between the different colonies. In the West Indies and Mauritius, where indenture lasted for a longer period, it is likely that the suffering of the labourers was more prolonged than it was, say in Fiji, where it was in existence for a relatively shorter period of time. It should also be noted that the path of progress was not always easy or smooth. There were costs. Much suffering and hardship had to be endured and many tragedies encountered before the indentured migrants attained a modicum of economic prosperity. And finally, any comparison between the economic position of the indentured migrants in the colonies and that of their kinsmen and compatriots in India, must be received with considerable scepticism. In India, the peasants were a part of a living community, intricate kinship networks and other social-support systems which cushioned them against precipitous decline in fortune caused by man-made circumstances or natural calamities. In the colonies, the Indians were more on their own. Their relative loneliness caused by the absence of an established community which aggravated the sense of alienation and uprootedness, made less bearable any hardships that did occur. In short, the *costs* of indenture must be weighed against its undeniable *benefits* before any objective interpretation can be offered.

The second school of thought emphasises the contrary view of the indenture experience. By dwelling at length on the suffering and hardships they endured on the plantations and subsequently, it

suggests that the migrants themselves gained little from their transportation to the colonies.

This interpretation, too, has a long history, going back to the beginnings of indentured emigration. Throughout the nineteenth century, Indians as well as some colonial officials argued persistently that indenture was worse than slavery. A telling critique was made by J. Beaumont, a former Chief Justice of British Guiana, in his book, *The New Slavery - An Account of the Indian and Chinese Immigrants in British Guiana* published in 1871. He described the indenture system as 'a monstrous rotten system, rooted upon slavery, grown in its stale soil, emulating its worst abuses and only the more dangerous because it presented itself under false colours, whereas slavery [had] the brand of infamy written upon its forehead'.<sup>12</sup>

The criticism of indenture was heightened after the turn of the century, partly because of rising Indian nationalism and partly also because of the availability of first hand accounts of the treatment of Indian labourers in the colonies. Reports from Fiji provided strong ammunition to the critics in India. Why this should have been so is not entirely clear, though among the many reasons would have been the high mortality rates among the indentured labourers on the plantations in the 1890s, the perception of autocratic behaviour of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company and its apparent stranglehold on the Government of Fiji, and not least, the interest in the condition of the Fiji Indians of such influential personalities as C.F. Andrews and the Indian journalist, Benarsidas Chaturvedi.

Among the first to enquire into and write about social and moral problems of indenture at any length in the early years of this

century were Christian missionaries. In the case of Fiji, it was J.W. Burton, an Australian Methodist missionary resident in the colony. In his book, *The Fiji of Today*,<sup>13</sup> which first appeared in 1910, Burton severely condemned the indenture system, the distressing, cramped conditions in the plantation lines, the high death rate, the fragile family life and the general tension and violence among the immigrants. Excerpts from this book appeared in the influential and widely read periodical, the *Modern Review* of Calcutta in 1913, and immediately attracted wide attention.<sup>14</sup> Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the moderate Indian nationalist leader and the newly appointed leader of the Imperial Legislative Council, drew upon it to denounce the indenture system and called for its immediate abolition. The call went unheeded though the Government of India agreed to send a deputation to the various colonies to enquire into the condition of Indian labourers.<sup>15</sup>

C.F. Andrews, too, read the book which prompted him to take up the *cause* of the overseas Indians.<sup>16</sup> It was Andrews, perhaps more than any other single individual, whose genuine feeling for the *izzat* (honour) of India and deep Christian sympathy for the poor and the oppressed, contributed most to the demise of the indenture system. Of all his achievements — and there were many indeed — this by wide consensus was his greatest.<sup>17</sup> It is no wonder that the Fiji Indians in 1917 gave him the respectful and affectionate title of 'Deenabandhu', which means brother and friend of the humble.<sup>18</sup>

Fiji was 'very close to my heart', Andrews once told his friend Benarsidas Chaturvedi,<sup>19</sup> and he, with his colleague the Reverend W.W. Pearson, made the first of his three visits to the colony in 1916. Together they wrote the now famous and oft-quoted monograph, *Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji*.<sup>20</sup> The picture of plantation life which appears from this account as well as from Andrews' numerous articles

published mostly in the *Modern Review*, is decisively more critical than Burton's; it is a lugubrious one, full of tales of deception, drudgery and irredeemable moral degradation of the Indians. Andrews collected much of the evidence through tours in various parts of Fiji and through interviews with indentured labourers and government officials, and it was supplemented by his wide knowledge and experience of the areas in India from where the indentured migrants had come. He tended to accept such impressionistic evidence rather uncritically, and interpreted it in a way that forcefully supported his own view of indenture. Andrews estimated, for instance, that over 80 per cent of the indentured emigrants had come to Fiji under some form of deception. 'Allowing for every exaggeration on the part of the illiterates', he wrote, 'there can be no doubt that the frauds practised by recruiting agents have been immense'. The recruiter, he asserted, 'becoming a man of power carries the exercise of his authority far beyond the limits of recruiting. He becomes not seldom a blackmailer whom the villagers actually bribe to live in peace.'<sup>21</sup> Such assertions have been used to the fullest by critics of indenture. This study will allow that fraud and deception were present in the system of recruitment of Indian labourers, as they were, and still are, it might be added, in other systems of labour recruitment; but that the extent of it has probably been exaggerated. It will be shown also that economic conditions in North India had made migration for many dispossessed and uprooted peasants an attractive palliative to improve their lot, and that many were very keen to do so.

By the 1920s and 1930s, as the intense passion generated by the anti-indenture crusade began to subside, and as the indentured labourers began in increasingly large numbers to settle in the colonies,

Andrews was able to view overseas Indian 'problem' as it was then called, in a more balanced perspective. He regretted, for example, his role in encouraging repatriation of Indians from Fiji back to India, when he learnt in Calcutta of the harsh realities of social disapproval, even ostracism, deceit and selfish materialism that many of the labourers encountered in their homes, where they had in fact anticipated being received with open arms. Many of these repatriates, now old, emaciated and disillusioned, later beseeched the Fiji Emigration Agent to be sent back to the colony. But being too old or weak, they could not be taken back. They 'disappeared into the multitudes of India, never to appear on the emigration records again,'<sup>22</sup> living out their last days in penury and wretchedness. In *India and the Pacific*, published in 1937, Andrews wrote of his impressions of the Fiji Indians: 'I have been struck everywhere by the latent powers of recovery which these villagers of India possessed within themselves, and also by the way they have been able to make use of it [*sic*].'<sup>23</sup>

In the two decades after 1920, public as well as scholarly attention shifted from pre-occupation with the moral evils of the indenture system to the political disabilities suffered by Indians settled in the different colonies. Indian concern over this question was not something new, of course: Mahatma Gandhi's struggles on behalf of Indians in South Africa at the turn of the century had 'brought the plight of the Indians overseas to the Indian national opinion.'<sup>24</sup> But it was not until the late 1930s and the early 1940s, with the prospect of independence on the horizon, that scholarly or semi-scholarly expressions of the Indian concern were first published. N. Gangulee raised the problems of the political rights of overseas Indians in his *Indians in the Empire Overseas*, published in 1947.<sup>25</sup>



These were discussed at length in C. Kondapi's monumental and still useful *Indians Overseas, 1838 - 1949*, published in 1951.<sup>26</sup> No aspect of overseas Indian experience is left untouched, though the main emphasis is on social and political discrimination. Still, echoes of the slavery thesis are very clear. In the first two chapters, Kondapi discusses the origins and development of indenture and *kangani* systems and the processes of recruitment of Indian labour. Kondapi comments perfunctorily on a number of contributory 'push' factors — the decline of the Indian handicraft industry, the increase in land revenue and pauperisation of the peasantry, the famines and the general degrading realities of Indian life, especially among the lower classes; but his overall assessment is clear: the recruiters, 'with official connivance of the recruiting depots', 'entrapped poor Indians by dangling before them hopeful pictures of prospects in the colonies.'<sup>27</sup> Echoes of Andrews reverberate in this work as they do in Gangulee's, albeit at a higher level of sophistication, and stripped of shrill, overt moral or political polemics.

In the 1960s there was a further exposition of the slavery thesis in S.B. Mookherji's slim monograph, *The Indenture System in Mauritius, 1837-1955*.<sup>28</sup> Basing himself mainly on published official sources, Mookherji concluded that 'to all intents and purposes [indenture] was the old wine of slavery in a new bottle with a new label. It would be equally apt to describe the indenture system as slavery preserved in pickles.'<sup>29</sup> However, it was not until the 1970s that the slavery argument found its most cogent, some would say its most persuasive, exposition.

The flourishing of this interpretation in the 1970s does not seem to be as fortuitous as might appear at first sight. Perhaps the

opening up of the great debate in the 1960s on the nature of the experience of slavery in the United States may have exercised suggestive influence on this interpretation of indenture.<sup>30</sup> The occasional and sometimes direct references in the works of those who view indenture as slavery, to the revisionist slavery literature, tend to confirm our assertion.<sup>31</sup> But a more direct influence may also have been the deteriorating political situation of overseas Indian communities in various parts of the world. Many countries in Africa, the West Indies and South-East Asia with substantial numbers of Indians experienced, in the aftermath of their independence, the rise of militant indigenous nationalisms and polarised racial politics. The Indians were, consequently, shunted to the periphery, with Burma and Uganda going to the extreme of expelling them unceremoniously. Little heed was paid to the contribution of the Indians and their forefathers to the development of these countries from which everyone, including the indigenes themselves, had benefited; indeed the Indians were looked upon as symbols of exploitation and injustice. The latest crop of studies goes to great lengths to point out the 'contribution' of the migrants by emphasising the extreme suffering and privation they had had to endure at the hands of unsympathetic colonial masters and planters. Indeed, they suggest that the Indians themselves often gained little except humiliation and degradation from the experience.

The slavery thesis finds its most forceful and comprehensive treatment in Hugh Tinker's *A New System of Slavery*, published in 1974.<sup>32</sup> Tinker's basic point is explicit: Indian indenture had all the characteristics of slavery except one, but only one: whereas slavery was a permanent institution, indenture was a transient evil; but he

fails to recognise the scale and significance of the difference. He dwells at length on the deception practised by unscrupulous recruiters on the recruits for whom 'emigration was not accepted as a natural process';<sup>33</sup> the perfunctory supervision of emigration procedures in India by supposedly overworked and often callous officials; the distressing mortality rates on the voyages and on the colonial plantations; the helplessness of the labourers compounded by their ignorance and timidity and by the arbitrary, distant and frequently rudimentary hand of justice; the total degradation and brutalisation of the indentured labourers; and the frighteningly common occurrences of sickness and mortality among them. Tinker contends, furthermore, that the system of indentured emigration and the condition of the 'coolies' – he continues to use that abhorrent word despite noting its repugnant connotations – remained much the same throughout the entire period.

The slavery thesis has elicited much sympathetic response in many parts of the world. Maureen Tayal has suggested that Tinker's descriptions fit the Natal Indian situation aptly,<sup>34</sup> while for Fiji Ahmed Ali has contended that '*Girmit* was a dehumanising and brutalising experience', 'traumatic, destabilising and disorienting in nature', 'an inevitable purgatory towards earthly paradise, the fulfillment of their *dharma* and *karma* and the path to *moksha*.'<sup>35</sup> Indeed, he has gone further than others by asserting that indenture experience in many respects resembled a 'total institution', following Goffman's usage of the concept,<sup>36</sup> which in turn induced a condition of psychological infantilism – the 'boy syndrome' – in the indentured labourers.

A detailed critique of the slavery thesis cannot be presented here not only because of the limitations of space, but also because this

study is not concerned with the experience of the indentured labourers in the colonies, which is the main focus of the critics. But some of its main aspects may be commented upon briefly.

The contention about the essentially unchanging structure of the indentured emigration process is not borne out by the evidence presented in this study (see Chapter 3). It is true that active government control of the labour traffic was not as pervasive or effective as it could have been, and it is also possible to be critical of the Government of India's policy of non-intervention in the transaction between indentured emigrants and the colonial governments. But throughout the entire period of indentured emigration, pressures were brought to bear upon the Government of India, most especially by the findings of various Royal Commissions, to enact protective legislation to safeguard the interest and welfare of its citizens. This it did in various stages throughout the nineteenth century, as we shall see. Legislative enactments did not, of course, completely eradicate all the evils in the system but they did go a long way to alleviate the suffering of the labourers. Though it should not be carried too far, the contrast with Pacific, Atlantic and Chinese labour traffic is instructive for it does show that indentured emigration, by the standard of the times, was generally better regulated and supervised than the others.

It is true that there were many callous and overworked bureaucrats who paid little heed to the welfare of the migrants in India and in the colonies, and there is ample record of this on the files. But there were, as we shall see, many obstructionist officials who were unfavourably disposed to the indenture system and who frequently frustrated the efforts of the recruiting agents, so much so

that official intervention from the highest level was sometimes necessary if the emigration was to continue. Perhaps the 'system' did not operate as efficiently or as effectively as it should or could have done, but it worked.

The view that migration is unnatural to the Hindu tradition is a widely held but highly debatable one. Particular attention seems to be paid here to the interdict on crossing the *kala pani* (dark waters), an act which imperilled the Hindu soul and invited severe divine retribution. We shall argue that this notion is exaggerated and that, in any case, it was not intended to apply to that strata of Hindu society which furnished the largest number of emigrants. We shall also show that within India itself, considerable spatial mobility was under way and hence emigration could not have been an entirely unknown or unnatural phenomenon (Chapter 5).

The assertion that the plantation imposed a total way of existence upon the lives of the indentured labourers seems tenuous and any generalisation is hazardous. It may be valid for the early years of indentured emigration but it does not adequately or accurately capture the experience of indenture in the different colonies. In Fiji, after five years of indenture, most emigrants moved out of the plantations and initially with some assistance from government, set up independent homesteads. Those who remained occupationally dependent upon the Colonial Sugar Refining Company did so as a temporary expedient, until a better alternative presented itself. Furthermore, despite the pervasive and socially and culturally destructive influence of the plantations, the indentured labourers were able to keep intact the central tenets of their values which, as the anthropological studies show, were in later years given fuller institutional expression.

Complete isolation between the indentured labourers on the plantations and their 'free' counterparts did not always occur. Some indentured labourers still alive recollect contacts between the two groups of Indians, and even with the Fijians.<sup>37</sup> The frequency of the contact depended upon the location of the plantations, the economic and social needs of the indentured labourers and in some cases also upon the permission of the overseer.

All this, of course, was in marked contrast to the experience of slavery where complete and invariably irreversible cultural transformation of the slaves was a universal phenomenon. This was accelerated by the breakdown in most cases of all major social institutions — the family, marriage, religion, social morality, and so on.<sup>38</sup> In the process of adapting to the new environment, the slaves evinced a strong desire to imbibe the values of Western civilisation and indeed often looked upon the new arrivals from Africa in contemptuous condescension.<sup>39</sup> This, as the Christian missionaries found out much to their dismay, never really happened in the case of overseas Indians.

And finally, it has to be noted that there were fundamental differences in the legal definitions of the slaves and the indentured labourers. The slaves did not have legal rights of personality, and were universally defined in terms of the category of property.<sup>40</sup> The master frequently not only had wide ranging police and disciplinary powers over his slaves, but also, <sup>exercised control</sup> over their marriage and family. On the other hand, the legal personality and the freedom of the indentured labourer were enshrined in the conventions between the Government of India and colonial governments, and recognised in the contract which the emigrants signed in India. Transgressions of these were a crime and thus

punishable in the courts of law. In most colonies, it can safely be said, violations of the labourers' rights did occur and went undetected or were punished lightly; but these were small in magnitude compared to what happened in slavery. The indentured labourer had recourse to law; the slave's life depended on the pleasure of his master.

All systems of labour for the benefit of others have always had an element of coercion and compulsion in them — whether it is the pain of physical punishment, the fear of starvation, or the pressures of social and political ideology. In this respect slavery and indenture, as systems of compulsory labour, had some common characteristics; but as we have suggested, contrasts were often more marked. To emphasise similarities alone, as Tinker and others of his school have done, is to emphasise superficial and often misleading correlations at the expense of quite profound contrasts. In a very real sense, it is to deny the uniqueness and specificity of events and, in the ultimate analysis, of history itself.

The third interpretation of Indian indenture takes a middle ground between the two schools of thought discussed above. It, too, has a long history as any objective reading of the documentary evidence would show. In scholarly literature, it found one of its earliest expressions in K. Hazareesingh's *A History of Indians in Mauritius* and in Dwarka Nath's *A History of Indians in British Guiana*, both works being published in the early 1950s.<sup>41</sup> Much new and valuable information is presented in both these studies, and both the writers are fully aware of the sordid conditions of indenture in the two colonies. But their argument is tempered by the need, as Hazareesingh

put it, to see historical reality 'in the light of the spirit of the times'.<sup>42</sup>

Probably the best example of a balanced interpretation of Indian indenture is K.L. Gillion's study, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, published in 1962.<sup>43</sup> Gillion viewed indentured not as an issue in Indian nationalist politics, as Andrews had done, nor as a barometer to gauge India's political image, as Kondapi or Ganguli had done, nor, indeed, as a purely troublesome issue in imperial relations, which is what Cumpston had tended to do. Rather, he attempted to delineate the structure and meaning of the indenture system in a scholarly way, and not least from the perspective of the indentured labourer himself. His book provides a composite and comprehensive account of the causes and consequences of introducing 60,000 Indian migrants into Fiji, their origins in India, life on the plantations in Fiji, and subsequent settlement and repatriation. It discusses, too, the setting up of the indenture system, its supervision and administration in India and in Fiji, and its eventual abolition in 1917. Based on a wide variety of sources, the book avoids polemics or any rigid moral, political or ideological direction. Gillion dwells at length on the working and living conditions in the Colonial Sugar Refining Company lines, long hours of monotonous work, fragility of social and family life among the migrants and concludes: 'It was not without reason that the Indians called their lives on the plantations in Fiji *narak*, which means hell.'<sup>44</sup> Material improvements in the lives of the indentured labourers and their descendants had indeed taken place, and many had forever escaped the life of drudgery and privation in India, Gillion notes. But there were costs also. Perhaps most importantly, he suggests, the migrants had lost the warmth of belonging without, at least in their own lifetime,



obtaining acceptance and recognition in their new home.

Despite its comprehensive research, however, there are in *Fiji's Indian Migrants* several lacunae and many important issues that merit greater attention. These relate more especially to the background of the migrants in India. They are taken up in this study, which covers some of the same ground as Gillion's work, but asks different questions and employs different sources and methods.

Judith Weller's study, *East Indian indenture in Trinidad*,<sup>45</sup> attempts to do, less successfully, what Gillion did for Fiji. It provides a wealth of information as well as some insightful analysis but does not relate the Trinidad experience to other wider aspects of indentured emigration. Essentially, it remains an institutional rather than a detailed social analysis of indenture. John Perry's published doctoral thesis, *A History of the East Indian Indentured Plantation Worker in Trinidad, 1845-1947*,<sup>46</sup> covers much the same ground as Weller's study but brings forth no new insights. It is less satisfactory both in terms of comprehensiveness of research and methodological approach to the subject, being based entirely on easily accessible published sources and concerned with description rather than analysis.

It is interesting to note that anthropological studies of overseas Indians, many of which were published in the 1960s, provide a great deal of support to the arguments of the third school.<sup>47</sup> In keeping with the tradition of the discipline, these studies use many different approaches and concentrate on different aspects of overseas Indian social structure. However, if one may be allowed a degree of oversimplification, they emphasise two general themes which are relevant for the historian of overseas Indians: fragmentation and

reconstitution. They show how certain social support systems which had sustained the migrants in India — joint family life, corporate village community, caste brotherhood — all gradually lost their meaning and relevance in the process of adaptation to the new environment. But they also clearly show that the break with the Indian past was not precipitous, for some of the above institutions did survive, in however truncated and fragile a form, the adverse social conditions of the voyage and the plantations. Alongside fragmentation also took place the process of reconstitution, when new loyalties and voluntary associations emerged, based on wider regional ties and common experiences of emigration and indenture. But there were other factors also. Among these may be mentioned the simultaneous arrivals of often literate, free migrants — clerks, interpreters, religious leaders and traders — whose ties with India were close and intimate; the persistence of family structures on the plantations; and the calculated non-interference of colonial governments (at least in the case of Fiji) in the affairs of Indian migrants once they had served their purpose.

This brief discussion of the 'state of the art' in overseas Indian historiography, through a critical appraisal of the representative literature, has highlighted several changing themes and moral biases in the writings of the last three-quarters of a century or so. We have seen that three general interpretations of the nature of Indian indenture experience have been offered: the first taking a favourable view, the second arguing that Indian indenture was, essentially, a new

system of slavery, and the third presenting a balanced picture. Much of this debate has been carried on at the 'macro' level. What we have so far, if I may make an analogy with modern Indian historiography, are detailed 'national' portraits of the indenture experience; we have not yet gone to the provincial or district level in our analysis. Also missing are systematic studies of aspects of themes of indenture in one or several colonies although here anthropologists have made some notable strides. It should be noted too, that in the main, most of the studies discussed above have dealt with the experience of the labourers in the colonies, providing little discussion of the background and origins of the indentured labourers in India. And finally, with very few exceptions, historians of overseas Indians have tended to 'chew over and over again the cud'<sup>48</sup> of Royal Commissions, private papers, newspaper accounts and other documentary sources, though putting different interpretations upon them.

In view of the foregoing, it is fairly certain that further preoccupation with general moral or ideological questions, with the rights and wrongs of indenture, will bring us diminishing returns and will lead us, instead, into an endless cycle. With the 'national' portraits of the indenture experience in several countries in hand, it is time now to take the analysis to a deeper level by asking new questions and probing new sources which will, among other things, provide the basis for evaluating the interpretations that have been offered so far.

This study is a small attempt to move in this direction. Its purpose is to delineate the background of the indentured emigrants in India. Our central concern is to understand who the emigrants were,

what social and economic strata and regions of the subcontinent they came from, the reasons for their emigration, the processes of recruitment and registration; in short, the structural dynamics of indentured emigration from India. These questions have, by and large, occupied the periphery of most studies of Indian indenture; yet it is certain that without a fuller understanding of them, any objective appraisal of the indenture system cannot be made.

They are accordingly discussed in this study with special reference to Fiji. The period covered is from 1879 to 1916, the two dates representing the commencement and the end of indentured emigration to that country. The choice of Fiji is a valid one for many reasons, besides the personal interest of the present writer who is from Fiji and is himself a legacy of indentured emigration. Perhaps most important of all, the major sources are easily available. The limited time period reduces the subject to manageable proportions and enables us to get a comprehensive picture of the whole story. The two terminal dates have significance beyond Fiji: the latter marks the end of indentured emigration to all the countries, while the former corresponds broadly with the beginning of the second phase of indentured emigration. This, together with the fact that the type of people who went to Fiji were essentially the same as those who went to other colonies, especially in the West Indies, enables us to treat this work on Indian emigration to Fiji as a case study of the second phase.

In investigating the origins and background of the indentured emigrants, one immediately comes up against the problem of sources. One document which throws valuable light on the subject, and one that has been used extensively by many scholars, is the Protector of Emigrant's *Annual Report on Emigration from the Port of Calcutta* [Madras]

to *British and Foreign Colonies* (hereafter *PR*). It throws considerable light on the legal and administrative aspects of the indenture system in India, as well as on the regional/district and social origins of the emigrants. An advantage of this source is that it enables one to get a synoptic picture of indentured emigration to all the colonies. But there are problems. Although the *PRs* are available in several places, including the colonies where they were sent in the dispatches of the Emigration Agents based in India, a full set of them at any one place is difficult to come by. Hence they can, at best, provide only snapshot pictures of a very complex process. But there is yet a more serious problem. Because of the demands of economy and the interest of the administrative system, some crucial pieces of information were presented in a processed, summarised form. This is particularly the case with the data on the social and caste origins of the emigrants. Six categories were used in the *PRs*: Brahmans and high castes, Agriculturalists, Artisans, Low castes, Musalmans, and Christians. Nothing is said about which castes or groups were included in the different categories, or about the basis of the categorisation. Where, for example, did the tribals fit in? But this data, such as it is, is not *always* available in the *PRs*, especially after the turn of the century. The 1914 *PR*, for example, forced by government directive towards economy in reporting, makes no reference to the social composition of the emigrants. There are other limitations also. Data on ~~female~~ emigrants is presented in a confusing way, while nothing at all is said about family migration. Yet these are questions of the utmost significance in any analysis of the origins and background of the indentured emigrants. In this study, therefore, I have used the *PRs* only for illustrative and comparative purposes.

The document which contains the most comprehensive data on the social and regional origins of the indentured emigrants, and one which forms the core of this study, is the Emigration Pass, a copy as an example of which is appended to this chapter. It contains full information about the personal and social characteristics of each emigrant (including his unindentured children) who embarked for Fiji from Calcutta: their depot numbers, name, caste, father's name, age, district of origin and registration, town and village, occupation, name of next-of-kin, marital status, and record of any bodily marks for personal identification. It also gives the name of the ship on which the emigrant travelled to Fiji and the emigrant's ship number, besides the certification of the Surgeon Superintendent, the Depot Surgeon, the Protector of Emigrants and the Fiji Emigration Agent at Calcutta of the emigrant's mental and physical fitness for manual labour and of his 'willingness to proceed to work for hire'. The Passes were filled out in Calcutta (or Madras) on the basis of the Protector's or his deputy's interview with the emigrants. The information given by them could always be checked against the information contained in the huge Emigration Registers filled out in the districts of registration, duplicate copies of which were sent to the port of embarkation for the Protector's scrutiny. These Registers were kept in India while the Passes were sent to the colonies in the custody of the master of the vessel. On the arrival of the ship, these were handed over to the local authorities at the depots, who once again interviewed the migrants and checked their accounts against the information given in the Passes. Relevant information about the migrants was entered into the *General Register of Immigrants* and various *Plantation Registers* to keep track of the migrants' progress and whereabouts in the colony. Then the

Passes were put together alphabetically, year by year, and in the case of Fiji, deposited with the Department of Labour which had the responsibility of dealing with the migrants. Later, with the end of indenture, they were deposited with the National Archives of Fiji where the full set of 60,965 of the original Passes are still available. The National Library of Australia in Canberra has a full set on microfilm and it was these that became the basis for my research.

To investigate the demographic characteristic of the North Indian indentured emigrants, each of their 45,439 Passes were examined. All important data, including the year of migration, depot number, caste, sex, age, marital status, districts of origin and registration, and occupation were put on to the computer code sheet. Some variables such as age, year and depot number required no coding, for the numbers were transferred straight to the code sheet. A depot number was an identification number given to the emigrant in the depot of embarkation. Its importance lies in the fact that it enables us to find out if the person was accompanied by anyone. Thus if Emigrant X was accompanied by his brother Emigrant Y, it would be stated in the column 'Name of Next-of-Kin': Emigrant Y, brother, depot number Z1. A similar statement would be found in the Pass of Emigrant Y. Or if Emigrant H was the husband of Emigrant W, it would be stated in the column 'If Married, to Whom': husband of Emigrant W, depot number Z2. And so on. Depot numbers thus enable us to get a picture of family or group migration.

In some cases where coding was required, it was a relatively uncomplicated procedure. In the case of sex, for instance, Males were designated 1, Females 2. To determine Marital Status, 'Single', that is unaccompanied emigrant, was denoted 1, Married 2, Widow 3, Unkown 0.

To determine the structure of family relations in the emigrating population, Husband was denoted 1, Wife 2, Son 3, Daughter 4, Mother 5, Father 6, and so on. Coding was also relatively simple in the case of occupation where there were a surprisingly small number of variables. However, in the case of such variables as Caste, coding, but more especially remembering the codes at the time of transcribing the data from the microfilm to the computer code sheet, was, to say the least, a very tedious, mind-numbing exercise. A quick perusal of the Emigration Passes before I began coding showed that the emigration officials did not use the general categories in the *PRs*, but precise names of the castes and sub-castes of the emigrants. These, as I was later to find out, numbered over two hundred and sixty. The names of all the important castes found in the United Provinces were taken from William Crooke's four volumes, *Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh*,<sup>49</sup> and each of them was given a code. But even Crooke's encyclopaedic account did not include the names of all the castes found in the UP as entries in the Emigration Passes frequently showed. The names of these castes were added to the list and coded sequentially.

The question that any sceptical reader is going to ask is: how reliable is the data on caste? Were there not deliberate falsifications on the part of the high caste emigrants (such as Brahmans) not favourably received in the colonies but who wanted to emigrate and, therefore, changed their caste names? There is no empirical evidence to sustain such scepticism. There are no clues on the Emigration Passes themselves — such as changes in caste names, comments by officials — which might suggest falsification. I am aware of only one case where there was deliberate mixing up of caste data: in the case



of a Pathan from Sialkot who, because Pathans were not encouraged to emigrate to Fiji, was registered as a Thakur from Meerut. But he was caught upon landing in Fiji when officials found discrepancy between his own account and data on his Pass. The error was rectified. The suggestion that high castes gave wrong social data about themselves is interesting, for if it were true, it would mean that more high castes migrated than is normally believed. In point of fact, however, these castes (including Brahmans) had little reason to falsify their caste data for they, like the others, were also engaged in cultivation. One frequent indicator of manual labour was thorns on the palms, and in this the cultivating Brahmans were no different from the rest of the emigrants. As for the middling and lower castes, there is no apparent reason to believe that they would deliberately falsify their caste data. But even if, for the sake of argument, there were some inaccuracies, this does not alter the fundamental picture presented in this study, given the scale of the data used in the analysis.

Regarding the districts of origin and registration, all the important emigration districts of the UP, Bihar and the Central Provinces were noted from the *PRs* and *Census Reports* and coded. Those found in the Passes but not in these sources, were added and coded sequentially. No attempt was made at this stage to organise the data on the districts of origin into any broad categories even though it was clear that some 'districts' were really large centres or estates within certain districts. Thus, Sahebganj, although a part of Gaya district in Bihar, was coded and processed separately, as were Arrah (Shahabad), Chapra (Saran), and other such places.

All this data was then punched from the computer code sheets on to a magnetic tape by the Data Processing Unit at the ANU. It was then checked, edited and processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).<sup>50</sup> The Package adequately catered for the range of the data at hand and for the questions that needed to be answered, and this obviated the need to write a separate programme altogether. The problem of excessive mathematisation which bedevils so many quantitative studies at present has been avoided here. Our interest, as the Appendices to this study will show, was confined to analysing very basic relations between the important variables, and this could adequately be done in two, three and sometimes four-way tables. No need was felt for sophisticated algebraic formulae or for recondite models to extract the maximum amount of data from the Emigration Passes.

The data from the analysis of the Emigration Passes gives us a very detailed picture of the structure and dynamics of the background of indentured emigration from North India; a picture which, as this study will attempt to demonstrate, goes against so many assumptions and assertions that have been made about the indentured emigrants.

But it should be added that my enthusiasm for the value of computerised data is tempered by my awareness of its limitations. We now know a great deal about who emigrated, when and from where — but very little about why all this happened. In other words, quantification has helped us to answer the 'how' (structural) questions of history, but not the 'why' (causal) questions. To understand the latter, we have had to turn to conventional published and unpublished sources as well as to oral and impressionistic evidence.

Yet the task of explanation has not always been easy for the questions that we have set ourselves the task of answering here, are not, in most cases, discussed in the sources. The subject of emigration, either internal or external, does not receive much attention at all in the *Settlement Reports* which are, by far, the most comprehensive documents on agrarian history of India. Hence it becomes difficult to talk with any certainty about the role and perception of emigration in the districts from where the emigrants came. The motives for emigration, too, have to be deduced from the objective data on the economic conditions for there are very few studies or sources which help us to establish precisely the actual, direct causal connection between the reason for and the act of emigration. In the case of females or families where there is little or no data on the causes of emigration, we have had to turn to folksongs to try and understand why they may have left India. The explanations offered here are far from satisfactory, but these should be viewed against the limitations of data.

### A Note on the Appendices

One of the strongest criticisms against quantitative history is that much of it is usually beyond the reach and comprehension of most conventional historians as well as of the wider interested public. The situation is exacerbated if, as usually happens, the raw and processed data on which the conclusions are based, are placed on tapes in quite inaccessible data banks. Many sceptical historians are thus unable to check or verify the accuracy and validity of the more controversial assertions. To meet this criticism, I have presented in Volume II of this study the processed data upon which I have based my conclusions. The computer code sheets — 1818 pages — which contain the raw, coded data have not been presented, for this would have made this thesis more bulky than it already is, without serving much useful purpose. In the footnotes to the various chapters, I have clearly indicated where I have drawn on the data in the Appendices. For easy reference, the Appendix and page numbers are indicated. Where two or three Appendices were used to substantiate a single point or to arrive at a particular figure, I have indicated in the footnotes the steps that were followed.

Two final points should be made about the Appendices. It will be seen that at the end of many Tables, a number of statistical correlations (tests) have been given. They are a part of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, but they are not relevant for our study and should, therefore, be ignored. The types of questions we have attempted to answer do not warrant the use of detailed statistical analysis. It will also be found that, in the case of a number of variables, the total figures vary depending on the context in which they are presented. This

is because in some Emigration Passes, the full range of data was not given. In one Pass, for instance, the District of Registration may not have been indicated while in another the Caste of the emigrant may have been illegible and hence not coded. But the discrepancies are insignificant.

#### A Note on Terminology

Anyone who writes on India has to grapple with difficult problems of terminology and spelling as usage varies over time and from place to place. While coding the Emigration Passes, I followed the forms prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the result that some archaic names were printed in the computer printouts. These have been corrected in the Appendices. Thus Cawnpore reads Kanpur, Muttra reads Mathura and Alipore has been changed to Alipur. But some old names such as Benares, Lucknow and Hoogly have been retained here in preference to their modern forms Varanasi, Lakhnau and Hugli. This is a matter of choice as these old and new forms are used simultaneously in India today. I hope the reader will be tolerant of any inconsistencies that may remain.

NOTES

- 1 Quoted in I.M. Cumpston, *Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834-1854*, (London, 1953), p.174.
- 2 For a succinct survey of literature, see S. Shigematsu, 'Overseas Indians - Bibliography of Books and Articles, 1873-1971', *Asian Studies*, vol.XXI, no.4 (1975), pp.25-49. See also the bibliographies of the books cited below. In the discussion that follows, I do not include studies of Indian communities in South-East Asia. As we shall see later in this study, the nature of Indian emigration to South-East Asia was different from that to the 'sugar colonies'.
- 3 See below. For a brief anthropological perspective on overseas Indian communities, see Chandra Jayawardena, 'Migration and Social Change: A Survey of Indian Communities Overseas', *Geographical Review*, vol.LVIII, no.3 (1968), pp.426-49.
- 4 *PP* Cmd. 5192 (1910), p.14.
- 5 Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in British Guiana* (London, 1950), p.156-7.
- 6 I.M. Cumpston, *Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834-1854* (London, 1953).
- 7 *Ibid.*, p.174.
- 8 George R. Mellor, *British Imperial Trusteeship, 1783-1850* (London, 1951), p.223.
- 9 Cumpston, *Indians Overseas*, p.179.
- 10 I owe these two names to Dr Stephen Henningham of Monash University.
- 11 See I.M. Cumpston, 'A Survey of Indian Emigration to British Tropical Colonies to 1910', *Population Studies*, vol.X, Part II (1956-57), pp.158-65.

- 12 Quoted in Kernial Singh Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya. Some Aspects of Their Immigration and Settlement (1786-1957)* (Cambridge, 1969), p.76. See also Usha Mahajani, 'Slavery, Indian Labour and British Colonialism: A Review Article', *Pacific Affairs*, vol.L, no.2 (Summer, 1977), pp.263-71. For an Indian characterisation of indenture as slavery, see Dwarka Nath Ganguli, *Slavery in British Dominion* (Calcutta, 1972). This book contains many of Ganguli's articles published in *The Bengali* in the 1870s. Ganguli's articles were selected for publication by Prof K.L. Chattopadhyay.
- 13 J.W. Burton, *The Fiji of Today* (London, 1910). See also Florence E. Garnham, *A Report on the Social and Moral Conditions of Indians in Fiji* (Sydney, 1918).
- 14 K.L. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants. A History to the end of Indenture in 1920* (Melbourne, rptd. 1973), p.172.
- 15 See Mr James McNeill, I.C.S., and Mr Chimman Lal, *Report to the Government of India on the Conditions of Indian Immigrants in Four British Colonies and Surinam*, Cmd. 7744 -5 (1914).
- 16 Andrews wrote to Burton, 'I do feel very strongly indeed that your book was the pioneer and did the pioneer work, and it is due to the book perhaps more than to any other single cause in the past that the whole indenture system was shown up in its proper light'. Quoted in Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, p.178.
- 17 This is endorsed by his biographer. See Majorie Sykes (ed.) *C.F. Andrews: Representative Writings* (New Delhi, 1973).
- 18 *Ibid.*, p.14.
- 19 Interview with Mr Benarsidas Chaturvedi, Firozabad District, Agra, February, 1979.
- 20 C.F. Andrews and W.W. Pearson, *Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji: An Independent Enquiry* (Perth, 1918).

- 21 Ibid., p.6.
- 22 Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, p.195.
- 23 C.F. Andrews, *India and the Pacific* (London, 1937), p.18.
- 24 Hugh Tinker, *Separate and Unequal. India and the Indians in the British Commonwealth, 1920-1950* (St. Lucia, 1976), p.23.
- 25 N. Gangulee, *Indians in the Empire Overseas: A Survey* (London, 1947).
- 26 C. Kondapi, *Indians Overseas, 1838-1949* (New Delhi, 1951).
- 27 Ibid., p.5.
- 28 S.B. Mookherji, *The Indenture System in Mauritius, 1837-1915* (Calcutta, 1962).
- 29 Ibid., p.65.
- 30 There is a vast literature on this. For a start, see Laurer Foner and Eugene D. Genovese (eds.), *Slavery in the New World: A Reader in Comparative History* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1969), and Ann J. Lane (ed.), *The Debate Over Slavery: Stanley Elkins and His Critics* (Urbana, 1971).
- 31 See, for example, Ahmed Ali (ed.), *Girmit: Indenture Experience in Fiji* (Suva, 1979).
- 32 Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery. The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920* (London, 1974).
- 33 Ibid., p.118.
- 34 Maureen Tayal, 'Indian Indentured Labour in Natal, 1890-1911', *IESHR*, vol.XIV, no.4 (1977), pp.519-47.



- 35 Ali, *op.cit.*, p.xxvii.
- 36 Erving Goffman, *Asylums* (Harmondsworth, 1968).
- 37 See the interviews with the indentured labourers in Ali, *Girmit*, *op.cit.*
- 38 See Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery* (London, 1967), p.178 ff.
- 39 See generally Kenneth Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution. Slavery in the Ante-bellum South* (New York, 1963).
- 40 *Ibid.*, p.197.
- 41 K. Hazareesingh, *A History of Indians in Mauritius* (Port Louis, 1950, 2nd edn, London, 1975); Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in British Guiana* (London, 1950).
- 42 Hazareesingh, *ibid.*, p.ix (of the 1975 edition).
- 43 Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants. A History to the end of Indenture in 1920* (Melbourne, 1962, rpt.1973).
- 44 *Ibid.*, p.129.
- 45 Judith Weller, *The East Indian Indenture in Trinidad* (Rio Piedras, 1968).
- 46 J. Perry, *A History of the East Indian Indentured Plantation Worker in Trinidad, 1845-1917* (Ann Arbor, 1969); originally a University of Louisiana Ph.D. thesis, Perry's study was published by University Microfilms.
- 47 See among others, Hilda Kuper, *Indian People in Natal* (Cape Town, 1960); Arthur and Juanita Niehoff, *East Indians in the West Indies* (Milwaukee, 1960); Morton Klass, *East Indians in Trinidad. A Study in Cultural Persistence* (New York, 1961); Adrian C. Mayer, *Peasants in the Pacific. A Study of Fiji Indian Rural Society*

(Berkeley, 1961); Burton Benedict, *Indians in a Plural Society. A Report on Mauritius* (London, 1961). For further references, see Jayawardena, 'Migration and Social Change'.

- 48 This is O.H.K. Spate's phrase. See O.H.K. Spate and A.T.A. Learmonth, *India and Pakistan. A General and Regional Geography* (London, 3rd edn, 1967), p.vii.
- 49 William Crooke, *Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh* (Calcutta, 1896), 4 vols.
- 50 This Package, developed by the University of Pittsburgh, is widely used by social scientists.

36455

COLONIAL EMIGRATION FORM No. 44.

**MAN'S**

HEALTH CLASS.

**EMIGRATION PASS.**

DEPÔT No. 133

For Ship S.S. "SANGOLA" PROCEEDING TO FIJI.

No. 97

Fiji Government Emigration Agency,  
21, GARDEN REACH,

CALCUTTA, the \_\_\_\_\_ 190 .

PARTICULARS OF REGISTRATION, { Place, Trinidad  
Date, 13. 1. 08  
No. in Register, 337

NAME, Diaugrey

Father's Name, Ghiron

Age, 26

Caste, Kori

Name of Next-of-kin, Duber, Brother

If married, name of Wife, \_\_\_\_\_

District, Bahraich

Thana, Jayapur

Village or Town & Mahalla, Pahelwari

Bodily Marks, Scar on belly

Occupation in India, Cult

Height, 5 Feet 8 1/2 Inches.

CERTIFIED that we have examined and passed the above-named Man as fit to emigrate; that he is free from all bodily and mental disease; and that he has been vaccinated since engaging to emigrate.

DATED

The \_\_\_\_\_ 190 .

*[Signature]*  
M.D., F.R.C.P.,  
LIEUT.-COLONEL, I.M.S.  
Depôt Surgeon.

Surgeon Superintendent

CERTIFIED that the Man above described has appeared before me and has been engaged by me on behalf of the Government of FIJI as willing to proceed to that country to work for hire; and that I have explained to him all matters concerning his engagement and duties. This has also been done at the time of registration by the Registering Officer appointed by the Indian Government.

DATED

The 25 / / 1908.

*[Signature]*  
Offg. Government Emigration Agent for FIJI

PERMITTED to proceed as in a fit state of health to undertake the voyage to FIJI.

DATED

The FEB 18 190 .

*[Signature]*  
Protector of Emigrants.

DEPT.					CUST.													PROGRAMMER													DATE		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34
1	3	6	4	4	0					0	8	1	0	1	6	9	1	1	9		2	4	2	0	0								
2	3	6	4	4	1					0	8	1	3	2	4	8	1	2	0			4	2	0	0								
3	3	6	4	4	2	1	5	2	1	0	8	1	3	2	3	6	1	2	9		1	4	2	2	1		1	5	2	2	1		
4	3	6	4	4	3					0	8	1	9	2	4	8	1	2	0		1	9	2	0	0								
5	3	6	4	4	4					0	8	1	3	2	3	6	1	2	2			8	2	0	0								
6	3	6	4	4	5					0	8	1	0		9	1	2	1			2	6	2	0	0								
7	3	6	4	4	6					0	8	1	9	1	7	5	1	2	5			8	5	2	0	0							
8	3	6	4	4	7					0	8	1	3	1	5	7	1	2	4			1	3	2	0	0							
9	3	6	4	4	8					0	8	5	7	2	5	1	1	2	4			2	1	2	0	0							
10	3	6	4	4	9					0	8	1	3		7	1	1	1	7			1	3	2	0	0							
11	3	6	4	5	0					0	8		5		7	4	1	1	9				5	2	0	0							
12	3	6	4	5	1					0	8	1	9	1	0	2	1	2	4				8	2	0	0							
13	3	6	4	5	2					0	8	1	3		7	4	1	1	7				5	2	0	0							
14	3	6	4	5	3					0	8	1	3	2	4	8	1	1	9			1	4	2	0	0							
15	3	6	4	5	4					0	8	1	4	1	6	9	1	2	0			1	4	2	0	0							
16	3	6	4	5	5					0	8	1	3	1	6	9	1	2	6				9	2	0	0							
17	3	6	4	5	6					0	8	2	8	2	5	1	1	2	2				7	2	0	0							
18	3	6	4	5	7					0	8		1	1	3	0	1	2	1				2	0	2	0	0						
19	3	6	4	5	8					0	8	1	3		7	4	1	2	1				5	2	0	0							
20	3	6	4	5	9					0	8	1	0	2	4	8	1	3	0				1	0	2	0	0						
21	3	6	4	6	0	6	2	7		0	8	1	8	2	4	8	1	2	5			1	0	2	2	1		6	2	8	1		
22	3	6	4	6	1					0	8	5	3	1	7	3	1	2	5				3	5	2	0	0						
23	3	6	4	6	2					0	8	1	3	1	7	5	1	2	5				8	2	0	0							
24	3	6	4	6	3					0	8	1	0	1	6	9	1	2	2				5	2	0	0							
25	3	6	4	6	4					0	8	1	4	1	6	9	1	2	1				9	2	0	0							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34

CODE SHEET

Columns:

- 1- 5 Serial number (3 6 4 5 5)
- 6-10 Depot number (left out)
- 11-12 Year (1908)
- 13-14 District of registration  
(13 = Fyzabad)
- 15-17 Caste (169 = Kori)
- 18 Sex (1 = male)
- 19-21 Age (26 yrs)
- 22-24 District of origin  
(9 = Bahraich)
- 25 Occupation (2 = Agriculturalist)
- 26 Marital status (0 = not known)
- 27 If accompanied (0 = no)

## CHAPTER 2

## FIJI AND THE INTRODUCTION OF INDIAN LABOUR

Although the first batch of Indian indentured labourers arrived in Fiji in 1879, the need for Indian labour to develop the commercial resources of the islands had been recognised much earlier. In 1861, Commodore Seymour, who had been sent to Fiji to assist W.T. Pritchard the British Consul, to establish peace between warring Fijians and Tongans, wrote: 'It is out of the question to expect native labour, and consequently we must look to the same source that supplies Demerara [present day Guyana] to furnish the requisite colonists for Fiji should their protectorate be accepted by Great Britain.'<sup>1</sup>

In 1867, F. and W. Hennings, European planters based in Levuka, made enquiries about Indian labour to Pritchard, but were told that their proposition was not yet practicable, and that Britain would not accede to their request.<sup>2</sup> Three years later, Nathaniel Chalmers, a cotton planter in Fiji, directly approached the Government of India to permit him to import Indian orphans and victims of famines, but his proposals went unheeded.<sup>3</sup> The Indian Emigration Act did not allow the emigration of Indian citizens except under written agreements with recognised governments.<sup>4</sup> On 14 September 1872, J.B. Thurston, then the Minister for Foreign Relations in the Cakobau government, interceded on behalf of the interested planters, and once again raised the question of Indian emigration to Fiji with the Government of India, noting that now 'there was a fully constituted

government of European residents and native chiefs' which had *de facto* recognition of France, the United States and Great Britain itself. The Fijian people, he noted, had 'lately emerged from barbarism' and were evincing a 'remarkably cordial' attitude to all foreigners, including Pacific Island labourers, thereby suggesting the preclusion of any ill-feeling or hostility on their part. If emigration was allowed, Thurston gave assurances that his government would supervise the treatment, payment and return of the labourers to India at the conclusion of their contract. Finally, he sent along with his letter a copy of immigration ordinances already in force in Fiji, and suggested that these could be modified and extended to govern Indian migration as well.<sup>5</sup>

The reception of this proposal in India was pointedly negative. A.O. Hume, the Secretary to the Government of India, firmly declined the proposal at 'the present time', and advised the Secretary of State in London, should he be inclined to entertain the proposals because of pressures of powerful cotton interests in Britain, to disregard any further overtures. The Secretary fully concurred with the advice.<sup>6</sup> J. Geoghegan, perhaps the most experienced and respected official on matters of migration in India, minuted that the 'Kakobau Rex' was 'too recent and too strange' an experiment in government for India to allow the emigration of its citizens to Fiji.<sup>7</sup> The sensational and widely publicised cases of kidnapping and other atrocities in labour trade in the South Pacific merely served to harden the negative attitudes of those opposed to the extension of Indian indentured emigration.

Although formally unstated, it was apparent that the pre-condition of Indian emigration to Fiji was the establishment of a firm,

Western-type government in the archipelago by some European power, preferably Great Britain itself. The question of cession of Fiji to Great Britain had, in fact, been raised as early as 1858 but had been rejected as being expensive and inexpedient.<sup>8</sup> Britain was not yet prepared to forsake its 'policy', vacillating between non-intervention and minimum intervention.<sup>9</sup> But circumstances in the 1860s were changing rapidly. The struggle for supremacy among the Great Powers was intensifying in Europe, and colonial possessions were increasingly coming to be looked upon as barometers of economic wealth and enhanced political status. More immediately, from the turn of the last century, European nationals had been migrating and settling in various parts of the Pacific. In Fiji, the European population increased from about 30-40 in 1860 to 2,000 in 1870.<sup>10</sup>

From the start, relations between Europeans and the natives were characterised by much friction, misunderstanding and prejudice. The home governments could no longer abnegate moral responsibility for the presence and actions of their nationals resident in the islands. Another enterprise in which many European, more particularly British, nationals were engaged was the disreputable labour traffic.<sup>11</sup> Cases of kidnapping, murder and ill-treatment of Pacific island labourers on the plantations in Fiji aroused deep concern in humanitarian circles who urged Britain to exercise more effective control. In these circumstances, the policy of abstaining from involvement in the affairs of the islands proved inadequate. Consequently, when the chiefs of Fiji made an unconditional offer of cession to Britain in 1874, Britain had little viable alternative but to accept it.

Cession itself brought a host of vexatious problems. Apart from the fundamental problems of law and order which must confront any

new government, the most pressing issue facing the nascent administration was economic solvency, a problem made more acute by an unforeseen fall in revenues from native customs and taxes in 1875 and by the reduction in the initial proposed grant from the Imperial Government of £150,000 to £100,000.<sup>12</sup> This reduction was justified 'evidently on the dubious reasoning that, because the native population had been reduced by a quarter, Fiji would require a third less financial assistance.'<sup>13</sup>

Sir Arthur Gordon, the first substantive governor of the colony (1875-1880), thus assumed the reigns of power in far from happy circumstances. He described his first impressions thus:

The state of things which disclosed itself to me on landing in Fiji was not encouraging. Pestilence, heedlessly admitted, had swept away one third of the entire native population. The same cause had carried off many of the imported labourers of the planters, who, from a variety of causes, were themselves, for the most part, reduced to the greatest straits. The revenue had fallen short of even the modest estimate of Sir Hercules Robinson, while expenditure had largely exceeded his anticipations. The introduction of labour from other parts of the Pacific had almost ceased. The season had been unfavourable to agriculture, wet and unhealthy, and gloom and discontent pervaded all classes.<sup>14</sup>

In one of his early addresses to the planters, Gordon outlined how he proposed to solve these seemingly unsurmountable problems:

We want capital invested in the Colony; we want a cheap, abundant, and certain supply of labour; we want means of communication; we want justice to be readily and speedily administered; we want facilities for education; and lastly (though, perhaps, that interests me more nearly and especially than you), we want revenue.<sup>15</sup>

In the circumstances, neither capital nor labour were attainable in the colony. To attract capital, Gordon realised early that he would have to look beyond the importunate cotton planters who themselves were caught up in the grips of recession. As it happened, he invited the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, an Australian enterprise, to extend



its operations to Fiji, which it did in 1882, remaining there till 1973.<sup>16</sup>

The problem of labour supply proved more intractable. The two previous sources, Fijian and Pacific island labour, were both placed in precarious circumstances, and it was clear that neither could be expected to meet the needs of the projected rapid economic development. The native Fijian population was already in a state of extreme distress and despair. A large number, 40,000 of the estimated total population of 150,000, had been killed by an epidemic of measles accidentally introduced by a visiting ship-of-war from Sydney.<sup>17</sup> If the depredations of the labour-hungry planters went unchecked, Gordon apprehended, the Fijians would be reduced to even more dire circumstances. He wrote to Lord Carnarvon: 'If the Fijian population is ever permitted to sink from its present condition into that of a collection of migratory bands of hired labourers, all hope, not only of the improvement but the preservation of the race, must inevitably be abandoned.'<sup>18</sup>

Gordon was, perhaps more than most colonial governors of the nineteenth century, deeply sensitive about the plight of native peoples abruptly exposed to the challenge of Western civilisation, and suffering because of the predatory habits of Europeans in pursuit of profit or glory. He wanted Britain to be able to point proudly to at least one colony where native subjects were treated with justice and fairness. He therefore moved to create a system of 'indirect rule' which would shelter the indigenes from the competitive pressures of the modern world, and allow them to proceed at their own pace under the gentle, paternalistic hand of the government. The basic features of that system are well known: prohibition of the sale of Fijian land, a practice

rampant in the decade before; the preservation of Fijian social structure in a rigid, codified and institutionalised form; and the introduction of a native taxation scheme designed to generate additional state revenue, while allowing the Fijians to meet the tax burden without recourse to plantation employment.<sup>19</sup> This policy was vehemently opposed by the planters at the time, who viewed the natives as being 'specially intended by Providence'<sup>20</sup> to work for them. However, Gordon vigorously defended his policy which received sympathetic approval of the Colonial Office as well.

It has to be noted, however, that Fijian labour was not suited to plantation employment, and that the Fijian people themselves were opposed to the practice, for it offered them little except 'paltry pay, indifferent fare, and frequently anything but mild treatment ...'<sup>21</sup> In a long letter to the governor, the chiefs gave the reasons for their opposition:

Regarding our people who engage their services to others, we do not dislike work for we know that idleness is not right. Employment is good to all men because by it their daily wants are satisfied. But what we most desire is that men should work for themselves in their several homes — that they should plant plenty, that they should build themselves good homes; that they be in a position to furnish themselves with household necessities; that their villages be kept clean and their houses in good repair; this is what we consider living in peace and prosperity. Our people are in many ways enticed and induced to go to work far away from their homes leaving their wives, their children, their relations and everything in their homes in a most bitter and pitiable condition — and it is the cause of the people being in a state of poverty and desolation — the compensation for services rendered by those engaged as labourers — the payment received whether it be in money or merchandise is quickly dissipated. If they remain at or near their homes and worked there, the benefits they would receive would be comparatively greater than those they receive by hiring themselves out to distant places as labourers.<sup>22</sup>

The other source of labour for the Fiji plantations was the neighbouring Pacific islands of the New Hebrides, the Solomons, and the

Gilberts and Tokelaus. The first of these labourers were introduced into Fiji from the end of 1864, and by 1869 there were 1,649 of them in the islands.<sup>23</sup> This labour traffic was ostensibly carried on under the direct supervision of the resident British Consul. A contract between the planter and the labourers was signed in his presence, by which the planter agreed to pay the passage money as well provide food and clothing, while the labourers bound themselves for a period of three years at the wage of £2 -£3 annually to be paid at the end of the engagement. In theory, the rights of the labourers were well secured, but in practice, neither the Consul nor any of his officials had any legal authority to enforce the contract. Not surprisingly, therefore, abuse of the system abounded, and atrocities were prevalent in the recruiting and transportation of the labourers. The curtailment of these had been one of the strong motives for the annexation of Fiji by Great Britain. In addition to the abuses, there were other reasons why Pacific island labour supply was becoming 'eminently precarious' to use Gordon's words, including the decline of native populations in the islands of recruitment, and increasingly intense competition for the labourers from Queensland, Samoa and New Caledonia.<sup>24</sup> Despite these difficulties, the government persevered, and attempted to bring the Pacific island labour traffic under closer supervision, but the nagging question of an assured and sustained source of labour supply remained unresolved.

Other avenues would have to be explored and Gordon, with the experience of Indian indentured labour in Trinidad and in Mauritius, where he had been governor before coming to Fiji, realised that he would have to turn to the 'super abundant population of India ...'<sup>25</sup> He had, perhaps, considered the introduction of Indian 'coolies' even

before arriving in the colony; realities of the new situation merely served to reinforce his convictions. In his first address to the planters, Gordon outlined his scheme, its advantages and disadvantages:

The supply of labour to be obtained from India is practically boundless. The amount of wages ordinarily given to Indian coolies is well known. I hold in my hand some statistics as to the probable expense of their introduction here. My calculations are £3:18s. for recruiting; 10s. a head per man for the agent; passage money £12; cost of returning same, £3; in all £19:8s. Deducting from this the amount of one-third, as paid by the Government, we arrive at the fact that, for £12:18:8, we obtain a coolie servant for five years, with his wages of 5d. per day additional, with rations. The West Indian system of immigration, which works well, is this: Before a certain day in the year, each planter sends in a requisition to the immigration agent, stating the number of coolies he requires for the coming year. These are added up together, and the total they amount to is sent for from India. The men when they arrive are assigned by lot to the applicants, so that there may be no complaints of unfair play. If a number less than that asked for is sent, a proportional diminution in the number allotted is made all round. An indenture fee, in some colonies £1, in others £2, is paid by the planter on each man allotted to him, and a like amount in each succeeding year of the five for which the coolie is indentured to him. The remainder of the expenses, so far as the planter's share of it is concerned (for the Government bears one-third) is defrayed by means of an export duty on produce, which varies every year, according as the number of immigrants sent for is great or small. It must be remembered, when speaking on this subject, that the Indian labourer enters upon his service for a much longer period than the Polynesian. He is engaged to work upon the estate for one certain five years, together with an additional five of labour in the Colony, though not necessarily on the same estate, before he is entitled to receive a return passage to the place whence he came. Thus it will be seen a Polynesian would have to be returned and re-engaged three times for every time an Indian labourer would be. The expenses of this may easily be calculated, and the saving soon arrived at. I must, however, candidly point out that, in one respect, the contract of Indian labourers contrasts unfavourably with those of Polynesia — that of wages; 5d. per diem, with rations, was the least amount they could be maintained at, and without rations they would cost 10d. per diem. If we had both systems of immigration at work, the Government would send for such a number of Polynesians and such a number of Indians as the planters might respectively ask for. It would depend on themselves which they would have, and no doubt they would ask for that which on the whole they found most advantageous for them. The immediate question then

is, "Is it in your opinion desirable that efforts should be made to effect the introduction of immigrant labour from India?" and to this also I would ask you to return an answer.<sup>26</sup>

The planters responded negatively, but Gordon's proposals received the sanction of Lord Carnarvon, the Secretary of State for Colonies, who saw 'no reason to doubt that the scheme may work satisfactorily in Fiji under careful supervision ...'<sup>27</sup> Consequently, Gordon authorised C.A.W. Mitchell, the Agent General of Immigration, who for seven years had performed a similar role in Trinidad, to arrange the procedures and details of immigration with the Government of India.<sup>28</sup> The latter was normally inclined to leave the matter of immigration to the 'ordinary laws of supply and demand',<sup>29</sup> but before doing so, it insisted on information on a number of pertinent subjects such as the geographical and economic character of the colony, the conditions of employment and the structure and regulation of agencies responsible for matters relating to indentured emigration.<sup>30</sup>

The requisite details were furnished from Fiji in due course. Mitchell explained the basic features of the immigration system as they were intended to exist in Fiji.<sup>31</sup> The salary of the officers of the Immigration Department was to be paid by the colonial government, while the cost of keeping the emigration depot in India, the recruiting of the emigrants, their transportation to Fiji and the return passage, was to be borne by the employers and from the colonial revenue. The employers would pay two-thirds of the total cost in the form of indenture fees, with the remaining third coming from government contribution. The indenture fee was to be fixed at such a rate as to provide for a fund called the 'fund in aid of return passages'. The money from this fund could not be used for any other purpose, so that if there occurred some unforeseen disasters: hurricanes, droughts,

fall in price of commodities, there would always be a certain sum available to meet the cost of repatriation of the labourers. This provision, it may be noted, was specific to Fiji for it did not exist either in British Guiana or Trinidad which provided the models for the immigration legislation in Fiji.

Indenture could only be extended for absence and desertion on the production of a magistrate's order. Thus, if an employer wanted lost time to be recovered, he was required to take the labourer to the Stipendiary Magistrate of his district who, if the labourer was convicted, extended the contract by the number of days the labourer had absented himself from work. The labourer was at liberty to re-indenture with the same or another employer, for which he was entitled to a sum of bounty money. Passes or Tickets-of-Absence were required if the labourers wanted to leave the plantation. Without these, they could be arrested by their employers, overseers or the headmen, but the police required a warrant for arrest. In this respect, Fiji was different from Mauritius, British Guiana and Trinidad, where a policeman could apprehend any indentured labourer without a ticket of leave, a practice which, not surprisingly, lent itself to considerable abuse.

Actual conditions of employment were stated on a form of agreement in English, Hindi (Devnagri script) and Urdu (Arabic script), which the prospective emigrants were given by the recruiters in the districts of recruitment.<sup>32</sup> These varied in some minor details over the years and between the different colonies. But all specified the type of work to be done, the number of hours of work required per day and remuneration for it, availability of accommodation and other facilities, and above all, provision of an optional return passage back to India. Typical conditions offered to Fiji migrants

stated that their indenture of five years would begin on the day of their arrival in the colony. The migrants would be required to do work related to cultivation or manufacture of the produce on any plantation in the colony. They would work nine hours on each week day and five on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays being free. Monthly or daily wages and Task-Work rates were specified. For time-work, each adult migrant was to be paid 'not less than one shilling' and every female migrant 'not less than nine pence', while children were to be paid proportionately to the amount of work done. The same rates applied to task-work, a male's task being defined as six hours of steady work and a female's four-and-a-half. The regulations stipulated that an employer could allot only one task a day but if, by mutual agreement, the labourer performed extra work, he was to be paid an additional amount. The migrants were to receive rations from their employers during their first six months on the plantation according to the scale prescribed by the government at a daily cost of four pence. Children between five and twelve years of age were to receive approximately half rations free of cost, while children under five were entitled to nine *chittacks* of milk daily, without charge, during their first year on the plantations. Suitable housing was to be provided free of rent to those under indenture and the ill were to receive free hospital accommodation, medical attendance, medicine and food. A migrant could return to India at his own expense at the end of five years' indenture. At the end of a further five years of 'industrial residence', he was entitled to a free return passage provided he claimed this right before the end of twelve years of residence in the colony. Children who had come with their indentured parents could claim the right of free passage before they reached the

age of 24 years, while children who were born in Fiji were entitled to free repatriation until the age of twelve provided they were accompanied by their parents or guardians.

The Government of India did not raise any objections to the conditions of employment offered by Fiji, for, in essence, they were very similar to those offered by other colonies. With the administrative arrangements in order, R.W.S. Mitchell was appointed the Emigration Agent for Fiji on 23 September 1878.<sup>33</sup> Since Mitchell was also the Agent for Jamaica, Trinidad and St. Lucia, he arranged to share Emigrant Depot 9 at Calcutta with these colonies. Thirty-seven recruiters were appointed to enlist 400 statute adults requisitioned by Fiji. The licences of two recruiters were subsequently cancelled on account of fraud and misrepresentation. Altogether 650 recruits were collected 'up country'. After registration at the sub-depots, they were dispatched to Calcutta, but by the time the contingent was admitted to the main depot, the number of recruits had been reduced to 597. Some had absconded, changed their minds and opted out or withdrawn because their families had been rejected, but the majority of them were rejected because they were upon examination declared unfit for manual labour and returned to their villages. In the depot itself in the waiting period before embarkation, further reductions took place: some died because of cholera and smallpox and quite a few were transferred to other depots. When the *Leonidas*, the first immigrant ship, cleared port on 4 March 1879, there were on board 498 souls: 273 men, 146 women, 47 boys and 32 girls.

Between 1879 and 1916 when indentured emigration was abolished by the Government of India, 60,965 Indian men, women and children went to Fiji. Of these, 45,439 had embarked on the ships at



Calcutta and the rest at Madras (after 1903).<sup>34</sup> The indentured emigrants were followed, in small numbers, by 'free' emigrants paying their own passages, and these included teachers, clerks, interpreters, *pundits* and *mullahs*, artisans and petty traders from Gujerat, and enterprising agriculturalists from the Punjab. Theirs, of course, is a different story.

In the very early years, the arrival of Indian indentured labourers was greeted with little enthusiasm by the planters.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps their negative reaction was due to the extra cost of Indian labour,<sup>36</sup> but perhaps also they were still smarting under the apparent slight of Gordon who, much against their wishes, had prohibited commercial employment of Fijian labour and had turned to India instead. Thus, only one planter, J. Hill of Rabi, offered to take 52 men, 25 women and 29 children from the first batch which had arrived on the *Leonidas*; the rest were reluctantly employed by the government on public works and other miscellaneous jobs.<sup>37</sup> But the planters could not hold out for long. When they witnessed Indian labour performing impressively on coffee plantations in Rewa in November 1879, they applied for an immediate allotment. Later as the supply of Polynesian labour became increasingly less certain, the planters expressed greater appreciation of Indian labour. One planter, writing in the *Suva Times* in 1885, noted:

It is upon the Indian labour that the future of Fiji depends; for the Fijians have become so utterly demoralised by the mistaken policy of the Government that many of the larger planters have no Fijian labour, and others are only waiting for existing agreements to expire and will have no more. The supply from Polynesia is gradually ceasing, and therefore, we have nothing but the Indian labour to depend upon, and it is undoubtedly the best in Fiji. Seeing that it is our only source of labour we must take it with the conditions imposed.<sup>38</sup>

They did. And in time, Indian indentured labour helped create the modern prosperous cash economy which the colonial government so desperately needed and for which Gordon had brought the Indians.

Fiji was, after East Africa in the 1890s, the last major importer of Indian indentured labour. In 1879, the indenture system had been in existence for some 45 years. It is to the gradual evolution and structure of that system that we shall now turn.

NOTES

- 1 Cited in Lucy Colaco, 'Labour Emigration from India to the British Colonies of Ceylon, Malaya and Fiji during the years 1850-1921', unpublished M.Sc. (Econ) thesis, University of London (1957), p.83.
- 2 K.L. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants. A History to the end of Indenture in 1920* (Melbourne, 1962, rptd. 1973), p.3.
- 3 Ibid.; E.P. B Pros 2-4, January 1873, NAI.
- 4 *The Indian Emigration Act XXI of 1883. Rules and Notifications Issued Under Its Provisions*, (Calcutta, 1898).
- 5 E.P. B Pros 2-4, January 1873, NAI.
- 6 The Secretary of State for India to Hume, 27 December 1872, *ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
- 8 For detailed discussed see J.D. Legge, *Britain in Fiji, 1858-1880* (London, 1958), pp.15-35; R.A. Derrick, *A History of Fiji*, vol.I, (Suva, rev. ed. 1950), pp.138-55; Ethel Drus, 'The Colonial Office and the Annexation of Fiji', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th Series, vol.XXXII (1950), pp.87-110.
- 9 See J.M. Ward, *British Policy in the South Pacific* (Sydney, 1948); W.P. Morrell, *Britain in the Pacific Islands* (Clarendon, 1960).
- 10 Legge, *Britain in Fiji*, pp.44-5.
- 11 For detailed account of the labour traffic, see O.W. Parnaby, *Britain and the Labour Trade in the Southwest Pacific*, (Durham, 1964); Peter Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation. A History of Solomon Islands Labour Migration, 1870-1914* (Melbourne, 1973); Deryck Scarr, 'Recruits and Recruiters: a portrait of the Pacific Islands labour trade', *Journal of Pacific History*, vol.II (1967), pp.5-24.

- 12 J.K. Chapman, *The Career of Arthur Hamilton Gordon: First Lord Stanmore, 1829-1912* (Toronto, 1964), p.159.
- 13 Ibid., p.160.
- 14 Sir Arthur Gordon, *Fiji. Records of Private and of Public Life, 1875-1880*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1897-1912), vol.I, p.194.
- 15 Ibid., p.178.
- 16 For detailed study, see Michael Moynah, *Brown or White? A History of the Fiji Sugar Industry, 1873-1973*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1978.
- 17 Chapman, *Arthur Hamilton Gordon*, p.159. For detailed and critical discussion, see Norma McArthur, *Island Populations of the Pacific* (Canberra, 1967), pp.3-26.
- 18 Sir Arthur Gordon to Earl Carnavon, 9 October 1877 in *PP* vol.LV, C.2149 (1878).
- 19 Discussions of this are found in the works of Gillion, Chapman and Legge cited above. See also Peter France, *Charter of the Land. Custom and Colonization in Fiji* (Melbourne, 1969).
- 20 Cited in Colaco, 'Labour Emigration from India', p.96.
- 21 Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, p.2.
- 22 Colaco, *op.cit.*, pp.96-7.
- 23 Legge, *Britain in Fiji*, p.56; Parnaby, *Britain and the Labour Trade*, *passim*.
- 24 Gordon to Carnavon, 9 October 1877, in *PP*, vol.LV, C.2149 (1878).
- 25 Ibid.

- 26 Gordon, *Fiji. Records of Private and of Public Life*, vol.I, p.179.
- 27 Carnarvon to Gordon, 14 November 1877, in *PP* vol.LV, C.2149 (1878).
- 28 *Fiji Royal Gazette*, vol.IV, 23 March 1878.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid., 9 February 1878.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 The following paragraph is based on 'Conditions of Employment' offered to Fiji migrants. These are found in the *PRs* and Gillion, *op.cit.*, pp. 210-12. An example of a copy in Hindi, Urdu and English, derived from D.W.D. Comins, *Note on Emigration from the East Indies to St. Lucia* (Calcutta, 1893), is appended to this chapter.
- 33 This paragraph is based on *PR*, 1879 and E.P. B Pros 90-93, April 1882, NAI.
- 34 The figure for total numbers entering Fiji is derived from Fiji Department of Labour's statistics on Indian emigration to Fiji, held on microfilm at the National Library of Australia, Canberra. For yearly breakdown of emigrants leaving for Fiji from Calcutta after 1879, see vol.II, Appendix I, pp.1-4.
- 35 E.P. A Pros 12, August 1883, NAI.
- 36 Including wages, rations and the cost of introduction and repatriation, the annual cost to the planter of one Indian labourer was estimated to be £13.14s, as against the existing cost of £10.14s.8d. for the Polynesian labourer. See Legge, *Britain in Fiji*, p.267.
- 37 *PR* (1879); E.P. B Pros 90-93, April 1882, NAI.
- 38 Colaco, 'Labour Emigration from India', p.110.

## APPENDIX I

## COLONIAL EMIGRATION FORM No. 5.

## FORM OF AGREEMENT FOR INTENDING EMIGRANTS.

*Particulars of Emigrant executing a contract for service in the Colony of SAINT LUCIA.*

REGISTRATION.		EMIGRANT'S		DEPENDENTS.		Sex.	Age.	Caste.	Occupation.	RESIDENCE.			SUCCESSOR TO ESTATE IN INDIA.		
Date.	Number.	Name.	Father's name.	Names.	Relation-ship to labourer.					District.	Thana.	Village or Town and Mahala.	Name.	Father's name.	Relation-ship.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
15-12-90	2	Budhu ...	Parahu ...	...	...	Male...	20	Tarki Koiri	Labourer	Azamgarh	Mohamda-bad.	Waidpur	Gulap ...	Domon ...	Uncle

I agree to emigrate on the conditions of service specified on the reverse.

Executed in my presence.

Mark of Budhu.

J. HAFLANN.

Registering Officer.

Emigrant.

Dated at Ghazipur, the 15th December 1890.

N.B.—This form is to be filled up in the Office of the Registering Officer in English in triplicate.

Successor to estate.

Name.	Father's name.	Relation.
Gulap.	Domon.	Uncle.

Fit.

J. HAFLANN.

CONDITIONS OF SERVICE AND TERMS OF AGREEMENT WHICH THE RECRUITER IS AUTHORIZED TO OFFER ON BEHALF OF THE AGENT TO INTENDING EMIGRANTS.

*Period of Service.*—Five years from date of arrival in the Colony.

*Nature of Labour.*—Work in connection with the cultivation of the soil or the manufacture of the produce on any estate and domestic service.

*Number of days on which the emigrant is required to labour in each week.*—Every day, excepting Sundays and authorized holidays.

*Number of hours in each day during which he is required to labour without extra remuneration.*—Nine hours.

*Monthly or daily wages or task work rates.*—When employed at time-work every able-bodied adult male emigrant above the age of fifteen years will be paid not less than one shilling, which is equal to ten annas, and every other emigrant above the age of ten years not less than nine pence, which is equal to seven annas and two pice, for every working day of nine hours; children below the age of ten years will receive wages proportionate to the amount of work done.

When employed at task or ticca-work, every adult emigrant will be paid not less than one shilling for every task which shall be performed. After the emigrant has had practice and experience he may earn much more than one shilling a day.

Wages are paid weekly.

*Conditions as to return passage.*—Emigrants may return to India at their own expense after completing five years' service under indenture in the Colony.

After ten years' continuous residence every emigrant who during that period has completed five years' service under indenture and any child of such emigrant, shall be entitled to a free return passage.

*Other conditions.*—Emigrants will receive rations from their employers during the first three months after their arrival in the Colony, according to the scale prescribed by the Government of Saint Lucia, at a daily cost of five pence, or four annas and three pice, for each person of 15 years of age and upwards.

Each child over one year of age will receive half rations at a daily cost of two pence half-penny or two annas and one and-a-half pice.

Suitable dwellings will be assigned to emigrants under indenture free of rent and will be kept in good repair by the employers. When emigrants under indenture are ill they will be provided with hospital accommodation, medical attendance, medicines, medical comforts and food free of charge.

नौकरी का समय—काबोनो या टापू में पड़ने की तारीख से पांच वर्ष तक।

काम का तीर—वह काम जो किसी बगान वा कोठी की जमीन को जोतने या उनके उपजे ऊपर की कारीगरों में लगाने वा घर के काज काम से लगाने रखटा है।

जितने दिन हर घटवारे में परदेशी कुली को काम करना होगा—इसवार और टहराई ऊई कुली के दिनों को छोड़ के सब दिन।

बिना ऊपर की मजदूरी के हर दिन जितने घण्टे उस को काम करना होगा—हर दिन नौ घण्टे काम करना होगा।

महीनावारी वा हर दिन की मजदूरी या चुकती काम का दर—जब घण्टे के हिसाब से काम मिलेगा तो ऐसे नौ घण्टे काम करने के हर दिन के लिये हर एक हट्टा कट्टा मर्द परदेशी कुली को जिसकी उमर पंद्रह बरस से ऊपर है एक शिलिंग से जो दस पाने के बराबर है कम नहीं मिलेगा और दूसरे हर एक परदेशी कुली को जिसकी उमर दस बरस से ऊपर है नौ पेंस से जो साढ़े साव पाने के बराबर है कम नहीं मिलेगा ऐसे नौ घण्टे काम करने के हर दिन के लिये और लड़के जिनकी उमर दस बरस से कम है जितना काम करेंगे उह, हिसाब से मजदूरी पावेंगे।

جب चुکتی یا ٹیکے کا کام मिलेगा तो हर एक जवान परदेशी कुली को हर एक चुक्तो काम के लिए एक शिबिंग से कम नहीं मिलेगा पर जब वह अच्छे तरह काम करने लगेगा और काम से वाकिफ हो जायेगा तो वह एक शिबिंग से भी ज्यादा हर दिन कमा सकेगा। तब हर घठवारे में मिलती है।

लौट जाने की शर्तें—कालोनी या टापू में पूरे पांच बरष तक इकरार-नामे के ब-मूजिब काम करते हुए रह के परदेशी कुली लोग अपने खर्च से हिन्दुस्तान को लौट या सकते हैं और हर एक परदेशी कुली दस बरष बराबर रहने के पीछे जिसने ब-मूजिब इकरार नामे के पूरे पांच बरष तक काम किया है और ऐसे परदेशी कुली का कोई लड़का या लड़की भी बिना खर्च लौट जाने का हकदार होगा।

दूसरी शर्तें—कालोनी या टापू में पञ्चने से पहिले तीन सहीने तक परदेशी कुलियों को उनके मालिकों से सेंट कृशिया गवर्नमेण्ट के ठहराये हुए हिसाब से हर दिन का खाना पांच पेन्श या दोने पांच आने हर दिन के देने से हर एक कुली को जिसको उमर पन्द्रह बरष या इससे ज्यादा हो मिलेगा।

हर एक लड़का या लड़की को जिसको उमर एक बरष से जपर है वहाँ के हिसाब से माथा हर दिन का खाना दो पेन्श और आध पेन्श या साढ़े दो पेसे देने से मिलेगा।

परदेशी कुलियों को इकरार-नामे की शर्त के भीतर बिना भाड़े का रहने योग्य घर मिलेगा और मकान की सम्मत मालिक की ओर से होगी और परदेशी कुलियों को इकरार-नामे की शर्त के भीतर बीमार पड़ने से सम्मतता में जगह मिलेंगे और डाक्टर व दवाई व नोमारी के योग्य खाना और मामूली खाना बिना दाम के मिलेगा।

نوڪري کي مدت — کالوني يا ٿاپو ميں پهونچنے کي تاريخ ت پانچ برس تک \*  
مزدوري کي قسم — وه کام جو باغات يا کوٺهي کي زمين کو جوٺنے يا ارسکے پيداوار کو کاري گري ميں لگانے يا گهر کے کام سے لگا رکھنا \*

جذنے دن هر هفتہ پرديسي کلي کو کام کرنا پٿريگا — اتوار اور ٿههراڻي هوئي چهٺي کے دنونکو چهوڑے سب دن \*  
هر دن جذنے گهٺے اوسکو بلا بالي مزدوري پانے کے کام کرنا پٿريگا — هر دن نو گهٺے کام کرنا هوگا \*  
ماهواري يا هر دن کي مزدوري يا ٺهیکے کے کام کا شرح — جب گهٺے کے حساب سے کام مليگا تو ايسے نو گهٺے کام کرڻے کے هر دن کے لٺے هر ايک هٺا کٺا مرد پرديسي کلي کو جسکي عمر پندرہ برس سے اوڀر هے ايک شلنگ سے جو دس آنے کے برابر هے کم نهين مليگا اور دوسرے هر ايک پرديسي کلي کو جسکي عمر دس برس سے اوڀر هے نو پينس سے جو ساڙه ساٺ آنے کے برابر هے کم نه مليگا ايسے نو گهٺے کام کرڻے کے هر دن کے لٺے — اور لٺے جٺکي عمر دس برس سے کم هے جٺنا کام کرينگے اوس حساب سے مزدوري پاونگے — جب چٺکي يا ٺهیکے کا کام مليگا تو هر ايک جوان پرديسي کلي کو هر ايک چٺکي کام کے لٺے ايک شلنگ سے کم نهين مليگا مگر جب پرديسي کلي کو عادت پٿرجايگي اور تجربہ حاصل هو جايگا تو وه ايک شلنگ سے بهي بيٺي هر دن کما سگيگا \*

لوٺ آنے کي شرطين — کالوني يا ٿاپو ميں پورے پانچ برس تک اقرارنامے کے بموجب کام کرتے هوئے ره کے پرديسي کلي لوگ اپنے خرچ سے هندوستان کو لوٺ آسکتے هون اور هر ايک پرديسي کلي دس برس برابر رهڻے کے پيٺچھ جسٺے بموجب اقرارنامے کے پورے پانچ برس تک کام کيا هے اور ايسے پرديسي کلي کا کوئي لٺکا يا لٺکي بهي بنا خرچ لوٺ آنے کا حقدار هوگا \*

دوسري شرطين — کالوني يا ٿاپو ميں پهونچنے سے پھلے تين مهينے تک پرديسي کليون کو اونکے مالکونے سنت لوسيا گورنمنٺ کے ٿههروئے هوئے پيمانے کے مطابق هر دن کا کھانا پانچ پينس يا پوٺ پانچ آنے هر روز دینے سے هر ايک کلي کو جسکي عمر پندرہ برس يا زياہه هو مليگا \*  
هر ايک لٺکے يا لٺکي کو جسکي عمر ايک برس سے اوڀر هے بتون کے حساب سے آدها هر دن کا کھانا دو پيس اور آده بني يا ساڙه نوپيس دینے سے مليگا \*  
پرديسي کليون کو اقرارنامے کے شرط کے اندر بلا ترويه رهڻے کے لايق مڪان مامگا اور مڪان کي موٺت بخوبي مالک کي طرف سے هوگي \*

پرديسي کلي کو اقرارنامے کي شرط کے اندر بيمار پٿرنے سے اسپتال ميں جگه مليگي اور ڊاکٽر - دوا - بيمارون کے لايق خوراڪ اور معمولي کھانا - - - پدم کے مليگا \*

Mark of Hooloo.

I agree to accept the person named on the face of this form as an emigrant on the above conditions.

In my presence

J. HACLANN,

Registering Officer.

Dated 15th December 1889.

D. W. D. COMINS,

Protector of Emigrants.

At Ghazipur.

Recruiter for SAINT LUCIA.

A. C. STEWART,

Government Emigration Agent for SAINT LUCIA.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE INDENTURE SYSTEM: EVOLUTION AND STRUCTURE

Indian indentured emigration was started in direct response to the shortage of labour caused in the 'King Sugar' colonies by the abolition of slavery in 1833, and by the termination of the system of apprenticeship for six years under which, until 1838, the planters had been able to obtain slave labour.<sup>1</sup> Once liberated, the former slaves showed a marked disinclination for plantation employment. Even when they returned temporarily, they chose to work on their own terms rather than on conditions dictated by employers. The memory of the relentless pace of work under harsh discipline usually for a pittance, was still fresh in their minds. One official wrote that

for the greater part of the Negroes abandoned not only field labour, but service of every kind, almost as soon as they were at a liberty to do so. No present kindness, or memory of past benefits, no persuasion or pecuniary inducements could prevail upon them to remain; and it is to be feared that the time is yet distant when motives of interest, or the pressure of necessity, will bring them back to serve as agricultural labourers.<sup>2</sup>

The apprenticeship system which had been hastily devised to reduce the inevitably drastic impact of the sudden emancipation of the slaves, proved a failure. From the start it had many contradictions and paradoxes, perhaps the greatest of all being the inherent ambivalence in relations between the labourers and planters.<sup>3</sup> Conscious of their new found freedom, dignity and access to the law, the apprentices refused to work as hard as the slaves. Thus in Mauritius, while a slave could



cut three cartloads of cane per day, the apprentices cut only two; while the slaves cleared 3,200-4,000 square feet of ground, the apprentices did about 2,400-3,000; and while the former dug 100 holes a day, the latter dug only 80.<sup>4</sup> The result, not surprisingly, was a dramatic drop in the production and export of sugar, the chief export commodity in most of the tropical colonies. In Jamaica, for instance, where nearly half of the apprentices in the West Indies were located, sugar exports, which had dropped only slightly before 1838, were almost halved between 1838-1840.<sup>5</sup> In other smaller West Indian colonies it was a similar story, with not only men but women also absenting themselves from work. The same situation existed in Mauritius.<sup>6</sup>

It became obvious that the planters' need for a cheap and sustained source of labour would have to be met from outside. Although all the colonies would eventually turn to India many of them, especially those in the West Indies, turned their attention elsewhere — to Europe and Africa. Between 1834-37 some 3,000 English, 1,000 Scots and the same number of Germans, and 100 Irish were introduced into Jamaica.<sup>7</sup> A smaller number of Europeans also entered St. Lucia.<sup>8</sup> These emigrants were brought privately on contract for three to five years, although Jamaica also offered a bounty from public funds. But those who had entertained high hopes of the white emigrants supplying a middle class for the West Indies who would set an example of industry to the Negroes or create a white labouring population, were soon disappointed.<sup>9</sup> The experiment failed because of the high mortality rate caused by 'insufficient sanitary precautions', the 'unsuitability of raw, unacclimatised Europeans for field work in the tropical sun, with the added temptation of unlimited drink',<sup>10</sup> and general demoralisation. The emigrants from the United States, who had also been imported in small

numbers, did not fare much better, for being in the main carpenters and bricklayers and people of similar occupations, they were unsuited to the rigour and discipline of plantation employment.<sup>11</sup>

Attempts had also been made in Trinidad to procure labour from neighbouring Grenada, St. Christopher and Nevis. The planters paid bounty to captains of small trading vessels who could provide labourers. On several occasions the planters directly dispatched their own vessels to collect labourers for the crop season, with the promise of returning them to their homes after the completion of work. But because there were no legal provisions specifying the conditions of service, or making the contract enforceable, and also because <sup>of</sup> the nature of the bounty system itself, it was inevitable that sooner or later, corruption and mismanagement would set in, which it eventually did. Not long after its inception the bounty system, 'ill-contrived and injudiciously managed', too ended in failure.<sup>12</sup>

The failure of these ill-fated attempts generated an interest in Africa as a possible source of cheap and reliable source of labour. Efforts were made to attract the population of Sierra Leone, Gambia and the Kroo Coast of Liberia, but despite 'assiduous attempts', offering high wages and free return passages at the end of five, and sometimes three years' service, the venture did not meet with much success.<sup>13</sup> In Sierra Leone, missionaries and commercial interests discouraged emigration, while the absence of pressing economic conditions contributed to inertia in the population. However, even if the attempts had succeeded, it is unlikely that large-scale population movement from Africa would have been sanctioned by Britain. I.M. Cumpston has rightly noted that

Africa was the most sensitive spot on all of England's international commitments, and it is difficult to believe that a large scale programme for movement of African labourers would have received legislative sanction. Even the legitimate traffic from Sierra Leone soon came to an end.<sup>14</sup>

More success attended efforts to get liberated African slaves who had been left at various ports in Sierra Leone or St. Helena, and less commonly in Rio de Janeiro or Havana, after slave ships carrying them had been intercepted by Britain. These homeless and dejected people became the responsibility of Britain which had to assume the burden of providing home and sustenance for them.<sup>15</sup> A timely and convenient solution was provided by the colonies which were experiencing acute labour shortage and were more than eager to import them. In the circumstances, the Negro had little choice but to emigrate, 'and the Government used many forms of pressure, though never overt compulsion, to persuade him to emigrate.'<sup>16</sup> An official explained the general conditions governing the emigration of the liberated African:

He will be subject to moderate restraint, and be considered to be in tutelage for three years; and as, during that period, he will be taught the value of labour, and be encouraged in industrious habits, by being paid in proportion to his work; and as, moreover, he will receive religious and moral instruction, I am sanguine in my expectations that the liberated African will eventually become a respectable and a useful member of society.<sup>17</sup>

In the colonies, however, these migrants did not quite perform the role assigned to or expected of them; instead, they evinced a 'general tendency to forsake the estates on which they were located to wander off either in search of work or into the villages.'<sup>18</sup>

The failure of Africa to become a regular and reliable source of labour supply prompted some planters to speculate about China as a

possible alternative, receiving encouragement from favourable impressions of the Chinese as hard working labourers. One West Indian observer described them in 1844 as

well made, robust, and active, inured to field labour, and able to work during the heat of the day, in fact, they are equal to our best Creole field labourers; they are eager for gain, and will do anything for money; they are quiet and very intelligent for their class, and not lazy. They value money, and are shrewd; and I do think no class of men can be better adapted to our wants than they are ...<sup>19</sup>

But the very qualities for which the Chinese labourers were admired also made them unsuitable for prolonged employment as coolies on the plantations. Being 'further developed in civilization',<sup>20</sup> as one official put it, the Chinese tended to move out of the plantations at the earliest possible opportunity to set up on their own as market gardeners and small shopkeepers, thereby becoming rivals to the very planters whom they were supposed to serve. Thus China, too, had to be abandoned as a source of labour supply.

But this was done gradually, for small numbers of Chinese, Africans and others were imported into the West Indies and Mauritius up to the 1860s, and possibly even afterwards. Table I gives a breakdown of the contribution of various areas, except India, to emigration to the West Indies and Mauritius.

It was eventually to India that all the colonies had to turn to fulfil their dreams of cheap, reliable and abundant labour. Mauritius had been enjoying moderate success with Indian indentured emigrants since 1834 when 36 Dhangars were imported there on contract. The contract, in English and Bengali, was very simple, specifying the planter 'or such other person I may be transferred to' for whom the

TABLE I <sup>21</sup>Origins of Non-Indian Immigrants in the West Indies and Mauritius

## WEST INDIES

<i>Place of Origin</i>	<i>— Years —</i>						TOTAL
	1843-56	1857	1858	1859	1860	1861	
Great Britain	34	-	1	-	-	-	35
Madeira	23,156	486	1,664	1,048	608	124	27,086
Cape de Verds	961	184	53	-	-	-	1,198
Azores	164	-	-	-	-	-	164
Sierra Leone	11,543	-	-	-	226	390	12,159
Kroo Coast	381	-	-	-	-	-	381
St. Helena	9,125	-	311	4	1,328	500	11,268
China	2,107	-	-	699	1,942	3,365	8,113
Canada	145	-	-	-	-	-	145
United States	70	-	-	-	-	-	70
British West Indies	6,366	-	68	26	-	-	6,460
Havana	347	-	-	-	-	-	347
Saba	23	-	-	-	-	-	23
Surinam	31	-	-	-	-	-	31
Rio de Janeiro	1,320	-	-	-	-	-	1,320

## MAURITIUS

Ibo (East Coast of Africa)	325	-	-	-	-	-	325
Madagascar	39	-	-	-	-	-	39
Aden	632	-	-	-	-	-	632
China	843	-	-	-	-	-	843

labourer was expected to work, the number of years of service required (5), remunerations (Rs 10 per month), food, clothing and medical facilities to be provided, and an optional free return passage to Calcutta at the expiry of the contract. The Superintendent of Calcutta Police, before whom all prospective emigrants were brought, then signed the document, attesting to the voluntary nature of the transaction.<sup>22</sup>

This tentative venture proved highly successful, and it was decided to put the experiment on a firmer footing. Thus between 1 August 1834 and the end of 1835, 14 emigrant ships were engaged to transport emigrants from Calcutta to Mauritius. By the end of 1839, over 25,000 Indians had been introduced into Mauritius.<sup>23</sup> Other colonies followed suit, as is indicated in the following Table. By the time indentured emigration was finally abolished in 1917, over one million indentured labourers from India had been transported across the seas.

TABLE II <sup>24</sup>

Major Indian Indentured Labour Importing Colonies

Name of Colony	Years of Migration	No. of Emigrants	Indian Population in		
			1879	1900	1969
Mauritius	1834-1900	453,063	141,309	261,000	520,000
British Guiana	1838-1916	238,909	83,786	118,000	257,000
Trinidad	1845-1916	143,939	25,852	83,000	360,000
Jamaica	1845-1915	36,412	15,134	14,661	27,951
Grenada	1856-1885	3,200	1,200	2,118	9,500
St. Lucia	1858-1895	4,350	1,175	2,000	-
Natal	1860-1911	152,184	12,668	64,953	614,000
St. Kitts	1860-1861	337	200	-	-
St. Vincents	1860-1880	2,472	1,557	100	3,703
Reunion	1861-1883	26,507	45,000	-	-
Surinam	1873-1916	34,304	3,215	-	101,715
Fiji	1879-1916	60,965	480	12,397	241,000
East Africa	1895-	32,000	-	-	-
Seychelles	? -1916	6,315	-	-	-

For the better part of the first decade of indentured emigration, no restrictions were placed by authorities in India on the system of recruitment and transportation of labourers; laws of supply and demand governed emigration. The planters obtained their labourers through European firms based in Calcutta and nearby areas.<sup>25</sup> However, it was not long before the more vigilant officials in India began to suspect the operation of deceit and misrepresentations in the conduct of recruitment. The Government of Bengal noted in 1837:

It is shown, however, that from the novelty of these contracts, from the circumstances that the parties proceeding as labourers, are, for the greater part a rude and ignorant class, and from their destination being to places where their language is little understood, the emigrants suffer under difficulties. It is not in all cases certain that they fully understand the terms of the contract by which they bind themselves, or that they are really willing to proceed for long periods to a distance from their native country.<sup>26</sup>

The doubts expressed above were increased by well-publicised reports of neglect and ill-treatment of labourers on four successive ships to Mauritius, all of which were ill-equipped and poorly supervised. In response to these criticisms, as well as to provide a semblance of legal supervision of indentured migration, the Government of India directed the Indian Law Commissioners to draw up proposals regulating indenture. These were incorporated in Act V of 1837.<sup>27</sup> Among other things, the Act provided that the emigration of contract labourers was to be subject to orders from authorities in India; that the emigrants should be required to appear before an official appointed by the provincial government; that the contract, in English and in the mother tongue of the emigrant, must specify wages and the nature of employment; that contracts for a period of over five years, and which did not include a

provision for return passage, were not to be approved; and that recruiters obtaining labourers through 'fraudulent means' stood to be fined up to £200 or face 30 months' imprisonment.

As these measures were enacted, reports of abuses reached an enlightened and sensitive public in India and Great Britain, which, ever vigilant, denounced indenture. In Calcutta, Thomas Boaz, a Calcutta clergyman who had interviewed some returned migrants from Mauritius, publicly condemned the indenture system on 10 July 1836 as merely an extension of slavery. A petition was sent to the President of the Council of India protesting the suffering of the indentured emigrants and asking for the curtailment of emigration until it could reasonably be established that the labourers benefited as much as did the entrepreneurs in India and Mauritius.<sup>28</sup>

Because of such mounting pressure, which could no longer be ignored or shelved, indentured emigration was temporarily halted by the Council of India so that it could 'endeavour to devise adequate measures for the protection of such persons.'<sup>29</sup> Previous orders permitting emigration were, therefore, repealed. Instructing the Indian labour importing colonies to institute their own inquiries into the condition of the indentured labourers, the Government of India appointed a committee of six on 22 August 1838 to investigate all aspects of indentured emigration. The six men were T. Dickens, Reverend James Charles, W.F. Dowson, Russomroy Dutt, J.P. Grant and Major E. Archer.<sup>30</sup> The Committee examined witnesses from August 1838 to mid-January 1839, and submitted its final report in October 1840. Because of the massive and frequently contradictory nature of the evidence that had been so assiduously gathered, the members differed in their interpretations as



well as on the matter of recommendations to the government. Consequently two reports were forwarded. The majority report of Dickens, Rev. Charles and Dutt presented a scathing critique of the indenture system. Their report concluded

it to be distinctly proved beyond dispute that the Coolies and other natives exported to Mauritius and elsewhere were (generally speaking) induced to come to Calcutta by gross misrepresentation and deceit practised upon them by native crimps, styled duffadars and arkottis employed by European and Anglo-Indian undertakers and shippers who were mostly cognizant of these frauds, and who received a very considerable sum per head for each Coolie exported.<sup>31</sup>

They contended further that if the emigrants had been given a proper idea of their actual place of destination, many would have refused to emigrate; that the emigrants were given the impression that they would obtain employment with the East India Company as peons, gardeners, porters, etc; that they did not fully understand the wider significance of the contracts they had signed, and that legislative measures enacted to counteract abuses had been to no avail; that the emigrants were threatened with legal action if they expressed an unwillingness to migrate after they had signed the contract; and finally, that the labourers suffered considerable social and economic disabilities in the colonies where regulations had 'little practical utility in restraining illegal importation of coolies'. To prevent 'great misery and distress' to the emigrants, the members recommended greater government control; formal conventions between India and the colonies; restrictions of indentured embarkations to certain well-supervised ports; appointment of a Chief Superintendent and 'Purveyors' of 'coolies' in the colonies; fixing of a fixed proportion of females to males among the emigrants; and government control of shipping.

J.P. Grant, in the minority report, dissented.<sup>32</sup> He acknowledged the existence of irregularities in the indenture system, but urged against direct government intervention. The disadvantages, he argued, had to be clearly and dispassionately weighed up against the 'incalculable' advantages of emigration to the emigrants themselves. It was to this view that the government was generally inclined, but in the circumstances considered it prudent to halt all indentured emigration.

The first round had been won by the 'humanitarians', though they still persisted in their efforts to educate the British public about the evils of 'coolie trade'.<sup>33</sup> But the planters, with their pecuniary interests in serious jeopardy following the curtailment of Indian immigration, also began to canvass for support. They shifted their 'theatre of operation' to England which, it now seemed, was the critical place. They realised that direct confrontation with the humanitarians would be futile for not only were the humanitarians better organised but also, given the principles they stood for, might in all probability carry public opinion with them. Thus, 'while working hard with the Government and press', the planters showed 'unwanted anxiety to conciliate the abolitionists'.<sup>34</sup>

Much correspondence followed between the colonies, the Imperial Government and the Government of India. It was clear that the prohibition on emigration could not be maintained for long. Reports from the colonies showed that while there were hardships and problems, they were not as harsh as had been portrayed; indeed, evidence showed much material improvement in the condition of the labourers.<sup>35</sup> In January 1842, the Colonial Office passed an Order, conditional upon the approval of the Government of India, allowing indentured emigration to

Mauritius. Most of its principles were later incorporated into the Government of India's Act XV of 1842, which was the first comprehensive measure to provide a semblance of government control and supervision.<sup>36</sup> The Act provided for the appointment on fixed salary of an Emigration Agent at the ports of embarkation in India, and a Protector of Emigrants in Mauritius. The Emigration Agent was required personally to examine each emigrant and to ascertain that he fully understood the nature of the transaction. The Agent was to give a comprehensive report of all the proceedings to the provincial government. All the ships were henceforth to be licensed by the Government, and required to conform to certain prescribed conditions; dietary and medical supplies for the emigrants were prescribed, as were accommodation facilities and indeed the length of the voyage itself. The Act was a step forward, but it still had many defects: for a start it dealt perfunctorily with the system of recruitment, but perhaps most important of all, there were no devices in it for the enforcement of the regulations. It is not surprising, therefore, that subsequent investigations still unearthed much abuse and irregularities in the system.

Mauritius opened the way, and it was not long after that the West Indian colonies renewed their request for Indian labour. In the past, officials in India had been apprehensive of allowing emigration to those distant colonies, partly on account of the great distance and consequent problems of communication, and partly because of the fear of the effects of competition among the recruiters for the different colonies. But reports from British Guiana were encouraging, and exposed some of the extravagant claims of the critics. Although 98 of the 414 migrants who had been introduced in 1838 had died, many had also done well. In fact, 236 of them had returned to India, bringing with them

upwards of \$20,000.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, indentured emigration was allowed to British Guiana, Trinidad and Jamaica under the same conditions as those that applied to Mauritius.

In the 1850s, indentured emigration was also allowed to smaller West Indian colonies. Some modifications were made in the existing regulations, but perhaps the most significant development was the move afoot in the colonies to restrict and even abolish provisions regarding return passage of the migrants after the completion of their contract. Mauritius raised the question in 1851 and was followed two years later by Guiana and Trinidad.<sup>38</sup> In the case of the former, the Government of India agreed that repatriation after five years should not be insisted upon, provided the colony agreed to pay the return passages of those unable, from sickness or destitution to purchase their own tickets. Trinidad proposed to give free return tickets only to those who claimed the right after 18 months of it becoming available; others, even after ten years' residence, it suggested, should be required to contribute \$35 towards the cost of repatriation. Initially, the Government of India proceeded cautiously, as it had done in the case of Mauritius, but once it realised the full implications of the proposals, it retracted from its earlier position. The Court of Directors observed in 1857:

We should view with great jealousy any proposals for depriving the natives of India of the absolute right to a return passage to their own country, unless such provisions could be framed as would perfectly secure them from the risk of undue influence when it was sought to obtain their consent to an arrangement for keeping them in the colony.<sup>39</sup>

Lord Canning's government concurred, emphasising that the labourers should be free to 'make their own bargain.'

Despite persistent and genuine efforts to curtail abuses in

the indenture system, careful investigation in the 1850s and early 1860s uncovered many irregularities and evasions of the various provisions. Some of these were brought to light by H.N.D. Beyts, an official from Mauritius sent to India to investigate various immigration-related matters.<sup>40</sup> He criticised especially the system of recruitment and the unscrupulous tactics used by recruiters. In many instances, Beyts noted, recruits unwilling to go to one colony were taken to the depot of another. Often such activity was carried on 'in open defiance of the authority of the local laws', while the Protector of Emigrants was 'utterly powerless to prevent the abuses if not in all at least in nine-tenths of the cases in which offences were committed.' The problem was compounded by the 'peculiarly credulous and tractable disposition' of the recruits who, away from their villages and afraid of the unknown, succumbed to threats of reprisal from the recruiter.

Earlier Dr F.J. Mout, appointed by the Government of Bengal to investigate the problem of shipping of emigrants, had found distressingly high mortality rates on the voyages. The average mortality on the 12 ships which left for the West Indies during 1856-7 was 17.3 per cent, reaching as high as 31.2 per cent on the *Merchantman*.<sup>41</sup> Mout attributed the high mortality rates to poor health of the labourers, especially those from Madras, defective selection procedures, inadequate facilities provided on the ships and changes in the diet of the emigrants on the voyage. The President-in-Council, however, attributed the causes directly to the facilities and conditions on the voyage.<sup>42</sup>

Further protective measures were passed, and these were incorporated into the Emigration Act XIII of 1864.<sup>43</sup> For the first time, the duty of the Protector of Emigrants was defined precisely. Unlike before, when the recruits were transferred directly to the port of

embarkation, they now had to be interviewed by local magistrates who had to be satisfied that the emigrants were emigrating voluntarily and fully understood the terms of contract. At the ports of embarkation the Protector was required to personally interview each emigrant. The recruiters were given licenses on a yearly basis, and had to wear badges to make their identity visible to all.

These efforts reflect the difference between the situation as it existed in the very early years of indentured emigration and as it did after the mid-nineteenth century. Much progress had been made, but not surprisingly, the reforms failed to satisfy both the critics and the advocates of indentured emigration. The opponents pointed to sensational cases of kidnapping, and assumed that these were typical of the wider scene. J.C. Robertson, the divisional magistrate at Allahabad in 1871, attempted to highlight the irregularities in recruitment by pointing to the great discrepancy between the numbers of recruits obtained by colonial recruiters and their inland counterparts: whereas the former collected 47 emigrants in the period of seven to eight months, the latter could only manage 14 or so during the course of the whole year.<sup>44</sup> His views were widely publicised. But what was not realised at the time was the crucial difference in the two types of recruitment: colonial recruitment was a highly organised and professionally co-ordinated venture, whereas inland recruitment, for the most part, was more amorphous and depended largely on the initiative and enterprise of the contractor or the middleman (*sardar*). Hence the discrepancy in the number of recruits collected by two types of recruiters. But these facts, which would have portrayed the problem in a more objective light, were lost sight of in the heat of the argument.

On the other hand, recruiters complained of the persistent harassment and intimidation they received from magistrates and police officials. W.M. Anderson, Emigration Agent of Jamaica, wrote that many officials deliberately delayed correspondence, and in some instances even refused to countersign recruiters' licenses 'unless a respectful zamindar becomes a security for them'. He referred to the practice of daily police visits to emigration depots as 'in truth sending wolves and vultures to look after and take care of lambs' — a reference to widespread corruption in the police force. And he complained that in general the impression was held that the government was opposed to emigration, and that subordinate officials were allowed to impede the process of recruitment at will.<sup>45</sup>

Constant complaints from the Emigration Agents precipitated the intervention of Lord Salisbury, the Secretary of State for the Colonies. He enquired whether, under proper regulation, and with due regard to the interest of the labourers, the Government of India 'might not more directly encourage emigration and superintend the system under which it is conducted.'<sup>46</sup> In Lord Salisbury's view, indentured emigration, properly regulated, would be to the benefit of everyone: India, Britain and the emigrants themselves:

While then, from an Indian point of view, emigration, properly regulated, and accompanied by sufficient assurance of profitable employment and fair treatment, seems a thing to be encouraged on grounds of humanity, with a view to promote the well-being of the poorer classes; we may also consider, from an imperial point of view, the great advantage which must result from peopling the warmer British possessions which are rich in natural resources and only want population, by an intelligent and industrious race to whom the climate of these countries is well suited, and to whom the culture of the staples suited to the soil, and the modes of labour and settlement, are adapted. In this view also it seems proper to encourage emigration from India to the colonies well fitted for an Indian population.

He then went on to suggest a number of ways in which the Government of India might intervene directly to encourage and facilitate indentured emigration and reduce its various deficiencies. He urged it to exercise direct control over the type of emigrants recruited by allowing the authorities in India to 'help and counsel' the colonial agents and, in times of difficulty, to even recruit labourers themselves. Salisbury further suggested that the Government of India should be responsible for the execution of the contracts the labourers had entered into in the colonies. This it could do by appointing its own officials there. The last paragraph of his despatch, which clearly shows that Salisbury intended permanent settlement and colonisation, read:

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

These words have acquired a particular significance in Fiji and are perhaps the most misquoted and misinterpreted in its political history. Fiji Indian politicians have long regarded it as the charter of equal rights for the Indian population of Fiji, equal in spirit and intent, they point out, to the Deed of Cession which promised the paramountcy of Fijian interests when Fiji was ceded to Great Britain in 1874.<sup>47</sup> The despatch did not specifically apply to or mention Fiji by name: indeed, when it was written, Indian emigration to Fiji had not yet begun. More generally, it is clear that the promise of equal treatment was conditional upon the acceptance of all of the proposed arrangements. As we shall shortly see, the Government of India declined to do this, thereby



invalidating the offer. Nevertheless, as Gillion has rightly noted, 'the intention of the British Government was that the Indians who went to the colonies should be allowed to settle permanently and should be treated as full citizens'.<sup>48</sup>

The Government of India referred Salisbury's despatch to all the provincial governments from which indentured emigration took place. With the exception of Bengal, all the other provinces were against that acceptance of the proposals. The Bombay Government disapproved of them on the grounds that emigration brought loss of revenue; the Madras Government feared that acceptance could be misconstrued to imply the desire on the part of the government to promote the interests of the colonial planters at the expense of India; while the North-West Provinces Government doubted if active encouragement would, in fact, provide the type of emigrants the colonies wanted.<sup>49</sup> For its part, the Government of India notified the provincial governments that *bona fide* emigration should not be discouraged: on the contrary, 'it should receive the countenance which the legislative and executive action of the Government has signified that it should have.'<sup>50</sup>

Beyond that, however, it did not want to involve itself. 'Our policy', the Government of India told the Secretary of State for India in 1871, 'may be described as one of seeing fair play between the parties to a commercial transaction, while the Government altogether abstains from mixing itself in the bargain.'<sup>51</sup> It gave its reasons. The Government of India stood little to gain from direct intervention, for indentured emigration had an 'infinitesimal effect' on the population of the districts where it was most popular. Moreover, direct involvement would put the Government in the delicate position of having to reconcile

the conflicting interests of the colonies and of the emigrants, which 'it would be impossible to discharge in a satisfactory manner.' But perhaps the most important reason was internal security, the apprehension that, if the Government was identified as being too involved in matters relating to indentured emigration, the responsibility for the abuses and atrocities of the recruitment process would be transferred to its shoulders. It was this reason which prompted the Government of India to abolish the indenture system in 1916 — when it had become a popular political issue in the hands of moral and political activists such as C.F. Andrews — despite vociferous protests from the colonies.

Thus, throughout much of the period of indentured emigration, the Government of India let its citizens depart from judicious dispassion. Some scholars, such as Panchanan Saha, have asserted that India 'was following the policy on emigration matters formulated in the colonial office', and that in doing so, it was neglecting the 'true interests of common people'.<sup>52</sup> What has been said above should effectively counter such assertions, for as we have seen in the notable example of Lord Salisbury's despatch, the Government of India, after consultation with the provincial governments, followed its own course. Its policy on indentured emigration cannot be seen as callous indifference: throughout the entire period, it had attempted to enact measures intended to mitigate abuses in the indenture system. Its efforts did not always meet with as much success as the critics would have liked, but fact remains that colonial interests, at least in emigration matters, were not allowed to supersede the interests of India. For when gross transgressions of labourers' rights took place in the colonies, emigration was stopped, and not resumed until adequate assurances for the protection of the labourers had been given.<sup>53</sup> Was

indentured emigration detrimental to the 'true interests of people' of India — as Saha has contended and as Indian capitalists argued at the time? If by this is meant that indentured emigration took away labour needed in various industrial enterprises in India, then it was not. In terms of numbers, indentured emigration was hardly ever significant enough to constitute a drain on the labour force. The new colonisation or resettlement schemes were not (or could not have been) affected, for the type of people required for their success — 'cultivators with some small capital and accustomed to independent enterprise'<sup>54</sup> — were not emigrating to the colonies. The colonial emigrants were, in the main, 'labourers, dependent for their support upon cultivating classes'.<sup>55</sup> And furthermore, as we shall see in Chapter 5, colonial and internal recruitments were, by and large, centered in different regions of the subcontinent so that there was little conflict of interest or purpose.

As a result of the voluminous correspondence between India, Great Britain and the colonies, the whole question of colonial emigration was opened up once again in the 1880s. Two enquiries into the working of the system of recruitment were instituted, under Major D.G. Pitcher in the United Provinces,<sup>56</sup> and under G.A. Grierson in Bihar.<sup>57</sup> They uncovered a number of defects, with the result that further reforms were instituted, and these were incorporated into the Emigration Act XXII of 1882. This governed indentured emigration, with minor modifications in 1908, until the abolition of the indenture system in 1916. It is appropriate now to examine in some detail how the system worked in India. This is made possible because the second phase of indentured emigration is very closely documented, and the records are easily available. It is possible to judge assertions of officials and

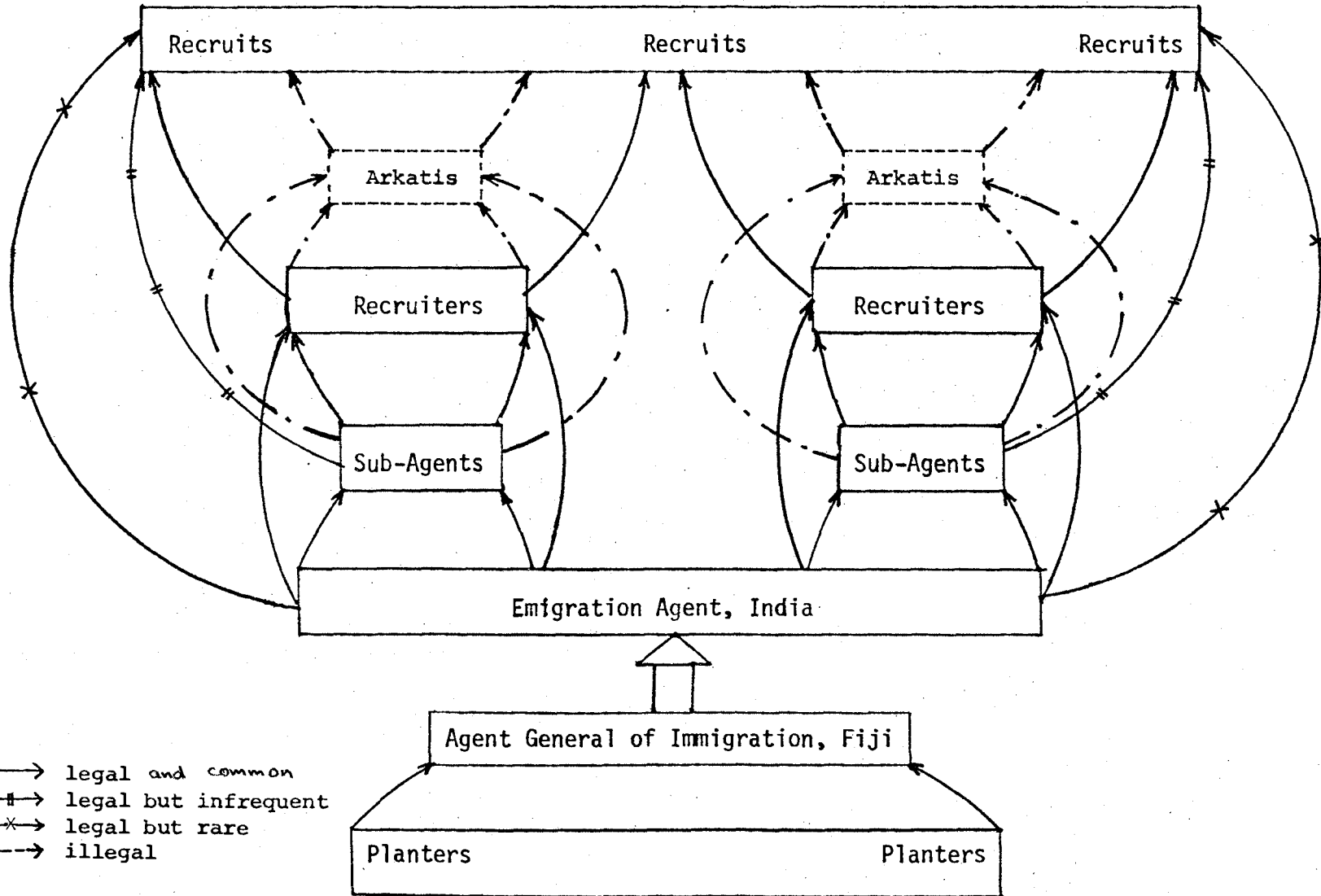
other contemporary observers against concrete evidence, in a way it was not possible to do for the first phase which is much more sparsely documented. A schematic representation of the structure of the recruitment process is provided on the next page.

Embarkation of indentured emigrants was restricted by the Emigration Act to the ports of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, and abolished altogether from the French ports. Each Indian labour importing colony was required to appoint an Emigration Agent, usually one of its officials, on fixed salary, to be based at the port of embarkation. However, because the recruiting season for the various colonies varied, one Emigration Agent usually represented a number of them. Thus for much of the late nineteenth century, there were only two British emigration agencies in Calcutta. One recruited for British Guiana and Natal, while the other one was shared between Trinidad, Mauritius, Fiji, Jamaica and, occasionally, by the smaller West Indian colonies of Grenada, St. Vincents and St. Lucia. Surinam, being a Dutch colony, had its own agency.

The Emigration Agent himself recruited rarely, except when the recruit was found in the vicinity of the depot, or when he presented himself for registration in Calcutta; usually he forwarded the requisition from the colonies to the sub-agents up-country. The social origins of the sub-agents cannot be ascertained with any accuracy. However, Major Pitcher found that in the UP a number of them were Jews, and in Bihar, Grierson found most of them to be former recruiters who had 'shown aptitude for the work', and who were able 'to meet the swindling tendency of recruiters by a thorough knowledge of their practices'.<sup>58</sup> There were also some European sub-agents, among the most prominent being Messrs Bird and Company which operated in Allahabad in the 1870s.

DIAGRAM I

The System of Recruitment of Indian Indentured Emigrants



Some sub-agents, such as those for Trinidad, were paid by a fixed salary,<sup>59</sup> supplemented by a commission to cover the expenses of collection, registration, accommodation, lodging and transportation of the recruits to the port of embarkation. The commission was paid only if the recruits actually embarked for the colonies, while the cost of repatriation to their districts of those who changed their mind or were rejected at the port of embarkation, had to be borne by the sub-agent. The British Guiana agency did not pay its sub-agents a fixed salary but gave them a higher rate of commission, supplemented at the end of the season by a bonus per 100 emigrants embarked for the colonies. Thus while the existence of commercialism may have induced a temptation to corruption, it also enjoined vigilance on the part of the sub-agent who stood to lose the most if the emigrants did not embark. The commission varied from place to place, depending upon the proximity of the place of recruitment to Calcutta (or other ports of embarkation), as well as over time. Another factor was the availability of recruits. In 1886, rates for men and children varied between Rs.17 - Rs.23, while for women they ranged from Rs.24 - Rs.34. In Allahabad in 1882, the sub-agents were paid Rs.28 for women and Rs.18 for men; in 1905, the rates had increased to Rs.40 for men and Rs.55 for women, and these remained more or less constant till the end.<sup>60</sup>

The sub-agents appointed and employed recruiters<sup>61</sup> although in theory the recruiters were to be directly responsible to the Emigration Agent. However, the recruiters were licensed by the Protector of Emigrants upon the recommendation of the Emigration Agent. The license was for the period of one year, and for it to be operative, it had to be countersigned by the magistrate of the district where the

recruiters intended to work. Their remuneration varied depending upon the colony they worked for. In the case of French colonies, bona fide recruiters were paid by a fixed salary, while those who worked for Guiana were paid partly by salary and partly by commission. Thus Ghura Khan, British Guiana Sub-Agent at Buxar, paid his recruiters Rs.5 - Rs.8 per month, besides Rs.5 for males and Rs.8 for females.<sup>62</sup> In Allahabad in the 1880s, recruiters received only commissions, without salary, of Rs.6 for men and Rs.8 for women, which by 1912 had increased to Rs.6 - Rs.9 for men and Rs.18 - Rs.20 for women.<sup>63</sup> These amounts may seem meagre today, but at the time they compared favourably with the average wage of unskilled labourers of two to four annas per day.

The critics of the indenture system, including government officials, reserved some of their harshest words for the recruiter. He was generally regarded as the 'scum of the earth',<sup>64</sup> 'low class, unscrupulous in his methods', 'by no means respectable and not likely to have much scruples where money is to be made'.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, sometimes the district magistrate cancelled a licence or refused to renew it because the recruiter was 'not respectable looking' or because he happened to be a Chamar.<sup>66</sup>

Who were the recruiters? Data on their social origins for the first half of indentured emigration is not readily available, though scattered sources indicate that many recruiters were Muslims, a few of high status, and higher caste Hindus.<sup>67</sup> For the second half, we are on firmer ground. The following Table, constructed on the basis of data in the *Register of Recruiters for the Benares District for the Decade 1882-1892*,<sup>68</sup> shows that the recruiters came from all strata of Indian society, though with surprisingly little contribution from the low

TABLE III

Caste/Social Background of the Recruiters in the Benares Region,  
1882-1892

<i>Name</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>No.</i>
Muslim	169	Bhur	3
Bania	67	Pahari	3
Kayasth	33	Barhai	3
Pathan	19	Bind	2
Halwai	18	Gowala	2
Brahman	17	Fakir	2
Thakur	16	Jew	2
Chattri	13	Patwa	2
Gadariya	13	Rajwar	2
Sheik	13	Saiyid	2
Lalla	12	Kurmi	1
Chamar	12	Kori	1
Kunbi	12	Moghul	1
Ahir	10	Sweeper	1
Bhuya	10	Hajam	1
Christian	10	Kalwar	1
Kahar	10	Bengali	1
Koeri	7	Not known	11
Nonia	5		
		<u>Total:</u>	507

castes. As can be seen, the largest numbers were provided by Muslims who — including Pathans, Sheiks, Saiyids, Moghuls, and Hajams — accounted for 205 or 40.4 per cent of the recruiters. The preponderance of Muslim recruiters in a largely Hindu area, recruiting mainly Hindu emigrants is a puzzle; perhaps the Hindus were not averse to being recruited by Muslims. Their higher numbers may have been a result of their urban residence, dating from Moghul times, as well as <sup>their</sup> high literacy



rates. Among Hindus, the largest number of recruiters came from Baniyas and Kayasths who together provided 19.7 per cent of the total, with 9 per cent originating from Brahmans, Thakurs and Chattris. It has to be emphasised that caste status by itself does not tell us much about a person's character or his moral scruples. It is quite possible that high caste recruiters were unscrupulous and deceitful in their dealings with the recruits. But the above data does throw some doubt on conventional assertions about their social origins.

Most of the recruiters were males who conducted their own operations. Nevertheless in many cases the recruiters, preoccupied with their normal activities, also employed unlicensed agents called *arkatis*. These were mostly males. They were employed where there were few recruiters or where the prospects of obtaining sufficient number of recruits appeared slim. Again, little is known about these people. In the UP, Pitcher found the *arkatis* to be *chaukidars* (guards) and *patwaris* (record keepers) who availed themselves of the opportunity of making a few rupees by turning in 'troublesome characters'.<sup>69</sup> In Bihar, Grierson found that *arkatis* came from all castes. Some of them had been engaged in recruiting for a long time, while others were shopkeepers, peons, domestic servants, cloth sellers and even labourers.<sup>70</sup>

Many of the emigrants were registered outside their districts of origin, as we shall see in Chapter 5. Thus they had already left their homes before they encountered the recruiters. But the recruiters were also afraid of making frequent incursions into the villages for fear of being beaten up by the servants of the local zamindars who saw them as taking away cheap labour, thereby lessening their grip on rural society.

The villagers themselves were not averse to wielding the *lathi* when they heard news of fraud and deceit practised upon their friends and relatives. Then there was the constant interference of the police officials who exercised greater influence in the villages than they did in the cities. One sub-agent in Bihar, Badri Sahu, said that 'when he recruits men of respectable castes, the police find their way into the depot and turn them out, saying that the Government is going to make Christians out of them, and that they would be eaten up by maggots and leeches.'<sup>71</sup> And in the UP, a recruiter complained that the 'mofussil police give us great trouble and annoyance by entering our depots and trying to intimidate the coolies into confessions against us.'<sup>72</sup> Apart from social and religious reasons, police interference was also a result of their resentment against having to conduct detailed, time-consuming enquiries into the background of those emigrants who came under the suspicion of registration officials. Speaking generally about the recruiters and their activities, Grierson, in an otherwise critical report, remarked that

I think that recruiters suffer from a good deal of false suspicion ... I heard many criticisms on the recruiters in the course of my tour, and, with few exceptions, they were the reverse of favourable. Such strong terms, as 'scum of the earth' applied to the recruiters generally, made one pause and think; but I invariably found that this bad opinion arose from too hasty generalization. The notice of a district officer is drawn to cases in which one or two black sheep were concerned, and he hastily concludes that all recruiters belong to the same flock.<sup>73</sup>

He went on to add that 'a great part of any deterioration which they have undergone is due to the way they are treated by Government officials'.

Pitcher also found

that the recruiter, though occasionally guilty of mal-practices in the exercise of what is looked upon by a number of people as not a very reputable calling, has

to contend with many unnecessary difficulties, that he is frequently impeded in most objectionable ways by the police and the underlings of the Court ...<sup>74</sup>

In view of the above, one must treat with some skepticism the picture painted by C.F. Andrews and other contemporary observers of the recruiters as aggressive and adventurous people who always terrorised villages into acquiescence and whom villagers had to bribe to keep the peace.<sup>75</sup>

Recruiting for the colonies was a vast, well-organised operation and, as the Table below shows, there were very few years indeed when there were not upwards of 500 recruiters at work.

TABLE IV <sup>76</sup>

Colonial Recruiting Licenses Granted and Cancelled

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number Granted</i>	<i>Number Cancelled</i>	<i>Percentage Cancellation</i>	<i>Number Recruited</i>	<i>Average No. per Recruiter</i>
1880-1	559	11	2.0	15,430	27.6
1881-2	452	14	3.1	11,539	25.5
1887	345	3	0.9	6,882	19.9
1888	511	4	0.8	10,325	20.2
1889	717	15	2.1	16,813	23.4
1890	768	20	2.6	23,813	30.0
1891	1,003	22	2.2	25,613	25.5
1892	857	2	0.2	17,225	20.1
1893	866	8	0.9	15,046	17.4
1894	1,023	6	0.6	26,707	26.1
1895	838	13	1.6	17,315	20.7
1896	755	12	1.6	16,439	21.8
1897	539	3	0.6	12,315	22.8
1898	701	27	3.9	9,334	13.3
1899	801	43	5.4	14,051	17.5
1900	1,088	27	2.5	18,489	17.0
1902	1,415	37	2.6	13,807	9.8

In at least three years, their numbers exceeded 1,000. A number of other features are clear from the Table. For instance, over the years there was a gradual increase in the number of licenses granted to recruiters. This may be attributed to the difficulty in obtaining the requisitioned number of recruits in certain years. The late 1890s and early 1900s were a period of relative economic prosperity in the United Provinces<sup>77</sup> which provided the bulk of the emigrants, and in these times Indians naturally expressed a reluctance to migrate. Consequently greater efforts were required to fill the quota. The sharp increase in the percentage of licenses cancelled after 1898 may indicate that the recruiters had to resort to questionable practices to collect a sufficient number of recruits. This is in contrast to the situation between 1892-7 when fewer licenses were cancelled. Again this is understandable in the light of the fact that these were years of drought, scarcity and famine, when distressed peasants sought any alternative to alleviate their grim conditions. Thus there seems to be a correlation between the difficulty in recruiting and economic conditions prevalent in the region from where the emigrants came. One of the most remarkable features of the Table, however, is the surprisingly low percentage of cancellations of the recruiters' licenses. The critics would explain it as the result of the inefficient and corrupt administration of the indenture system in India. They would argue that the cases of fraud and deceit which reached the officials were only the 'tip of the iceberg'. Perhaps. But in the context of the general thrust of the argument developed here, and in view of the long history of indentured emigration, it could be suggested that the elaborate machinery set up to govern recruitment was in fact effective, and that (perhaps) cases of fraud were low, certainly much lower than

appears from impressionistic and oral evidence.

For what type of offences were licenses cancelled? Each year the Protector of Emigrants gave the reasons — and those for 1902 were most comprehensive:<sup>78</sup>

1. Two for providing unsuitable accommodation.
2. One for absence, owing to illness, of the recruiter from the district for which he held a license.
3. One for endeavouring to obtain a license from an agency when he already held a license for another.
4. One for keeping a married woman against her husband's wish.
5. Three for suspicious conduct in connection with the recruitment of emigrants.
6. One for recruiting in a district in which he was forbidden to collect emigrants.
7. Two for having put forward a man to represent another who did not wish to emigrate.
8. One cancelled at recruiter's wish.
9. Five for supplying emigrants to other agencies other than those for which they were licensed.
10. Three for conducting recruiting operations in districts other than those for which they were licensed.
11. One for an offence under Section 420 of P.C. (Police Code?).
12. Four for being considered by the magistrate to be men of suspicious character.
13. Two for providing a woman for registration under a wrong description.
14. One for being without sufficient means to carry on his work.
15. Two for inducing a minor girl to emigrate.
16. Three for recruiting emigrants prior to having their licenses countersigned.
17. Two for misleading a woman and keeping the sub-depot register carelessly.

From this list, one gets the impression that abuses for which licenses were cancelled were of a general nature, abuses which (it would seem) would be present in any system of labour recruitment. In seven cases, for example, licenses were cancelled because of *suspicion* (the nature of which is not specified) about the character of the recruiters or the way they conducted their business. In this one gets glimpses of how arbitrarily those in authority dealt with the recruiters.

Once the recruiters had collected a few recruits, they took them to the sub-depot which was run by the sub-agent. The sub-depot was normally a large *pucca* house, with special arrangements made for the accommodation of emigrants.<sup>79</sup> The building was very much like the average houses in the villages, though occasionally wanting in privacy and sanitation, especially for females. Once the recruits had entered their domain, the sub-agents and their employees aimed to keep them *khush* (happy) and in good health. Food was plentiful and free, for the sub-agents had to ensure that those who presented themselves before the registration officials appeared physically fit for manual labour. To avoid violating caste scruples, the recruits were allowed to cook their own food which was bought from the local *bania*. In cold weather, they were provided with blankets. In some cases, strict control was exercised on the mobility of the recruits, lest they come in contact with people outside, change their mind and bolt. But total *bandish* (confinement) could not be imposed, not for any noble reasons but for self-preservation: sub-agents feared public reprisal, even a riot, if it was discovered that people were kept against their will. In Bankipur district in Bihar, a sub-agent for Mauritius was falsely implicated in such a charge, which led to a police raid on the sub-depot. A long court

case ensued which effectively ruined the sub-agent.<sup>80</sup>

But there were other more subtle ways of applying pressure on recalcitrant recruits. The sub-agents and the recruiters would often remind the recruit that he had eaten their salt, and therefore, was obliged to proceed. At least one emigrant to Fiji recalled this to be the reason for his migration.<sup>81</sup> Others who expressed an unwillingness to migrate were told to pay back money spent on them. An official recounted an imagined conversation between the sub-agent and an unwilling recruit:

Very well, you are at a perfect liberty to return but I have a little bill against you for road expenses, and as you have no money, I must have your *lotah* and *dupattah* – and anything else that will procure a refund of the amount I have expended.<sup>82</sup>

But sometimes also, things happened the other way around. In the UP, an official noted that 'if on the one hand there is a great agency for oppression, there is on the other a temptation to consent, get money or food, and then refuse to go'.<sup>83</sup>

In the waiting period in the depot which could last for up to a fortnight, the recruits were sometimes given medical examination by one of the agency's travelling medical inspectors. Those thought to be hopeless cases were rejected and presumably they returned to their villages at their own expense; others remained in the sub-depot until a reasonable number had been collected. Then they were taken to the district civil surgeon for medical examination after which they were presented to the sub-divisional magistrate for registration. Here the sub-agents and recruits had their first encounter with emigration officials. Clerks had to be bribed to get early registration: failure to do so could result in disaster, for the contingent could be made to

wait for days and even weeks. The recruits had to be shielded from petty Indian officials, especially of high castes, who frequently abused and taunted them. And finally, they had to be schooled to give proper answers. Sometimes the interview began and ended with only one question, 'Are you going willingly?' Sometimes the recruits were rejected because of vague suspicion. Here is an example from the *Benares Register of Emigrants*, 1890: 'Inspected the sub-depot today — only one female cooly admitted this morning. She has got a little jewel on her, hence her case seems suspicious. Rejected.'<sup>84</sup>

By the time the recruits passed through the sub-depot and had been registered, an average of 18 per cent of the original entrants were rejected for reasons listed in Table V. A number of features are clear in the Table. Looking at yearly variation, it is clear that the largest percentage of reductions took place in the mid-1890s. These, as we noted above, were years of scarcity and famine in many parts of the UP, and it is more than likely that a large number of those brought before the district civil surgeons and registration officials would have included emaciated unfortunates who were naturally rejected. On the other hand, 1899 and 1900 were years of relative prosperity when the percentage of unfit recruits brought for registration would have been lower. Rejection for unfitness accounted for the largest percentage of reduction, and this again was more marked in the scarcity years. What the precise causes of unfitness were — disease, poor eyesight, physical deformities — are not known. Another striking feature is the prominence of those who deserted the sub-depot. The deserters may have included those who were initially tricked into the sub-depot, and escaped at the earliest opportunity. It may also have included those who changed their minds and decided to return to the village. This was not



TABLE V <sup>85</sup>Deductions at Sub-Depot Before Despatch to Calcutta

<i>Causes</i>	<i>Years</i>							Total	%
	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1899	1900		
No. at depot from previous year	90	380	400	118	176	258	514	1,936	
New registrations	15,046	26,707	17,315	16,439	12,315	14,051	18,419	120,362	
Infants born in sub-depot	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	3	
Total Recruits to be a/c	15,136	27,087	17,717	16,558	12,491	14,309	19,003	122,301	
Died	7	14	10	9	2	6	2	50	0.2
Deserted	343	963	600	592	460	145	338	3,441	15.3
Left behind/detained	54	221	194	-	-	3	-	472	2.1
Rejected as unfit	1,464	3,181	2,176	2,611	1,442	892	724	12,490	55.7
Unwilling	79	154	330	369	60	104	120	1,216	5.4
Claimed by relatives	90	140	83	292	58	102	71	836	3.7
Transferred to other depots	3	412	81	2	15	-	457	970	4.3
Surplus	25	-	-	188	557	542	1,487	2,799	12.5
Rejected because relation rejected, unwilling, etc.	33	41	-	-	83	-	-	157	0.7
Total Number Rejected	2,098	5,126	3,474	4,063	2,677	1,794	3,199	22,431	18.3
% of Total Rejected	13.9	18.9	19.6	24.5	21.4	12.5	16.8	-	-

difficult to do as the recruits still were on familiar terrain.

Those who were passed then did their *chalan* (journey) to the port of embarkation. Depending on the distance between the sub-depot and the main depot, weather and transport arrangements, the journey might take anything from a week to a fortnight or more. The batch was accompanied by the recruiter — who was required to have a special certificate for the purpose. Sometimes, the recruiter delegated this task to his deputy or to the *chaprasis* (assistants) of the sub-depot, and himself set out in search of more recruits. Part of the journey was completed on foot and part of it by rail. Throughout, the recruits were provided food, blankets and other necessities by the recruiter or his deputies. Further reductions in the number of recruits took place on the journey, the percentage varying from 1.3 in 1895 to as low as 0.1 in 1897.<sup>86</sup> Desertions accounted for most of them.

Upon landing in Calcutta (as our emigrants did) the batch encountered further harassment: more palms had to be greased and more *baksheesh* was needed. In 1882 in Calcutta, the police demanded four annas for each recruit and a rupee for the man in charge. At the Howrah bridge, the constables had to be paid if the recruits were to cross it unharassed. In 1894, an incident showed what could happen if the conventions were not followed: the police stood idly by as railway workers rushed the recruits, resulting in the loss of 106 of them.<sup>87</sup>

Having crossed the bridge, the recruits were taken to the Emigration Depot at Garden Reach. These were usually shared between different colonies at different times, but this did not create problems of accommodation, as the recruiting seasons for the different colonies varied — to ensure that ships avoided bad weather on the various routes.

The buildings varied in size and structural layout, though each Depot was required to have a number of facilities stipulated in the Emigration Act.<sup>88</sup> First of all there was a Reception Shed set apart from the others for the examination of freshly arrived recruits. Those recruits who were passed there by the medical officers were then taken to the Accommodation Depot. Single males and females were kept separate, and efforts were made to keep together married couples and others with families. Each person, whether an adult or a child, was given a platform space of 12 'superficial feet' wide and six feet square in the Accommodation Depot. Cooking sheds with brick or mud plastered walls and tiled floors were situated at a distance, as were separate latrines for men and women. Each Agency had separate Hospital Sheds for treatment of ordinary diseases, Observation Sheds for suspected cases, and Segregation Sheds for the treatment of contagious diseases; and each of these had separate wards for males and females. Besides these, there was an Inspection Shed for mustering the emigrants for various purposes including, whenever necessary, for their feeding.

Soon after their arrival at Garden Reach, the Emigration Agent arranged for the recruits to be examined by the Medical Inspector whose main duty included ascertaining whether they were physically fit for five years of hard manual labour in the colonies. If satisfied, he gave a certificate for embarkation to the Emigration Agent, and if not, he notified the Protector of Emigrants. The Protector and his deputies interviewed all the recruits and if they discovered some irregularities, or found that the recruits for some valid reason did not want to emigrate, they ordered the Agent to pay them reasonable compensation as well as arrange their free repatriation to the place of registration. Those who, through illness or other crisis, could not embark on their return

journey immediately, were sent to a separate shed for convalescence until they were fit to return.

During the waiting period in the depot, a further reduction in the number of recruits took place, as is shown in Table VI. It is clear from the figures that, on the average, a little more than three-quarters of the recruits who were admitted to the depot finally embarked for the colonies. This proportion is much lower when compared to the number of recruits who were brought to the sub-depot up-country: in 1894 only 58.8 per cent of the original recruits finally boarded the ship, in 1895 60.3 per cent, in 1896 61.5 per cent, in 1897 60.8 per cent, in 1899 65.5 per cent, and in 1900 61.4 per cent. That is, on the average, 40 per cent of those originally recruited did not embark. The causes of the rejections are clearly indicated in the Table. Much of what has been said in relation to the reduction taking place at the sub-depot applies here as well. However, some features call for comment. The figure of 41 per cent for rejection for unfitness seems inordinately high. The reasons for this are difficult to ascertain as our sources do not go beyond giving statistical aggregates. It may have happened that recruits contracted disease or were otherwise disabled between the time they left the sub-depots and the time they were brought before the medical inspectors at the Emigration Depot. Perhaps also the authorities at the sub-depot exercised less vigilance than did those at Calcutta. The highest number of rejections for unfitness took place in the early-mid 1890s, years of distress when there was little difficulty in filling the requisition from the colonies. Those who did not emigrate because their relations were rejected or expressed an unwillingness to proceed further or remained behind for other reasons,

TABLE VI <sup>89</sup>History of Emigrants Between Arrival at Depot and Departure for Colonies

	1881-2	1888	1889	1891	1894	1895	1896	1897	1899	1900	Total	%
Total no. accom. in depot	11,162	9,412	14,814	21,101	21,181	14,584	12,796	9,809	12,213	15,465	142,537	-
Died	64	59	108	141	109	41	33	26	39	131	751	2.7
Deserted	484	249	426	348	559	201	133	69	343	412	3,224	11.8
Rejected as unfit	590	703	1,236	2,057	1,602	1,516	1,145	742	728	932	11,251	41.2
Unwilling	125	144	62	91	226	149	83	56	215	397	1,548	5.7
Claimed by relatives	62	49	79	52	105	36	26	11	63	139	622	2.3
Not emig. on acc. of relation (rejected, unwilling, etc.)	54	264	580	1,013	554	522	337	145	155	218	3,842	14.1
Transferred to other agencies, rejected, unwilling, etc.	155	175	178	707	306	280	204	261	390	197	2,853	10.4
Surplus	38	51	265	277	238	264	319	124	438	469	2,483	9.1
Released from engagement	-	4	17	17	47	17	2	2	62	135	303	1.1
Proceeded to colonies as passengers	-	5	43	17	2	2	8	1	2	-	90	0.3
Sent to hospitals outside	-	-	-	-	86	44	54	116	10	59	369	1.3
Total reduction	1,572	1,713	2,994	4,720	3,834	3,072	2,344	1,553	2,445	3,089	27,336	
% Reduction	14.1	18.2	20.2	22.4	18.1	21.1	18.3	15.8	20.0	20.0	-	19.2

constituted the second largest group or those who in the end did not emigrate. However, over the years, there was a progressive decline in the importance of this factor. In 1891, for instance, this accounted for 21.5 per cent of the total reduction, in 1895 17.0 per cent and in 1900, 6.4 per cent. This trend is related to the discouragement of family migration after 1890 by the Fiji government because planters persistently complained of feeding and clothing 'uneconomic' families. (See Chapter 8). Desertion was the third most important cause of the reductions. The desertion figures for the Main Depot in Calcutta were lower for all the years except 1899 and 1900 than the figures for the sub-depots. Thus in 1894, the sub-depot desertion figure was 19 per cent, compared to 14.6 per cent at the Main Depot in 1895 17 per cent and 6.5 per cent, in 1896 15 per cent and 5.6 per cent and in 1897 17 per cent and 4.4 per cent. In the absence of any data other than statistical, we can only speculate on the causes of desertion. Perhaps the deserters included those who were tricked by the recruiters and the sub-agents and decided to get away before they were taken to some place to which they did not intend to go. But perhaps also they may have been shrewd men and women who got enlisted as potential colonial migrants knowing from the very start that they would abscond in Calcutta. This view is not entirely implausible given that in the late and early twentieth centuries large numbers of people from the UP were increasingly finding employment in Calcutta and its industrial suburbs (Chapter 5). A free trip would save them a few valuable rupees.

Those recruits who had been passed by the medical authorities and had obtained their necessary papers, had to spend a compulsory period of seven days in the depot before they could embark the ships.

The waiting period could, however, be extended to several weeks if the ships did not arrive in time or if requisite quotas had not been filled. During this time, the recruits were encouraged to do light work such as keeping the sheds clean and gardens and grounds in order.<sup>89</sup> Games and amusements were encouraged, a useful tactic to keep the recruits away from melancholy and depression. The new life fostered a sense of companionship and togetherness that cut across barriers of religion, caste, and place of origin. The old, hierarchically organised and seemingly divinely pre-ordained world of the villages, and the tenacity of social bonds forged through many years of communal existence, were proving fragile and vulnerable. Social barriers were impossible to maintain. Commensal taboos gradually broke down as all had to eat food cooked by unknown *bhandaris* (cooks). The process of fragmentation — for it was not abrupt disintegration — of the old world was aided by the attitude of the authorities who viewed all the recruits simply as 'coolies'. But along with this was taking place the process of reconstitution where new ideas, new values and new associations were being formed. The recruits soon realised that success, even survival, in the world ahead depended more on individual enterprise than on one's ascribed status. They would realise fully the validity of this truth on the plantations in Fiji.

The above discussion has highlighted a number of features of indentured emigration from India which we may summarise here. Indians were imported into the various colonies to meet the shortage of labour supply caused by the abolition of slavery, after attempts to obtain labour

from other sources had failed. In the very early years, few legislations were enacted to govern the recruitment and transportation of the labourers, a situation which improved markedly with time, especially after the 1880s. The Government of India, despite its official policy of non-involvement in migration matters, did in time assume the role of a dispassionate participant as can be seen in the enactment of a number of measures directed to lessen evils present in the system of commercialised recruitment of indentured labour. The 'system' set up did in fact work, if not always to the satisfaction of its opponents. The recruiters were not invariably 'low caste' characters and the apparently overworked bureaucrats not always callous and indifferent. All this is not to deny the existence of irregularities and misrepresentations in the collection of recruits; no system of labour recruitment, however well regulated, could ever be entirely free of them. But it is all a matter of degree. Our contention is that the abuses would appear to have been exaggerated. The emigrants who finally boarded the ships at Calcutta were, perhaps, unaware of what they would eventually encounter in the colonies, but they were not mere simpletons who were invariably tricked into emigrating by the recruiters. Later in the study we shall discuss the forces which created the conditions for their emigration. But our concern in the next chapter is to look closely into the question of which parts of the Indian subcontinent (precisely) the indentured emigrants came from.



NOTES

- 1 Some Indian labourers were imported into Mauritius and Bourbon before the 1830s, but this was done on an *ad hoc* basis and the numbers were not significant. See *PP* vol.XXIV (1875), p.26.
- 2 H.L. (Emigration). A Pros.14, 8 May 1847, NAI. See also *PP* vol.XXXVII (1840), p.459; D.W.D. Comins, *Note on Emigration from the East Indies to British Guiana* (Calcutta, 1893), p.5; W. Kloosterboer, *Involuntary Labour Since the Abolition of Slavery* (Leiden, 1960), p.4 ff; W.L. Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the British West Indies* (London, 1937).
- 3 Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in British Guiana* (London, 1950), pp. 6-7.
- 4 Panchanan Saha, *Emigration of Indian Labour, 1834-1900* (New Delhi, 1970), p.9.
- 5 Christine Bolt, *The Anti-Slavery Movement and Reconstruction* (London, 1969), p.18.
- 6 I.M. Cumpston, *Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834-1854* (London, 1953), p.12.
- 7 Saha, *Emigration of Indian Labour*, p.12.
- 8 D.W.D. Comins, *Note on Emigration from the East Indies to St. Lucia* (Calcutta, 1893), p.3.
- 9 K.O. Laurence, *Immigration into the West Indies in the Nineteenth Century* (Kingston, 1971), p.9.
- 10 Comins, *St. Lucia*, p.3; *PP*, vol.XXXV (1844), p.316.
- 11 D.W.D. Comins, *Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad* (Calcutta, 1893), p.3.

- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Laurence, *Immigration Into the West Indies*, p.13. See also Fred H. Hitchins, *The Colonial Land and Emigration Commission* (Philadelphia, 1931), p.245 ff.
- 14 Cumpston, *Indians Overseas*, p.55.
- 15 Laurence, op.cit., p.14.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 *PP*, vol.XXIV (1840), p.121: from a copy of a Minute addressed to the members of the Court of Policy, 26 February 1836.
- 18 Laurence, *Immigration Into the West Indies*, p.15.
- 19 *PP*, vol.XXXV (1844), p.551.
- 20 E.P. A Pros.12, August 1883, NAI. See also Saha, *Emigration of Indian Labour*, p.16; Hitchins, *The Colonial Land and Emigration Commission*, p.244 ff.
- 21 *PP*, vol.XXII (1862), p.89. Detailed breakdown for the individual colonies are provided on pp.87-96.
- 22 *PP*, vol.XVI, Sess.I (1841), p.392. A copy of the contract is included as an appendix to this Chapter (Appendix I).
- 23 G.D. (Emigration), Consultation 6, 1837, NAI.
- 24 The main sources of this Table are: G.W. Roberts and J. Byrne, 'Summary Statistics on Indenture and Associated Migration Affecting the West Indies, 1834-1948', *Population Studies* vol.XX, part 1 (July 1966), pp.125-34; J. Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration from India* (Calcutta, 1874); *PP*, vol. LVII (1900), pp. 467-8; E.P. B Pros.1-3, October 1881, NAI; Hugh Tinker, 'Indians Abroad: Emigration, Restriction and Rejection' in Michael Twaddle (ed.),

*Expulsion of a Minority: Essays on Ugandan Asians*, (London, 1975), p.15. It must be noted that the two terminal dates refer to the period of most emigration; there were some years when there was no emigration to some colonies. The figures generally refer to the actual numbers entering the colonies, but in some cases they may also refer to numbers embarking at different ports in India.

- 25 H.L. (Emigration), A Pros. 18/22, 1837, NAI.
- 26 G.D. (Emigration), Consultation 6, 1837, NAI.
- 27 Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration from India*, pp. 433-44.
- 28 *PP*, vol. XVI (1841), p.149.
- 29 G.D. (Emigration), Consultation 2, 1838, NAI.
- 30 *PP*, XVI, Sess.2 (1841), p.287 ff. See also H.P. (Emigration), A Pros.15-20, 4 Nov. 1840, NAI.
- 31 *PP*, vol.XVI, Sess.2 (1841), p.291.
- 32 *Passim*.
- 33 Cumpston, *Indians Overseas in British Territories*, p.35.
- 34 *Ibid*.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p.38.
- 36 *PP*, vol.XXXV (1844), pp.483-8.
- 37 Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration from India*, p.444.
- 38 *Ibid.*, pp.447-8.
- 39 *Ibid*.

- 40 H.P. (Emigration), A Pros.36-8, 17 March 1862; *ibid.*, A Pros.6, 6 September 1861, NAI.
- 41 F.J. Mout, 'Report on the Mortality of Emigrant Coolies to the West Indies', H.P. Consultations, 1 October 1858, NAI. See also Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration from India*, p.454.
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration*, p.467 ff.
- 44 E.P. A Pros.16-43, July 1872, NAI.
- 45 E.P. B Pros.4, July 1872, NAI.
- 46 E.P. A Pros.41-67, May 1881, NAI. See also Cd.5192 (1910), pp.7-10.
- 47 K.L. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants: A History to the end of Indenture in 1920* (Melbourne, rptd. 1973), pp.26-7.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p.27.
- 49 E.P. A Pros.4-29, February 1880, NAI.
- 50 E.P. A Pros.41-67, May 1881, NAI.
- 51 *Ibid.*
- 52 Saha, *Emigration of Indian Labour*, p.155.
- 53 Cd.5192 (1910), p.4.
- 54 *Ibid.*, p.9.
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 E.P. A Pros.43-57, September 1882, NAI.

- 57 E.P. A Pros 12-15, August 1883, NAI.
- 58 See the above two footnotes.
- 59 E.P. A Pros 43-57, September 1882, NAI. An example of a copy of the contract between the Emigration Agent of Trinidad and a sub-agent is enclosed as an appendix to this Chapter, (Appendix II).
- 60 Ibid.; Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, pp.30-1.
- 61 An example of a copy of the contract between a Trinidad sub-agent and his recruiters is appended to this chapter (Appendix III). Derived from E.P. A Pros.43-57, September 1882, NAI.
- 62 E.P. A Pros 12-15, August 1883, NAI.
- 63 E.P. A Pros 43-57, September 1882, NAI.
- 64 See fn.62.
- 65 Miscellaneous File (Emigration), 1/102, 1865, Regional Record Office, Varanasi, UP.
- 66 E.P. A Pros.41-67, May 1881, NAI.
- 67 See fns 65 and 66. In 1865, among the many recruiters operating in Benares were: Mudar Bux, Jainarain, Thomas Wyburn, Bisheshwar, Rahman Ally, Rain Lal, Kisoopersaud, Lalji, Hans Raj, Sheik Mudaree, Khuda Bux, Abdul Khan, Faiz Khan, Sadak Ali, and Sheik Chandoo. In 1871, the following recruiters were working for Messrs Bird and Company: Bundoo, Ram Sarun, Gouree Sunker Choubey, Madho, Mommmed Hossein, Oahed Khan, Shewpersaud, Goroo Churn Dutt, Sheik Sunoo, and Gunga Bissan Mistry.
- 68 The *Register* was found in the Collector's Office, Benares. I am grateful to Dr S.P. Sinha of the Regional Record Office, Varanasi, UP, who helped me to locate it.

- 69 E.P. A Pros.43-57, September 1882, NAI.
- 70 E.P. A Pros.12-15, August 1883, NAI.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 E.P. A Pros.43-57, September 1882, NAI.
- 73 E.P. A Pros.12-15, op.cit.
- 74 E.P. A Pros.43-57, op.cit.
- 75 C.F. Andrews and W.W. Pearson, *Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji: An Independent Enquiry*, (Perth, 1918).
- 76 Data obtained from the PR of the various years listed.
- 77 See next chapter.
- 78 PR, 1902.
- 79 Based on E.P. A Pros.12-15, August 1883; E.P. A Pros.43-57, September 1882; A.H. Hill, 'Emigration from India', *Timheri*, vol.VI (Sept.1919), pp.43-52, and the testimony of some of Fiji's indentured labourers in Ahmed Ali (ed.), *Girmit: The Indenture Experience in Fiji*, (Suva, 1979), pp.1-57.
- 80 E.P. A Pros.12-15, ibid.
- 81 Oral evidence. I am grateful to Mr Rajen Chaudhary for letting me use some of his interviews with indentured labourers from Labasa, Fiji.
- 82 E.P. A Pros.43-57, September 1882, NAI.
- 83 Ibid.

- 84 The *Registers* were found by accident in the Collector's Office, Benares. Arrangements are being made to have them placed in the Regional Record Office, Varanasi. They contain valuable information on recruitment activity at the local level, and could quite easily provide adequate material for a separate study.
- 85 Source: *PR* for the years listed.
- 86 Derived from my analysis of *PR*.
- 87 Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, p.35.
- 88 The following discussion is based on *The Indian Emigration Act XXI of 1883, Rules and Notifications* (Calcutta, 1898); Hill, 'Emigration from India', Ali (ed.), *Girmit*; Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, *passim*.
- 89 This paragraph is based on the testimony of the indentured labourers: see Ali (ed.), *Girmit* for examples.

## APPENDIX I

## INDIAN LABOURER'S PERMIT.

Duffadar Bhuwanny.

No. 152.

I, PEROO, engage to proceed to Mauritius to serve E. Antard, père, or such other person as I may be transferred to (such transfer being made by mutual consent, to be declared before a public officer), as a khidmutgar, for the space of five years from the date of this agreement, on consideration of receiving a remuneration of Company's rupees ten (10) per month, and food and clothing as follows; viz.

14 chittacks rice,	} daily ;	1 blanket	-	} yearly ;
2 " dholl,		2 dhooties	-	
- 1/2 " ghee,		1 chintz mirjacc	-	
- 1/2 " salt,		1 lascar's cap	-	
		1 wooden bowl	-	

also one lotah or brass cup between four persons, and medicine and medical attendance when required; also to be sent back to Calcutta at the expiration of my period of service, free of all expense to myself, should such be my wish, subject to the terms of my general agreement. Executed this day of November 1837.

Peroo, his + mark.

নিম্নিত্ত পিক খেদমতগার কস) একবার পশমিদ° কার্যনধাগে এই একবার পশমের তারিখ অবধি পাঁচ বৎসরের মিয়াদে অথবা তিনি হাকিমের লোকের সাহায্যে ওভয়ের সন্মতি পূর্বক জাহার নিকটে আমাকে শোপবর্দ কবেণ মজুরগীরি চাকরি কবুল কবিল্যাম মাহিনা কোম্পানির ঠাকার হিসাবে পাইব থোবাক পোশাক নিচের নিম্নিত্ত উপশীল মাহিক পাইব

থোবাক প্রতি দিবশ	পোশাক প্রতি বৎসর
চাল) ১৯, চন্দ্রচটাক	কম্বল ১ এক
ডাল) ৯০ দুইচটাক	পুতি ২ দুই
ঘৃত ১০ অর্দ্রচটাক	ছিটেবমুজাই ১ এক
লবন ৫ এককাচা	কাপ্তের বাটী ১ এক

চারি চারি জনে এক তাম্বা কিম্বা পাতলের লোচাকী বাটী পাইব আর জখন দরকার হয় চিকিৎসা এবং ঔষুধ পাইব আর চাকরির মিয়াদ সম্পন্ন হইলে জদি আমি বাসনা করি আমাকে পুনরায় কলিকাতায় আপনার থরচে পৌঁছাইতে হই বেক এই সাধারণ একবারনামার সত্ত্বে মাহিক তাহাতে আমার কিছু থরচ নাগি বেক না ইতি তারিখ

সন ১৮৩৭ সাল

Height, 5 feet 3 inches; age, 28 years; colour, light; particular marks, none; caste Mussulman.

I hereby certify, that this memorandum of contract has been inspected by me, and the contents thereof fully explained to the within named.

(signed)

F. W. Birch,

Supt<sup>r</sup> Calcutta Police.

Calcutta, 20 November 1837.



## APPENDIX II

## TRINIDAD GOVERNMENT EMIGRATION AGENCY, 11, GARDEN REACH

*To**Allahabad*

1. SIR, — You are appointed by the Government of Trinidad a Sub-Agent of Emigration during <sup>\*</sup>this season, subject to the following conditions.

2. Males between the ages of twelve and thirty-five years of age and females between the ages of twelve and thirty, shall be considered statute adults. Two children from two to twelve years shall be deemed equivalent to one male statute adult. Infants under two years old shall not be taken into account.

3. Not less than forty female adults, pursuant to the minimum fixed by the Government of India, must accompany every hundred male adults; where this proportion is not fully maintained the right is reserved of rejecting emigrants, who will be sent back to their homes at the Sub-Agent's expense.

4. You will receive a monthly salary of Rs. , provided the number of statute adult emigrants passed and received into this depôt as eligible monthly does not fall below . In addition to this monthly stipend you will receive a further amount of Rs. 18 for each man and Rs. 28 for each women to cover all expenses contingent on the collection, registration, train hire and way-expenses to the Government Emigration Depot at Garden Reach of each statute adult admitted and passed as eligible for emigration. This allowance, however, will not be granted in the case of an emigrant who declines to emigrate, nor of any who are rejected after admission to the Depôt, and the expenses in connection with the return of such emigrants to their homes will be charged to your account. Where desertions from the depôt occur after five days have expired from the date of admission, Rs. only will be paid in lieu of Rs. and nothing should they occur previously. Five days after the emigrants have been admitted to the depôt and passed, you will receive Rs. on account, and the remaining Rs. after they embark for the colony.

The rail-hire will be paid by means of the "Credit notes" in general use, and debited, as alre[a]dy stated, to your account.

5. I need hardly remind you that you must act in strict accordance with the laws of India, especially No. VII. of 1871, and, above all, to see that your subordinates and recruiters deal fairly and honestly with intending emigrants. The advantages of emigration to Trinidad if clearly set before the people are so manifest, that, apart from the immorality of such a practice, no possible advantage can accrue either to the sub-agent or his subordinates by holding out expectations which they are aware will not be realised, for the intending emigrants are certain to be undeceived by the Agent and the Protector at Calcutta when categorically examined, even if they have failed clearly to realise their prospects when questioned by the Magistrate up-country, before whom they originally appeared to attest their desire to emigrate and have their names enrolled; for should they decline to proceed to the colony, you and your employees will forfeit all claim to any allowance for expenses contingent on collection, registration, and the journey to Calcutta.

6. A *per caput* fee of six annas will be paid for the district medical examination of all emigrants, the services of the District Civil Surgeon being enlisted where practicable. The Surgeon who passes the people will certify the numbers, sex &c., of those whom he has examined on the "foil" and "counterfoil" of the book provided for the purpose, and send the "foil" to the sub-agent for transmission to Calcutta along with the emigrants. The Surgeon will also endorse on the back of the emigrants' certificates whether he considers them eligible or not.

7. Any further instructions or notice it may be considered necessary to issue should receive your immediate attention and be promptly acted on.

8. All recruiting licenses, printed forms, and brass badges will be supplied by the Agency free of charge, but other contingent expenses will be paid by the sub-agent.

## APPENDIX III

## TRINIDAD EMIGRATION SUB-AGENT

Allahabad, ————— 188 .

1st. — I hereby agree to give you a contract for supplying intending emigrants for Trinidad during the season of 1880-81 from the districts and for supervising generally over their registration and other conveniences.

2nd. — When the coolies are gathered by you, not under 10 men, I will have a chalan and you shall give a chalan, and I will have amongst 100 men 40 women, and if women and men are not sent, the rates will be decreased and then you will have to agree upon it, and when your coolies arrive here at Allahabad and are on the station (in the train) and arrive at Calcutta, then whatever may be your rates according to that your money will be "pakka." If any coolies registered by the Doctor or by me run away or die or refuse at the time, the loss of which will be borne by you. Money you shall receive then when I will receive a letter from Calcutta saying all the coolies have arrived here safe : nothing will be paid for those under 10 years of age; over 12 you shall get half rate.

3rd. — Rates for out districts:-

Fatehpur, each man, Rs. 6; each woman, Rs. 8.

Bánda, Mirzapur, and Beylah Partabgarh, the same if you wish to work at Allahabad; out villages the rates will be each man Rs. 6 and each woman Rs. 7; you will receive nothing of those that are under 12 years of age.

4th. — All expenses for recruiting [*sic*], registration, food for coolies, and other expenses up to the time of arrival at the station must be paid by you.

5th. — Strong healthy field labourers are required and all such castes minor, whether male or female under 18 years of age, will not be taken unless accompanied by respectable relatives or (father or mother). No men will be taken of soft hands or weak. "Panjábis" are altogether refused. Men should be recruited of those sort when they agree to be vaccinated and also eat on board of ship.

6th. — When you have taken the license of Trinidad and after which

at any time without my license give the coolies elsewhere or have your license changed or send it by another man, and if made out there, whatever may be the rate of Calcutta I shall take from you: there will be no objection to it at all. Whatever this has been written if not done accordingly with License, and all, whatever may be the loss, it will all be taken from you and you will not hesitate at all.

*Emigration Sub-Agent for Trinidad.*

I agree to the terms and conditions of this agreement.

*Recruiter for Trinidad.*

## CHAPTER 4

## REGIONAL ORIGINS OF THE INDENTURED EMIGRANTS

Indian indentured emigrants to various parts of the world came from widely scattered regions of India. The reason why one colony obtained a greater portion of its labour supply from one region rather than another would seem to depend on a number of interrelated factors, including deliberate acts of policy in India and in the colonies, considerations of expediency, prejudice of the colonial planters against emigrants from certain parts of the subcontinent, and accidents of history. In the case of Fiji, indentured migration was started from South India in response to the difficulty of obtaining a sufficient number of migrants in the North. It seems to have been a similar story for many of the West Indian colonies. However, as it happens, most of the indentured emigrants came from the North, embarking for the colonies at Calcutta. The following Table gives an indication of the contribution of the various regions to indentured emigration.

TABLE I <sup>1</sup>Ports of Embarkation of Indian Indentured Labourers

<i>Years</i>	<i>Calcutta</i>	<i>Madras</i>	<i>Bombay/Karachi</i>	<i>French Ports</i>
1856-61	14,533 (66.5%)	6,479 (29.6%)	860 (3.9%)	- -
1861-70	122,241 (67.5%)	56,356 (31.1%)	2,479 (1.4%)	- -
1870-79	142,793 (78.4%)	19,104 (10.5%)	- -	20,269 (11.1%)
1880/1-89	97,975 (76.0%)	21,653 (16.8%)	- -	9,351 ( 7.2%)
1891/2- 1900/1	106,700 (63.3%)	28,550 (16.9%)	33,343 (19.8%)	- -
1907/8- 1916/17	66,839 (62.3%)	32,369 (30.2%)	8,016 ( 7.5%)	- -

This study is concerned primarily with North Indian indentured emigration to Fiji, but it is important to understand why North India and particularly the United Provinces and not other regions, became the focus of indentured recruitment. This chapter attempts to provide some answers to that question. In doing so, it highlights the contrasts and variations in the patterns and trends of emigration from different regions of the subcontinent.

### South India

South India has probably always been the most migration-prone region of the subcontinent. Even in pre-historic times, its inhabitants were known to have established contacts with other countries, especially those neighbouring India. However, systematic, large-scale emigration of labour from South India had to await the development of European commercial enterprises in the 'Colonies of India System'<sup>2</sup> — Burma, Ceylon and Malaya. These countries were by far the largest importers of South Indian labour. Exact figures on this migration are difficult to ascertain as much of the movement was unregulated and unsupervised, and therefore not well documented, especially in contrast to the indenture system. But an indication of the magnitude and volume of this movement can be gained from the figures available for net migration. In the case of Burma, between 1852 and 1937, 2,595,000 Indian immigrants settled permanently; in the case of Ceylon, between 1834 and 1938, 1,529,000 stayed on in the country; and in Malaya, between 1860 and 1938, this figure was 1,189,000.<sup>3</sup>

The preponderant majority of these South Indian labourers to Burma, Ceylon and Malaya were recruited by middlemen, known as *kanganis* in Malaya and Ceylon and as *maistries* in Burma. The *sardari* system of

labour recruitment for the Assam Tea Gardens was structurally similar to the *kangani* and *maistry* systems. In the case of Ceylon, the middleman system seems to have gained ascendancy from the outset, because of the failure of the indenture system to check desertions of labourers from the estates,<sup>4</sup> but in Malaya, it became prominent in the 1880s and 1890s. The *kangani* labour was popular with the planters because it was cheaper but perhaps more importantly, it was considered free and thus less subject to government control and intervention.<sup>5</sup> After indentured emigration to Malaya ceased in 1910, the *kangani* system became the main source of labour supply until 1938 when the scheme of assisted labour migration to that country was abolished.

The middleman was usually an experienced and trusted employee of the estate or the plantation, who was entrusted with the duty of supplying a requisite amount of labour to his employers.<sup>7</sup> He was despatched to his village with a certain amount of money to pay an advance to the prospective emigrants who were either his village mates or kinsmen, and to cover the expenses of the journey. But the middleman was not merely a recruiter; at work on the plantations, he was also a headman or foreman, acting as a direct link between the labourers and the management. However, the power and influence of the middleman could vary in some measure in the three countries. In Malaya for instance, in contrast to Ceylon, the planters exercised a greater degree of control over the labourers by paying wages directly to them, a practice which could perhaps weaken somewhat the rigid control of the *kangani*; but according to one observer, even there he had 'effective hold on his labourers'.<sup>8</sup> In Burma, the *maistries* and the labour contractors exercised almost total influence over all aspects of emigration, from the recruitment and employment to dismissal of the labourers.<sup>9</sup> There, the

relationship between the employee and the employer was highly impersonal and rigidly structured, a situation which made the *maistry* the sole channel of communication in all matters.

Despite all these variations, however, one thing remained constant: the extreme vulnerability of the labourers and their susceptibility to a variety of coercive pressures from those in authority. It was not always that the middlemen, often people of respectable castes who exercised considerable social influence, abused their position: indeed they could, and did, provide leadership to the mass of illiterate labourers. But the absence of written and legally enforceable contracts and comprehensive protective legislation did create possibilities for corruption and fraud. At least one historian has suggested that the middleman system of labour recruitment was worse than even the indenture system.<sup>10</sup>

The largest employer of South Indian *indentured* emigrants was Malaya. According to one estimate, some 250,000 indentured labourers entered that country between 1844 and 1910.<sup>11</sup> The reason why South and not North India provided the largest number of indentured emigrants to Malaya, apart from obvious historical and geographical factors, was that the North Indian emigrants had proved to be 'troublesome elements'. But more importantly, the Government of India had refused to sanction indentured emigration to Malaya from any parts of India other than the South.<sup>12</sup>

However, it must be emphasised that the structure of indentured emigration to Malaya was different in detail, if not in spirit, to that of the sugar colonies. As we have seen, the recruitment, registration and shipment of indentured labourers to the latter was closely supervised by government officials and conducted under various



Emigration Acts, but these were largely absent in the case of Malaya. There the indentured emigrants were recruited by unlicensed speculators and employers themselves or by their agents.<sup>13</sup> The contract of service, not always written, was for a period of one to three years, whereas for the sugar colonies, it was always written and stipulated service for five years, at least in the second half of indentured migration.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the expenses of recruitment and transportation of sugar colony migrants were borne by the Emigration Agents on behalf of the colonies they represented, whereas for Malaya the emigrants were expected, after a period of employment, to repay the advances made to them as well as the cost of passage. And finally, for the sugar colonies, the Government of India insisted upon, and usually successfully enforced, the fulfilment of certain conditions in the Emigration Act such as the minimum of 40 females to 100 males in each shipment,<sup>15</sup> whereas given the amorphous nature of the system that operated there, it could do little in this regard to Malaya. Consequent social and moral problems emanating from this require little elaboration. In short, the indenture scheme as it existed in Malaya was a peculiar one, combining elements of both the *kangani* and regulated indenture systems.

While South India was the major labour supplier to Burma, Ceylon and Malaya, it was a relatively less important recruiting ground for the sugar colonies, with the exception of Natal. The number of South Indian indentured emigrants to these colonies is shown in the following Table.

TABLE II 16

South Indian Indentured Emigrants to the Sugar Colonies, 1842-1916/17

<i>Colony</i>	<i>South Indian Contribution</i>	<i>Percentage of Total Emigrants</i>
Mauritius	144,342	31.9
Natal	103,261	67.9
British Guiana	15,065	6.3
Fiji	14,536	23.8
West Indies	12,975	-
French West Indies	330	2.0
Reunion	2,131	14.2

The relative smallness of South Indian contribution to colonial migration does not seem, as far as can be determined, to have been the result of any deliberate act of policy either on the part of the Government of India or of the colonies. Rather, it seems to have been a function of the 'disinclination' on the part of the South Indians to engage for distant, especially the West Indian, colonies.<sup>17</sup> This is understandable enough in view of the fact that employment opportunities were available in countries much nearer home. The reluctance of the Madrasis was, however, complemented by a prejudice in the Caribbeans especially, against their eating habits as well as their reputation for being unwilling workers. Oliver William Warner, who for 12 years had been an Immigration Inspector in Trinidad, gave a curious reason why his colony had stopped recruiting in the South. He told the Sanderson Committee in 1910:

We do not find the Madras coolies so satisfactory as the North-West Provinces coolies, owing to the fact that they took to drinking so frightfully in Trinidad. The Madras coolie is far more addicted to drunkenness than the Calcutta coolie — the North-West Provinces coolie.<sup>18</sup>

Another reason would be that for most of the colonies North India, from where indentured emigration first began, was able on the whole to supply the requisite numbers. This perhaps served to discourage the extension of recruiting operations in the South. It was usually the case that the Emigration Agents of the different colonies turned to South India when it became harder to obtain sufficient number of recruits in the North.

There were some interesting variations and changes in the patterns of emigration from South India to the different colonies. In the case of Mauritius, for instance, almost 77% of its South Indian emigrants went there before the 1870s,<sup>19</sup> while for Natal, sustained South Indian emigration took place after the 1880s, reaching its peak in the years 1890-1911, which was also the most important period of labor emigration to that country.<sup>20</sup> For Guiana, as the Table shows, South Indian emigration played a minor role, with the bulk (76%) of the South Indians emigrating between 1842-70. It was a similar story for the other West Indian colonies, with 67% of the emigrants leaving before the 1870s. In the case of Fiji, as we noted above, South Indian emigration started after the turn of the century.

In South India, the emigrants came from certain regions. Malaya and Ceylon drew their labourers principally from the Tamil region, with sprinklings from other parts such as Andhra Pradesh and the Malabar coastal areas.<sup>21</sup> Burma drew a large part of its supplies from Vizagapatnam and Godavari in Andhra Pradesh and to a lesser extent from Tanjore and Ramnad.<sup>22</sup> The sugar colonies, too, drew their migrants from these areas, though there were some variations over the 82 years of indentured emigration. In the pre-1842 period, large numbers of South Indian emigrants were reported to have come from Vizagapatnam,

Coimbatore, Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Malabar and Chingleput; from 1842 to 1870 from Godavari, Ganjam, Madras, Chingleput, Tanjore, South Arcot and Rajahmundry; and from 1870-99 from Madras, Vizagapatnam, North Arcot, Trichinopoly, Chingleput and Malabar.<sup>23</sup> The exact contribution of the various districts to all the sugar colonies are available for the years 1915-16: North Arcot supplied 1,024 emigrants (or 41% of the South Indian total), followed by Madras 671 (27%), Kistna 70 and Godavari 64 (3% and 2.6% respectively).<sup>24</sup>

### Western India

This region, as indicated in the number of departures from the port of Bombay, was a minor supplier of indentured labour. There were two major reasons for this. In the first place, the Government of Bombay discouraged colonial migration which, so it argued, resulted in a decline of land revenue following loss of population.<sup>25</sup> And secondly, from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, many employment opportunities were available in the region itself: in Bombay city, in the textile mills and in road construction and irrigation work.<sup>26</sup> This naturally obviated the need for overseas emigration.

Thus between 1842-70, the port of Bombay accounted for only 31,761 or 6 per cent of all indentured embarkations.<sup>27</sup> All these emigrants went to Mauritius. The main districts of recruitment in this period were Poona, Satara, Ratnagiri, Nagpur and Sawantwadi.<sup>28</sup> In the second phase (after the 1870s), 43,221 emigrants embarked the ships at Bombay and Karachi, mostly the latter, of whom 85.4 per cent were destined for Mombasa, 13.4 per cent for 'other places' and 1.2 per cent for the Seychelles.<sup>29</sup> Those bound for Mombasa left after 1896 on

a three-year contract to work on the railways. Most of the emigrants were Muslims from the Punjab region, though there were others from the Bombay Presidency, Sindh, Baluchistan and the Northwest Frontier Provinces.<sup>30</sup> But this migration was short-lived, and about half of the emigrants returned to India at the expiry of their contract. In later years many traders and artisans also departed from Bombay for the colonies, but they were 'free' emigrants paying their own passages.

### French Territory

The French ports accounted for the smallest number of indentured embarkations. Altogether, between 1842 and 1916, 49,890 emigrants embarked on the ships there for the colonies.<sup>31</sup> Of these, 20,770 (41.63%) had left before the 1870s, 16,011 destined for the French West Indies and 4,579 for Reunion. After 1870, over half of the emigrants went to the French West Indies, a third to Reunion and the rest to French Guiana. The Government of India was never too keen on sanctioning indentured emigration to the French colonies partly because of fears of rivalry but partly also because the reputation of the French in treating the Indian labourers was a particularly bad one.<sup>32</sup> Embarkation from the French ports was prohibited after the promulgation of the Indian Emigration Act XXI of 1883, which restricted indentured departures to Calcutta, Madras and Bombay.<sup>33</sup>

### North India

This region was, of course, the largest supplier of indentured labour to the sugar colonies as was indicated in the embarkation figures for the port of Calcutta. Interestingly, however, Bengal itself contributed very few emigrants. In the case of Fiji, for

instance, it furnished only 150 or 0.33 per cent of the total from North India (see below). At first glance, this may be a surprising trend especially as Bengal was one of the most heavily populated areas in British India. Some British officials attributed the disinclination for long distance travel on the part of the Bengalis to their 'timid' spirit.<sup>34</sup> But in fact the Bengalis, like the people of Western India, could easily find employment much nearer home: in the rapidly expanding city of Calcutta, in the jute industry and in the tea gardens of Eastern Bengal and Assam. Hence they did not feel the necessity for emigrating to the colonies.

Thus most of those who left from Calcutta were 'upcountry men'. Before the 1870s, they came from the tribal and plains areas of Bihar and after that time, principally from the United Provinces. Some scholars have remarked upon this changing focus of colonial recruitment but few have explored it systematically.<sup>35</sup> We shall probe the question further, using some hitherto unused sources.

Much evidence from the 1830s suggests the preponderance of 'Dhangars' among the early indentured emigrants.<sup>36</sup> The exact meaning of this word is unclear, but possibly it derives from 'dang' or 'dhang' which in tribal dialects means hill.<sup>37</sup> However, in the nineteenth century, the word was applied to all the tribals by the English and even by the non-tribal Indians, ignorant of the complexity of tribal culture.<sup>38</sup> The Dhangars came from the heartland of tribal India: the forested seclusion of the undulating Chota Nagpur plateau. Many sources provide impressionistic glimpses of the districts which contributed the tribal emigrants, but the only ones to give a precise breakdown, as far as we can determine, are the shiplists of two immigrant ships, the *Hesperes* and the *Whitby*, both of which sailed from Calcutta for British

Guiana in 1839.<sup>39</sup> The following Table provides a breakdown of the districts of origin of the 405 emigrants aboard the two vessels.

TABLE III

Districts Supplying  $\geq$  1% of the *Whitby* and the *Hesperes* Emigrants

<i>Name of District</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Name of District</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Hazaribagh	72	17.8	Burdwan	10	2.5
Bankura	49	12.1	Lucknow	10	2.5
Ramgarh	36	8.9	Ayodhya	8	2.0
Midnapur	27	6.7	Ghazipur	8	2.0
Nagpur	20	4.9	Arrah	7	1.7
Kasi	13	3.2	Bistopur	6	1.5
Cuttack	13	3.2	Chapra	5	1.2
Muzaffarpur	11	2.7	Others	110	27.1
Total				405	

In terms of their social background, 34 per cent of the emigrants were recorded as Dhangars and a further 15 per cent tribal or quasi-tribal groups (Bauris, Bhuiyas, Bagdis), 8 per cent Muslims, 8 per cent Rajputs, 5 per cent Kurmis and 3 per cent Gowalas.<sup>40</sup> The numerical superiority of the tribal groups is evident, but it is also interesting to note the small, though significant, contribution of high and middle caste Hindus. Many of them came from the settled plains areas as well as from the cities such as Kasi (Benares), Lucknow, Arrah and Chapra.

The tribal districts continued to provide a significant number of indentured emigrants during the first two decades of indentured emigration. However there was, from the 1840s onwards, a perceptible shift in recruitment activity to the Northern 'Hinduized' settled plains areas of Bihar and, to a lesser extent, the UP. **Table IV**

gives a comprehensive picture of the change in the regional origins of the indentured labourers in India during the first phase of indentured emigration. Map I provides a synoptic picture of this. In the late 1860s and early 1970s a further shift took place, pushing the frontiers of colonial recruitment to the UP.

The interesting question to ask is why the first indentured emigrants came from tribal areas. No definitive answer can be given here though several contributory factors may be noted. One reason which seems to have induced the recruiters to focus on the tribals was the tribals' migratory habits. One official noted in 1838 that it 'is in the natural habit of the Hill Coolie to leave his home to labour for considerable periods',<sup>42</sup> while another made the point more directly: 'The fact of these people habitually leaving their homes and resorting to the indigo planters of other and far distant districts for employ[ment], first suggested the idea of inducing them to travel further.'<sup>43</sup> Besides this, the social and personal habits of the tribals made it seem as if they were better suited for plantation work. Thomas Blythe and Sons, planters of Mauritius, asserted that the tribals were 'quiet, docile and industrious', while another planter, J.R. Mayo, remarked that 'they are temperate, and are particularly trustworthy where sobriety is absolutely necessary.'<sup>44</sup> The various stereotypes are well summed up in the following quotation:

The Dangurs entertain no prejudices of caste or religion, and they are willing to turn their hands to any labour whatever, as far as they are capable. Neither are they unwilling to partake of any kind of animal food, the worst description of which would be a luxury to them. Their habitations are equally simple and confined; any dry place, 20 feet square, and 8 feet high, would suffice for 20 men. They are unacquainted with the luxury of bed beyond a dry floor, upon which they repose in their blankets in the cold weather, and a remnant of thin cotton cloth in the summer season.

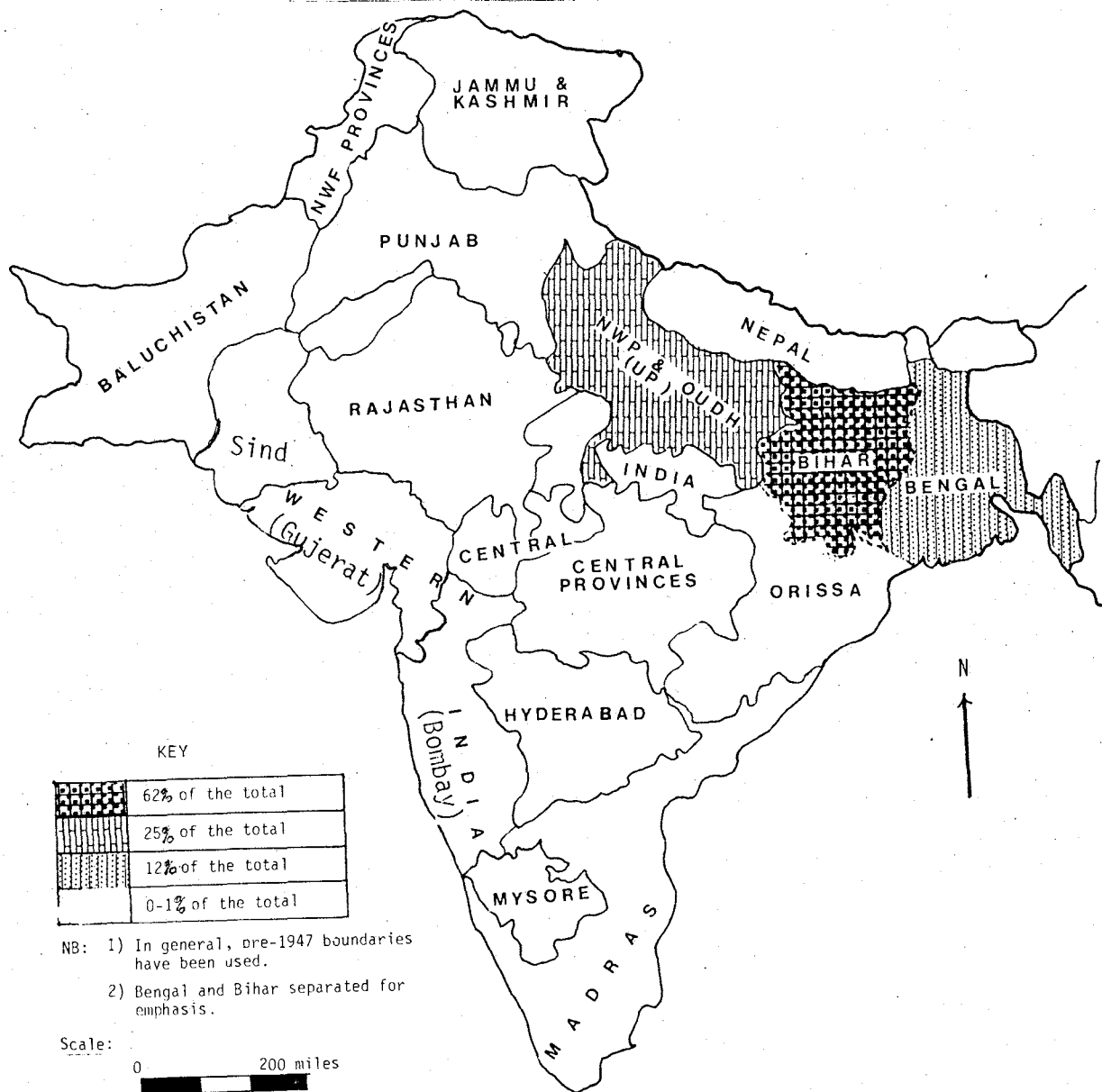


TABLE IV 41

## Districts of Origin of Indian Indentured Emigrants, 1844-1864

	1844	1845	1849	1852	1853/54	1854/55	1855/56	1858	1859/60	1861/62	1863/64	Total
Allahabad	15	3	54	21	48	61	31	46	64	114	93	550
Arrah	806	85	1,267	1,757	3,017	2,549	1,974	2,355	5,641	3,235	615	23,301
Azamgarh	58	1	247	444	332	538	537	535	658	714	310	4,374
Bankura	81	54	212	1,648	121	172	100	274	339	250	27	3,278
Benares	165	18	179	194	410	381	245	351	622	994	132	3,691
Bhagalpur	31	4	42	38	92	40	25	86	75	201	6	640
Burdwan	65	8	131	150	67	79	72	126	247	186	27	1,158
Calcutta	41	2	34	44	59	19	44	28	100	24	29	424
Chapra	207	23	500	480	570	509	614	798	927	769	245	5,642
Cuttack	11	22	233	163	123	55	140	58	161	74	13	1,053
Farraknabad	7	1	11	3	10	14	7	3	14	44	35	149
Ghazipur	183	16	597	682	1,198	1,005	1,139	1,859	2,968	2,230	477	12,354
Gorakhpur	57	7	155	186	368	177	275	207	365	438	248	2,483
Hazaribagh	525	134	493	917	1,324	610	542	1,142	1,732	1,005	71	8,495
Hoogly	57	4	78	78	81	52	72	99	148	81	10	760
Jaunpur	45	12	74	135	187	209	147	98	224	491	216	1,838
Kanpur	20	4	22	19	61	20	21	12	38	118	77	412
Kisangarh	-	-	-	34	48	19	17	8	91	60	21	298
Lucknow	87	12	-	200	291	190	108	78	281	925	837	3,009
Midnapur	101	61	148	223	93	85	78	80	276	217	24	1,386
Mirzapur	58	5	34	26	65	112	58	31	110	202	37	738
Muzaffarpur	-	12	192	205	411	168	182	215	417	530	81	2,413
Nagpur	66	-	7	6	15	5	15	4	78	20	3	219
Patna	298	36	398	600	1,075	618	614	777	1,521	1,834	325	8,096
Purulia	343	145	351	731	694	713	436	1,846	1,790	463	52	7,564
Purnea	11	2	29	32	18	11	6	9	25	25	5	173
Ranchi	725	128	267	939	906	466	505	517	750	614	75	5,892
Sahebganj	1,628	218	761	1,678	2,240	1,592	1,360	1,562	3,481	4,006	208	18,734
24-Parganas	61	4	198	134	140	69	93	111	316	119	40	1,285
TOTAL:	5,752	1,021	6,714	11,767	14,064	10,538	9,457	13,315	23,459	19,983	4,339	120,409

MAP I  
 PROVINCIAL ORIGINS OF INDIAN INDENTURED EMIGRANTS DURING THE  
 FIRST PHASE (1840s - 1860s)



For any kind of labour requiring great muscular strength, they are not equal to stout Europeans; but since my arrival in this country, I have seen many Europeans earning Rs 3 per diem, the result of whose labour, individually, would not equal that of an industrious 'Dangur' receiving only one-third of the European's pay, food and everything included.<sup>45</sup>

The reasons for the displacement and consequent emigration of the tribals from their homes are complex. In the context of this study, it is necessary to dwell briefly on the causes. In pre-contact times, the tribal people of the Chota Nagpur led an apparently self-sufficient existence based upon nomadic slash and burn agriculture. Their social structure was fluid but stable, with a headman at the top who combined in himself secular and religious functions. Chosen because he claimed supernatural powers or because of hereditary succession, the headman (and his assistants) managed the affairs of the entire community and mediated between different villages, factions and even the supernatural. Several villages combined to form a federation called a *parha* headed by a *raja*, who was chosen from one of the headmen of the villages. However, despite the autocratic sounding title of the *raja*, the *parha* was essentially a democratic organisation. S.C. Roy, the distinguished Bengali anthropologist, notes that the 'assembled elders of the tribe took part, as of right, in the deliberations of the Parha tribunal. Tribal custom was the recognised law to which the Parha-Raja and other dignitaries were quite as amenable as the humblest member of the Parha.'<sup>46</sup> Traditionally, there does not seem to have been any individual ownership of land in tribal Nagpur.<sup>47</sup> The inhabitants cleared their villages under the leadership of the headman (*munda*) or priest (*pahan*), who re-allocated lands and collected dues and services owing to the community. Of course, no transactions were formalised by written documents; the cultivator acquired his field

in the presence of witnesses by taking 'a piece of earth as a token of acceptance ... from the headman or *mahato* as he was called in some areas.'<sup>48</sup> In short, the traditional world of the tribals was largely self-contained, self-sufficient and structurally egalitarian.

The first challenge to its autonomy occurred with the advent of Muslim incursion in eastern India in the sixteenth century. In 1585 A.D.<sup>49</sup> for the first time, the Raja of Chota Nagpur was incorporated into the vast network of the Moghul Empire, and was reduced to the position of a *malguzar* (tributary). Regular revenue demands followed, a practice resisted by the tribals used to self-sufficiency and independence. Because of this, the *raja*, Durjan Sal, was interned at the fort of Gwalior for 12 years. After his release, he returned, but imbued with ideas of royal grandeur and pomp he had witnessed in the Moghul courts. To run his administration in his new style, he imported Brahmans and Rajputs who in turn introduced alien ideas of rent in kind and cash (*rakumats*) and cesses (*abwabs*). In addition, the immigrants had to be remunerated, for which purpose the *raja* allocated several villages to them. Not surprisingly, the new *jagirdars* appropriate some of the best land in the region, and even began to levy rent on the land which had been given by the aboriginals to foreigners, mostly relatives who had migrated to the villages. Compounding economic exploitation was social oppression caused by the introduction of notions of caste and purity, thus pushing the tribals further to the fringes in their own country.

British penetration did little to ease the plight of the oppressed tribals. On the contrary, it gave authority to the landlords and proprietors 'to evict tenants, distrain and sell their property, and even seize their [the tribals'] persons, without recourse to the courts

of law. The tenant had no lease or documentary evidence of his rights; all he could do was to bring a civil suit against his landlord in order to recover his rights after they had been infringed'.<sup>50</sup> The users and moneylenders exercised their own version of oppression. They advanced money at exorbitant interest, and upon failure of the tribal borrowers to repay the sum and the interest, turned them into bondsmen. There were two types of bonding, *kamioti* and *harwai*.

In the first of these cases, the borrower agreed to avail himself for the personal and domestic services of the moneylender. His land, cattle, ploughs and domestic utensils could all be seized by the moneylender or his agents to make good the loan and the interest, a course of action which would again lead the tribals into further debt until they were reduced to the status of serfs. The *harwai* bondsmen were required, in addition to giving personal service, to plough the fields of the lenders, for a small amount of unhusked rice per day. This too was a vicious cycle for the borrower, occupied with tending the soil of the moneylender, had little time to grow his own crops or earn wages elsewhere to repay the debt. On the death of the debtor, his family and subsequent generations would be held responsible for the payment of the debt.

Superimposed upon all this were the particularly severe and exploitative policies of the East India Company. Land revenue assessments were 'oppressive and arbitrary'<sup>51</sup> and the general reluctance of officials to relent in the collection of revenue even in times of crisis or in the event of natural calamities such as famines, left the already impoverished tribals with little margin for survival in hard times. Its policy towards conservation of forests also had adverse effects. It drastically reduced the area within which they could practice their nomadic system of cultivation called *jhum*.<sup>52</sup> Then also it took away their hunting grounds,

limited the grazing area of their cattle, and to a certain extent, restricted the supply of forest products which the tribals had used in the past to supplement their resources.<sup>53</sup> In sum, the process of contact between tribals and the outside world was characterised by 'continuous exploitation and dispossession of the aboriginals.'<sup>54</sup> The sense of indignation and resentment felt by the tribal people is vividly depicted in the following contemporary folksong:

Look where thou wilt, O, wherever eye gazes  
 Up to the sky or below to the earth,  
 [Men of mean blood wilt thou meet in high places];  
 Owls pose as lords now, the owls of low birth!  
 Struts the vain peacock in glory of plumage,  
 Owls pass for lords now, the owls of low birth!  
 Look how the crow rules as *Diguār* each village,  
 How proud the peacock stalks o'er the earth!  
 Now lords it the crow as *Kotwar* far and near,  
 Now hath each village for *Diguār* a crow!  
 Mūṇḍās of villages now tremble with fear,—  
 They that were lords of the land until now!  
 Bhūinhārs now quake with forebodings drear,  
 Mūṇḍās of villages now tremble with fear.  
 Sullen resentment reigns over the land,  
 The Mūṇḍās chafe and fret,—an angry band.<sup>55</sup>

Occasionally the frustrated tribals erupted in open rebellion, especially against the *dikkus*, as they contemptuously called the immigrants from the plains.<sup>56</sup> However, they soon realised that this brought more repression than relief. Consequently, many began to take advantage of the expedient of migration which in the circumstances offered a glimmer of hope and freedom. The main movement was towards the east, and it began around the 1830s, with the Santals and other tribals 'willing to work at anything that would yield them a living.'<sup>57</sup> Some moved towards the fertile, forested valleys of the Damin-i-koh, while others were attracted by prospects of employment in the indigo plantations being set up by European entrepreneurs (see below). As noted, it was from this displaced, disillusioned 'flotsam of humanity'

that the early indentured emigrants were recruited.

In the colonies, the planters expressed satisfaction at the apparently diligent and docile behaviour of the tribals. But they were soon to be sorely disappointed, for sometime in the late 1840s and early 1850s, a decline set in in the volume of tribal migration to the colonies. One reason for this was the high mortality rate among the tribals on the voyages.<sup>58</sup> The commanders and surgeons of the immigrant vessels attributed this to the selection of sickly, physically unfit emigrants in Bengal. However Dr F.J. Mouat, who conducted a detailed enquiry into the matter noted that the 'neglect of proper sanitary precautions on board most of the vessels [was] the most important factor.'<sup>59</sup> Cramped conditions on ill-fitted, perfunctorily supervised vessels must have taken a heavy toll of a people used to free life in the open air. Perhaps there was a psychological reason also. Hugh Tinker has hinted that the loneliness of a long sea voyage and the sudden awareness that the break with their tribal homes was permanent, may have induced an acute psychological condition in which the tribals abandoned their hold upon life and longed for death, and in some cases by mysterious means committed suicide.'<sup>60</sup>

But there were other reasons also, the most important being the availability of employment opportunities in India itself, which especially suited the temperament and abilities of the tribal labourers. Indigo plantations were one of the earliest foci of tribal labour.

W.W. Hunter wrote:

In every part of Nuddea little communities of Santals, Dangars, or other hill-men, may be found living apart from the Hindus, and preserving their national customs in the middle of the low land population. Many indigo factories in the eastern districts have villages of these western highlanders. A family of them makes its

appearance wherever manual labour is wanted, builds its leaf huts in a few days, and before the end of the month feels as much at home as if it were still among the mountains. Patient at labour, at home with nature, able to live on a penny a day, contented with roots when better food is not to be had, dark-skinned, a hearty but not habitually excessive toper, given to pig-hunting on holidays, despised by the Hindus, and heartily repaying their contempt, the hill-men of the west furnish the sinews by which English enterprise is carried on in Eastern Bengal. Many of them come from the central highlands, where the population is permanently just one degree above absolute starvation, where the extension of tillage is only possible after a considerable outlay of capital in digging tanks, where the winters are severe, where cutaneous diseases and every infirmity common to half-starved hunting communities are rampant, and where the political disaffection which springs from a chronically hungry stomach is never unknown ... Every Winter, after the indigo is packed, numbers of the labourers visit their native villages, and seldom return unaccompanied with a train of poor relations, who look forward to the wages of the Spring sowing season as the soldiers of Alaric contemplated the spoils of Lombardy.<sup>61</sup>

Some also found employment in the coal mines of Bihar in later years,<sup>62</sup> or in railway construction work,<sup>63</sup> but the largest magnet for tribal labour was the Assam Tea Gardens, where large-scale importation of labour began in 1853.<sup>64</sup> Throughout the entire period of labour migration there, the Chota Nagpur plateau remained by far the largest supplier.

The decline in the volume of tribal labour shifted colonial recruitment activity to the North into the settled plains of Bihar. But these areas, too, proved disappointing in the long run. Like the tribals the plains people were also attracted by employment prospects nearer home — in the indigo plantations and the coal mines. At the same time, encouraged in large part by the advent of railways, large numbers of Biharis were turning towards Bengal, especially Calcutta, where they were in great demand as palki-bearers, durwans, punkah-pullers, lathials (club-men), peons, and generally as labourers.<sup>65</sup> The advantage of this migration over its indentured counterpart was that it enabled the emigrants to return to their homes in time for planting or harvesting



crops, while those who went to the colonies either did not return at all, or did so after many years often to go back soon afterwards. The result of all this was a move further north-west to the UP, which became the most important recruiting ground for the colonies for the last 40 or so years of indentured emigration, supplying in many years well over three-quarters of the total colonial demand.<sup>66</sup>

Like the other colonies, Fiji derived the majority of its North Indian indentured emigrants from the UP, as Map II and Table V show. But before we discuss the trends and patterns of emigration from there, it is necessary to discuss the other regions to highlight significant differences among them.

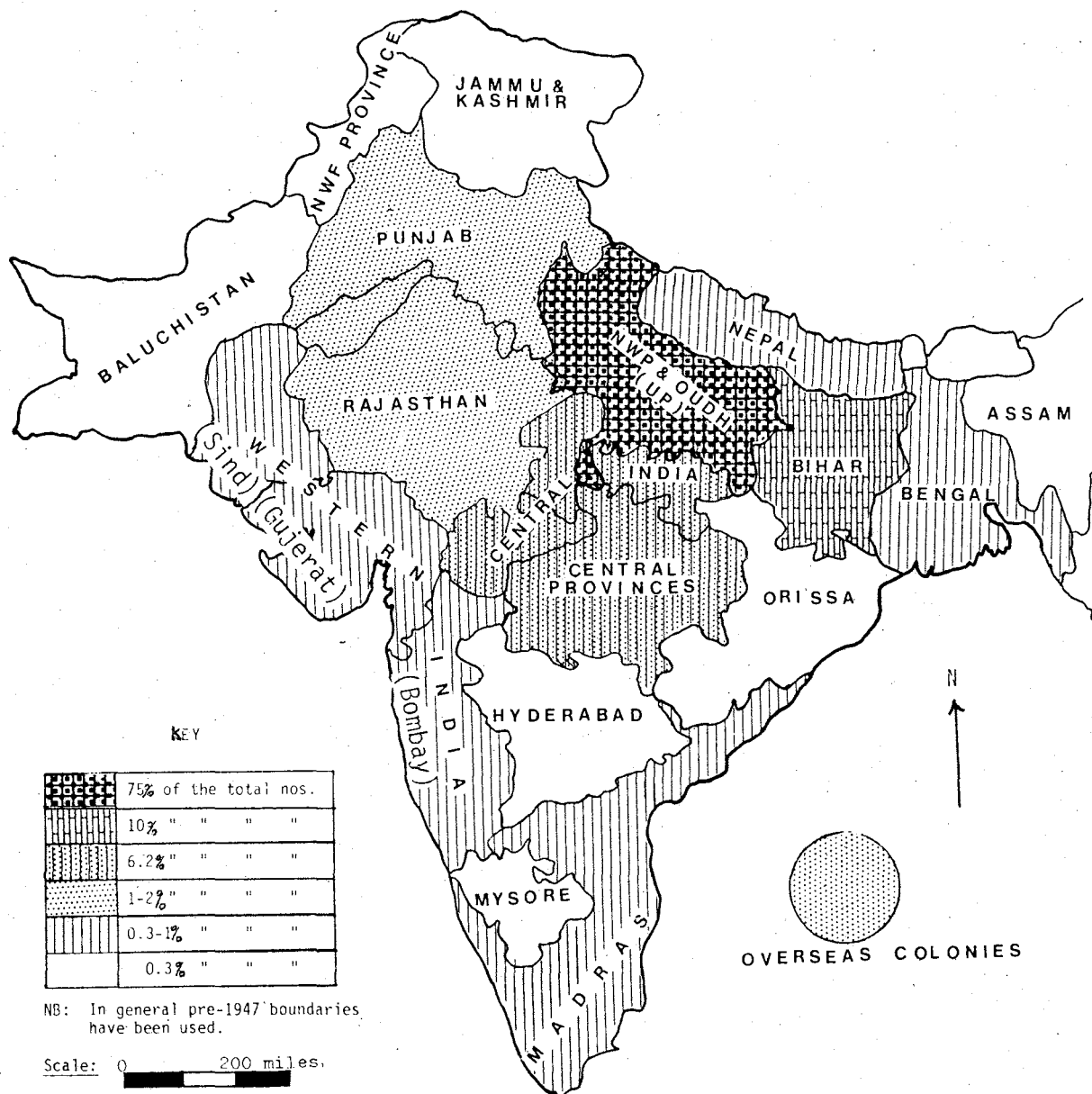
TABLE V <sup>67</sup>

Regional Origins of Fiji's Calcutta Embarked Migrants

<i>Name</i>	<i>Numbers Emigrating</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
North Western Provinces	21,131	46.5
Oudh	13,207	29.0
Bihar	4,771	10.5
Central Provinces	2,802	6.2
Punjab	828	1.8
Rajasthan	733	1.6
Overseas Colonies	640	1.4
Nepal	398	0.9
Bengal	150	0.3
Western India	120	0.3
Madras	76	0.2
Other Areas	81	0.2
Unspecified	502	1.1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>45,439</b>	<b>100.00</b>

MAP II

PROVINCIAL ORIGINS OF FIJI'S CALCUTTA EMBARKED MIGRANTS



The contribution of Bihar is not surprising in view of what has been said above, but it has to be noted that the break was not abrupt and that there were interesting variations. Three distinct phases can be seen in the pattern of Bihari migration to Fiji: 1879-1890; 1891-1894; and 1895-1916.<sup>68</sup> In the first phase, Bihar supplied on the average about 34 per cent of the migrants, its greatest contribution being in 1884, when it furnished 51 per cent of the total. This unusually high figure was, however, due to a fall in demand from the other colonies, as well as due to adverse economic conditions prevailing in the region.<sup>69</sup> Dr J.G. Grant, the Protector of Emigrants, remarked:

The manifestly greater activity of emigration from the Lower Provinces as compared with that from the North-West and Oudh, is attributable to the comparatively high price of food grains, the result of persistent drought which prevailed during the year throughout the area from which the largest number of labourers was drawn. For while crops in Bengal and Behar were suffering more or less from want of rains, which led to scarcity, the local markets of the North-West Provinces and Oudh appear to have been comparatively well stocked. On the other hand, as regards the recruiters themselves, the presence of facilities for obtaining suitable labour so much nearer the port of embarkation than the more distant Upper Provinces, and of economising transit, must have led them to make the best of their opportunities by concentrating their operations chiefly in Behar and the districts in its vicinity which were most readily accessible by rail.<sup>70</sup>

The five years after 1891 saw a marked decline in the contribution from Bihar, the yearly average supply being 10 per cent, which further declined to 5.4 per cent after 1895 to the end of indentured emigration to Fiji. The reasons for these sharp breaks are not exactly clear, though, as we shall show later, the increasing importance and easy availability of labour in other regions may be one of the important factors.

Fiji's Bihari migrants came mostly from the settled plains districts. The main districts of indentured emigration were: Shahabad (and Arrah) 1,410; Gaya (with Sahebganj) 767; Patna 644; Saran (with Chapra) 511; and Monghyr 273.<sup>71</sup> Why those districts and not others? An economic explanation is tempting, but there were other areas in Bihar which were more depressed or impoverished and more densely populated. A more plausible explanation would take into account the long tradition and therefore, presumably, the popularity of colonial emigration in these districts. The following Table shows

TABLE VI <sup>71a</sup>Colonial and Internal Emigration from Bihar (Bengal) Districts (1885-86)

<i>Name of District</i>	<i>Inland Migration</i>	<i>Rate/ Million</i>	<i>Colonial Emigration</i>	<i>Rate/ Million</i>
Hazaribagh	1,021	924	87	78.7
Birbhum	363	456	57	71.7
Santal Parganas	633	403	37	23.5
Bankura	394	378	10	9.59
Manbhum	286	270	10	9.44
Burdwan	219	157	35	25.1
Gaya	300	141	980	461
Midnapur	300	119	19	7.54
Monghyr	226	114	341	173
Lohardaga	151	93.8	-	-
Bhagalpur	145	73.7	161	81.8
Murshidabad	57	46.4	34	27.7
Balasore	26	27.5	-	-
Hoogly	21	20.7	-	-
Patna	30	17.07	684	389
Nadia	29	14.3	-	-
Darbhanga	33	12.5	238	90.3
Shahabad	20	-	879	447
Cuttack	15	10.1	-	-
Saran	6	2.63	146	64.02
Muzaffarpur	4	1.54	169	65.4
Pabna	-	-	10	7.62

that in the 1880s, the districts which favoured colonial over internal migration were those which contributed most migrants to Fiji. This trend may, in part, have been a result of favourable impressions created by the returning emigrants. One official explaining increased colonial migration from the province pointed to

the steady diminution of the feeling against emigration which is caused by the return of old emigrants to their houses. People are at length beginning to find out that a Hindu going to British Guiana is not forced to become a Christian, and that bitumen (*mimiyai-ka-tel*) is not extracted from a cooly's head by hanging him up by the heels and roasting him over a slow fire. Coolies come back more and more and come back, too, with money, and not uncommonly they return to the colony with their wives and families after a short stay at home.<sup>72</sup>

Before we leave Bihar, the contribution of the tribal areas of the province may be noted. Hazaribagh, one of the major emigration districts in the early years of indentured emigration, contributed only 142 of Fiji's indentured migrants, Bankura 12, Ranchi 11, Chota Nagpur 3, Santal Parganas 4, Singhbhum 3 and Birbhum 7. The reasons for the decline in tribal emigration to the colonies have already been noted. The Central Provinces, as we have seen, did not feature prominently as a recruiting ground for indentured labour for Fiji. This was partly because in many years no direct recruitment was carried on there and partly because, like the Biharis, the inhabitants of this region were able to find employment within India itself. During the first two decades of indentured emigration, the CP supplied about 0.5 per cent of the total numbers emigrating to Fiji, its major contribution in this period being in the years 1882-86 when 118 emigrants were recruited there. However, the peak years were reached after the turn of the century, especially 1901-03: in 1901 the CP contributed 901 emigrants or 38 per cent of all the emigrants despatched that year; in 1902

455 or 30 per cent and in 1903, 383 or 32 per cent. The sudden increase was due to the increased demand for labour from Fiji following the expansion of the sugar industry there,<sup>73</sup> and the difficulty experienced in obtaining sufficient number of recruits in the usual areas. The major districts of emigration in the CP were: Raipur 744, Rewa 317, Sambalpur 199, Bilaspur 177, and Jabalpur 169; followed by some important minor areas such as Bhopal, Hosangabad and Saugor.<sup>74</sup>

The Punjab was never an important recruiting ground for indentured labour except in the 1890s, when some Punjabis were exported to East Africa to build railways. The Punjabis, especially Sikhs, are, for historical, social and geographical reasons, perhaps the most mobile people in India, and some of them were leaving as 'free' emigrants for Canton, Hong Kong, North America and other areas.<sup>75</sup> In the 1920s, some also came as independent agriculturalists to Fiji. However, as indentured labourers, they were not viewed favourably in the colonies, despite the fact that they were considered the strongest and the most intelligent emigrants from India.<sup>76</sup> The main reason for the prejudice against them was their apparently 'unruly' character. In 1904 Trinidad protested: 'These are very objectionable as field labour ... many ... absconded to the Spanish Main, some have had to be sent back to India having absolutely refused to work in the fields, and nearly all have been unruly and troublesome.'<sup>77</sup> In Labasa, Fiji in 1907, some Punjabis and Pathans were instrumental in organising a minor revolt to protest against low pay and unsuitable working conditions, complaining that in India 'they had been promised employment as policemen.'<sup>78</sup> This led the colonial government to discourage their emigration.

As in the case of the other regions, there were important variations in the patterns of indentured emigration from the Punjab.

In the early years, with the exception of 1882 and 1883 when it furnished 9 per cent and 5 per cent of the total number for those years respectively, the contribution of the Punjab remained relatively insignificant. Its peak period was a few years after the turn of the century, with the largest contribution being in 1903: 137 or 11.4 per cent of the total for that year. There was a dramatic decrease in 1908 when only one Punjabi indentured labourer emigrated. The contribution from the Punjab remained low till the end of indentured emigration, though in 1913 it increased slightly.

The main districts of supply in the Punjab were: Rohtak 157, Gurgaon 154 and Hissar 134, with sprinklings from Karnal, Ambala, Amritsar, Jalandhar and other areas. One reason for the prominence of Rohtak and Gurgaon (now in the state of Haryana) may have been that recruits from these areas were considered to 'be the best immigrants ever to land in Fiji.'<sup>79</sup> Another could have been the fact that these districts were contiguous to the UP, which may have encouraged the recruiters to extend their activities there, especially in difficult years. It may be added that the emigrants from these areas were not Sikhs but Jats who are an enterprising agricultural caste.

Rajasthan closely followed the pattern of the Central Provinces and the Punjab. The years 1900-06 alone accounted for 57 per cent of the total from that region. Active recruitment was hardly ever carried on there except in years when the main supply areas failed badly. Most of the Rajasthanis came from Jaipur 473, Jodhpur 108, Ajmer 64 and Marwar 48.

Nepal contributed 398 indentured emigrants to Fiji, but of these 396 came before 1894. The reason for this sudden decline was the promulgation of an order by the Nepal Durbar prohibiting the recruitment

of its citizens for the colonies, presumably so that they could continue to provide recruits for the Indian Army.<sup>80</sup> The Nepalis, who today constitute a separate, almost exclusive, community in Fiji (many of them are found in the Sigatoka Valley), were highly prized indentured labourers in Fiji. The other two regions from India need little comment, except that many of the emigrants from these areas were recruited away from their homes, mostly in large cities.

The contribution of the overseas colonies requires some elaboration. It should be emphasised that the figure of 640 covers only those emigrants who re-indentured for service in the colonies. It should be noted that returned emigrants who stated as their place of origin the colonies where they had worked before coming to India, appear on the Emigration Passes mostly after the turn of the century. In fact, our figures show that only seven returned indentured emigrants went to Fiji up to 1901, a figure which appears very much on the low side. Perhaps there were very few returned emigrants re-indenturing in the early years, but it is also possible that for various reasons, including better chances of registration, they gave as their place of origin their districts of birth in India. After the turn of the century with Emigration Agents experiencing difficulty in fulfilling the requisition from the colonies, the returning emigrants, at least those who were not emaciated or disabled, were perhaps readily enlisted even when they gave the colonies as their place of origin. The returned emigrants who re-indentured for Fiji came from the following colonies: Fiji 227, Natal 200, British Guiana 94, Trinidad 51, Surinam 26, Mauritius 23, Jamaica 18 and St. Lucia 1.<sup>81</sup>

Besides these, there were other returned emigrants who came to Fiji as passengers, paying their own fares. An estimate of the volume of this migration is provided by the figures available in the



various shiplists.<sup>82</sup> Our analysis shows that some 1,695 such individuals came to Fiji, mostly after the turn of the century. The largest numbers of these emigrants came from Natal — 740, followed by Fiji 237, British Guiana 226, Straits Settlements 141, Trinidad 117, Mauritius 78, Surinam 51, Jamaica 46 and Ceylon 37. The remaining came from Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincents, Guadeloupe, New Caledonia, Bourbon and Rangoon (Burma). The difference in the volume of this migration from the various colonies cannot be explained as no records are available on the subject. In the case of those emigrating to Fiji a second time, it would be safe to assume that many of them had a specific purpose for the choice of that destination. Perhaps they had acquired some property in Fiji and had gone to India on a free passage to bring their families. The presence of relatively large numbers of children makes it fairly certain that this passenger migration, as it was called, consisted of large numbers of families. But why did so many Natal emigrants go to Fiji, paying their own fares? Did they go intentionally, or had they become lost in the vast crowds of Calcutta, so that they then took the first opportunity available to leave for any colonial destination? The true answer is lost to history.

The United Provinces was, as we have seen, the largest supplier of Fiji's North Indian indentured migrants. But even here there were variations. A discussion of these may put into perspective the fluctuations in the contributions of the other regions. In the very early years of indentured emigration to Fiji, especially between 1884 and 1890, the UP supplied a relatively small percentage of emigrants; small, that is, in terms of its overall contribution. In this period, it provided 55.4 per cent of the numbers emigrating, its lowest ever being in 1884 — 39.9 per cent of the total for that year.

We may recall that Bihar was the largest labour supplier for that year. In the decade after 1890, the largest numbers of indentured emigrants came from the UP. Between 1895 and 1899, for instance, over 90 per cent of the total for these years came from there. The reason for the prominence of the UP in the 1890s was the prevalence there of adverse economic conditions in the form of scarcities and famines.<sup>83</sup> After the turn of the century, especially during the first four years, there was a decline in the number of emigrants from the UP which, as we have seen, forced recruitment activities into other areas such as the Central Provinces and the Punjab. The average contribution of the province to the total numbers emigrating to Fiji in this period remained around 62 per cent. Once again, economic reasons were largely responsible for the fluctuations. These were years of relative prosperity after the disasters of the previous decade, times when the difficulties of eking out an existence diminished somewhat and when the landless labourer could attempt to 'work upwards to the rank of the cultivator ... by taking a field and making his living partly out of the produce of it and partly out of wages.'<sup>84</sup> But 1903-4 were 'the last of a series of fat years', for in 1904 and 1905 monsoons failed in large parts of the UP, resulting in scarcity. But worse was still to come: in 1907-8, the monsoons failed completely in August and by December, 'most of the province was in the grip of a severe famine.' Officials noted that 'distress was always under control' and that there were 'no unusual movements of the people and no undue emigrations from a stricken district.'<sup>85</sup> However, our figures show that during these years, recruitment in the UP increased markedly. After 1905, with the exception of a few years, the UP contributed over 80 per cent of the labourers to Fiji.

In the UP, it was the eastern districts which furnished the largest number of the indentured emigrants (see Map III). The following Table provides a precise breakdown of their contribution. The variations in the

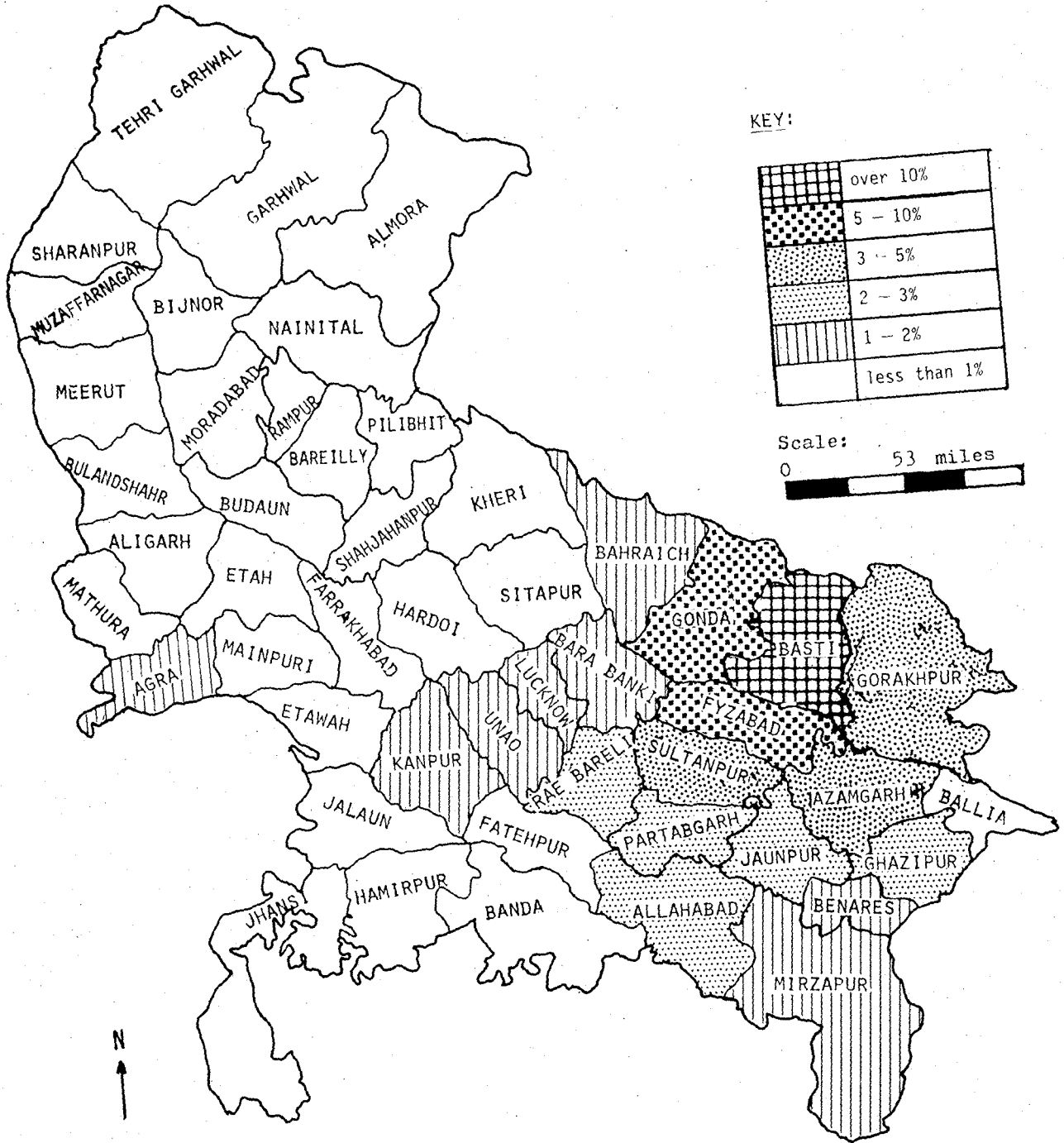
TABLE VII <sup>86</sup>

Districts of Origin of Fiji's North Indian Migrants,  
Supplying  $\geq$  1% of the Total

<i>District</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Basti	6,415	14.1	Bara Banki	769	1.7
Gonda	3,589	7.9	Gaya	767	1.7
Fyzabad	2,329	5.1	Bahraich	750	1.6
Sultanpur	1,747	3.8	Raipur	744	1.6
Azamgarh	1,716	3.8	Benares	672	1.5
Gorakhpur	1,683	3.7	Patna	644	1.4
Shahabad	1,410	3.1	Lucknow	613	1.3
Allahabad	1,218	2.7	Kanpur	583	1.3
Jaunpur	1,188	2.6	Unao	556	1.2
Ghazipur	1,127	2.5	Agra	549	1.2
Rae Bareli	1,087	2.4	Mirzapur	527	1.2
Partabgarh	894	2.0	Saran	511	1.1
			Jaipur	473	1.0

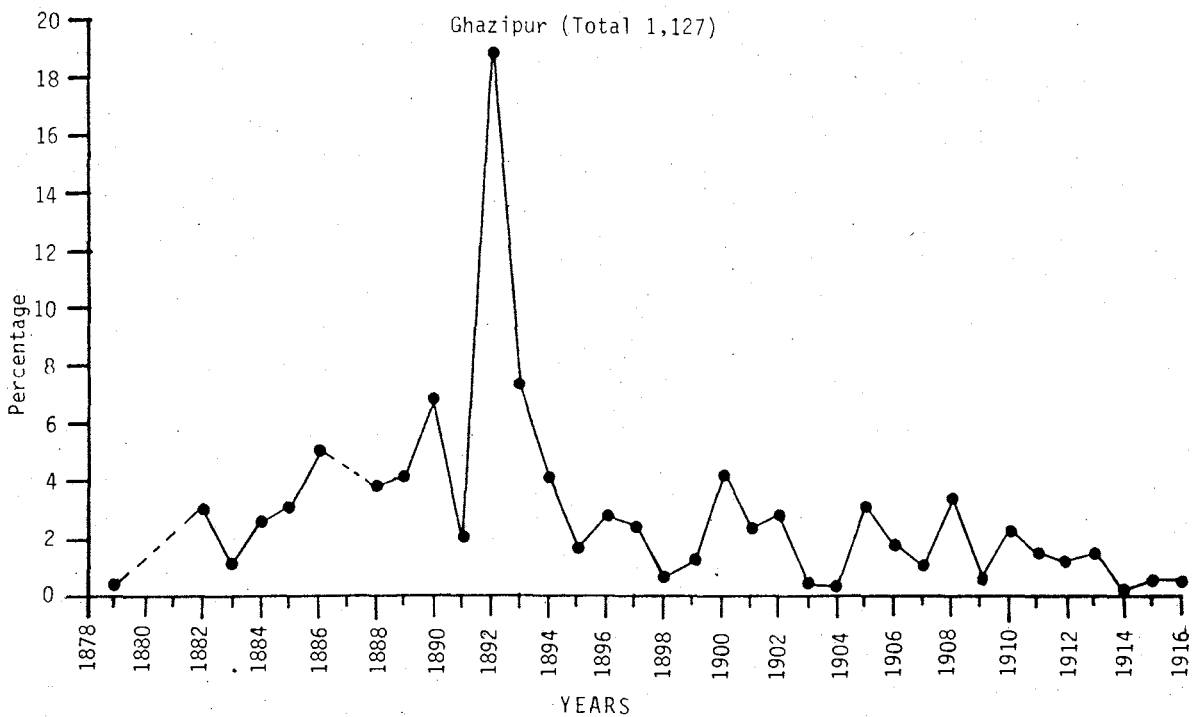
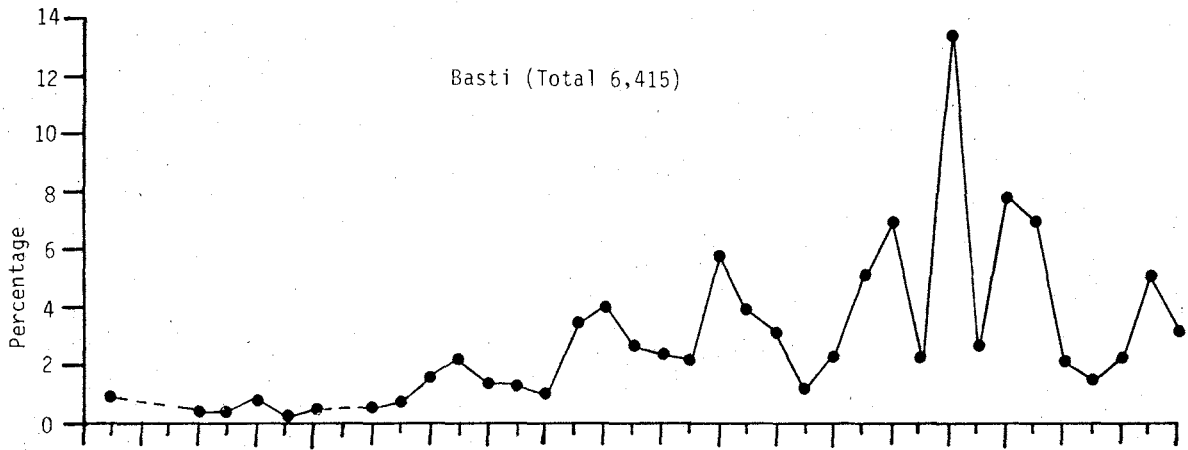
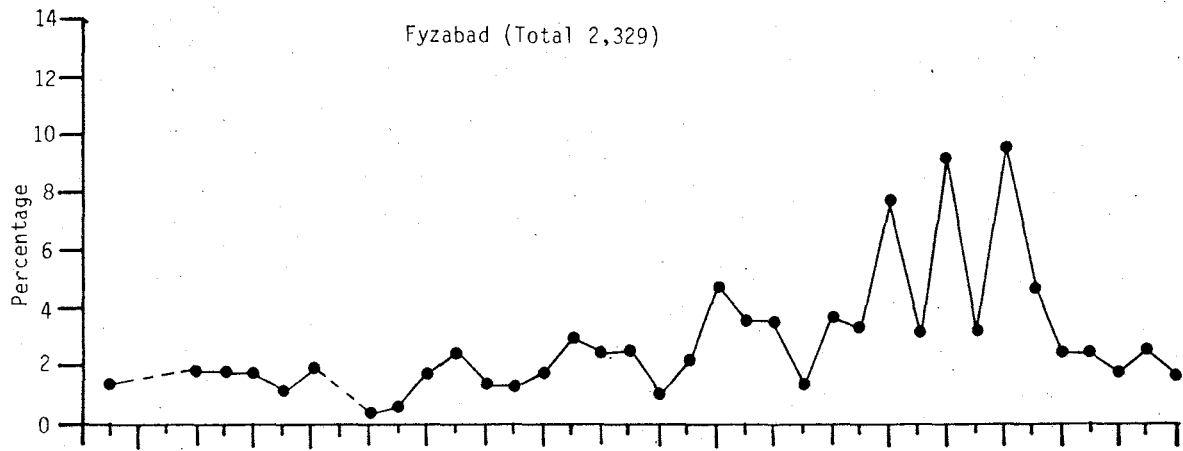
volume of migration from the major districts over the years are shown in the graphs on pages 143 and 144.<sup>87</sup> Some very clear trends emerge. The main migration districts, Basti, Gonda, Sultanpur and Fyzabad became important after the turn of the century. In fact, for the first three districts 1908 was the peak year of emigration. For Fyzabad, 1910 was the most important year, although 1906 and 1908 were also significant. In the case of Basti, only 25 per cent of the emigrants had left during the first two decades of emigration, while for Gonda it was 32 per cent.

# MAP III DISTRICTS OF ORIGIN OF FIJI'S UP MIGRANTS

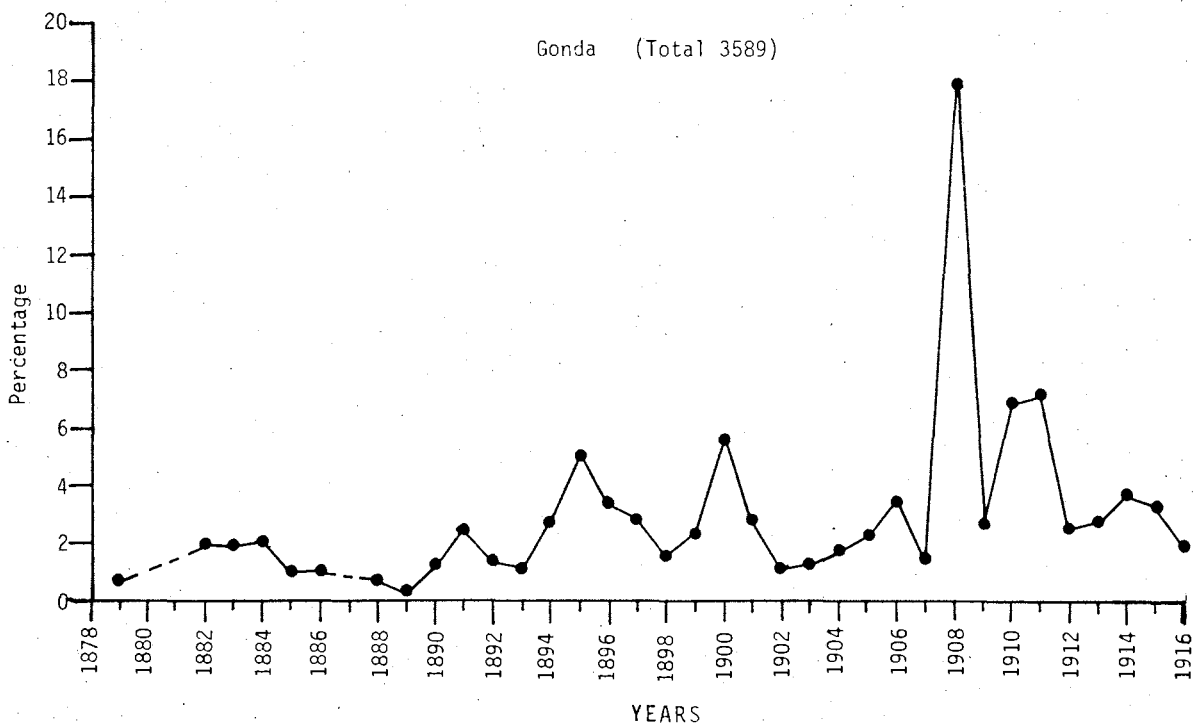
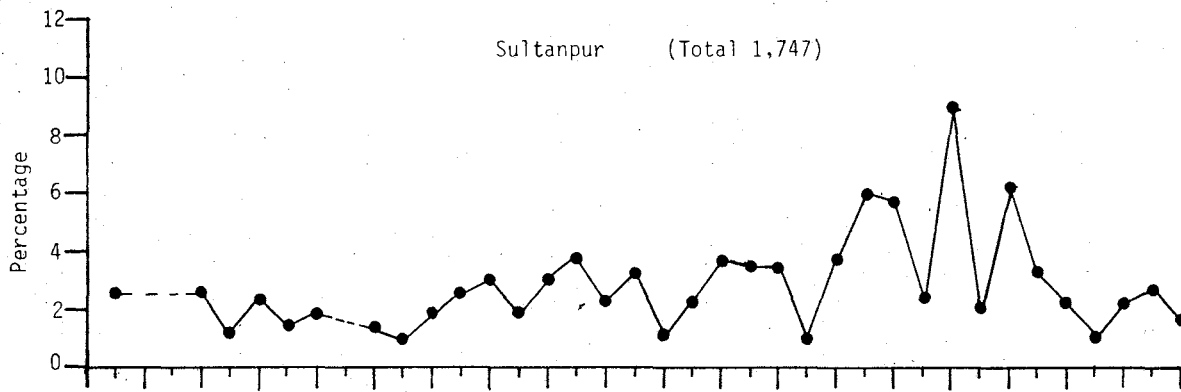
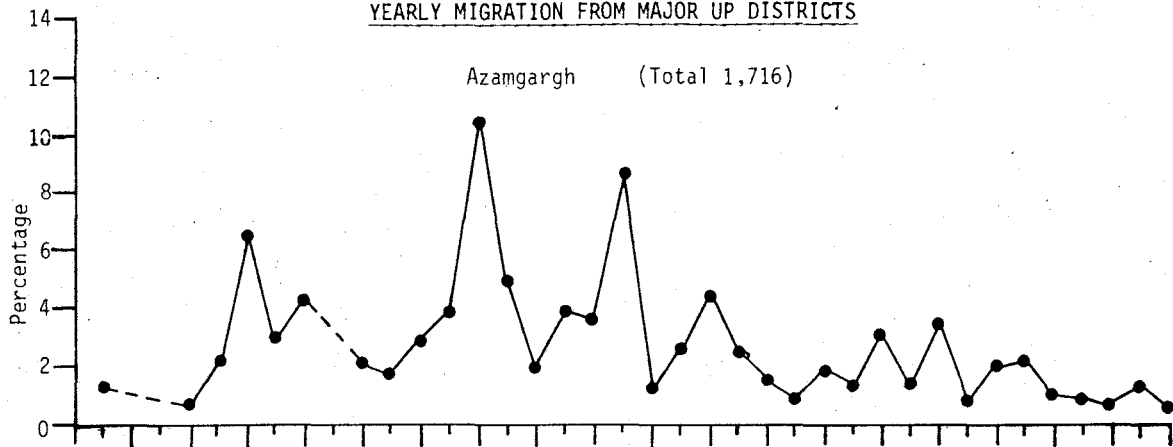


GRAPH I

YEARLY MIGRATION FROM MAJOR UP DISTRICTS:



YEARLY MIGRATION FROM MAJOR UP DISTRICTS



This was in marked contrast to the trend for Azamgarh and Ghazipur where, in the case of the former, 72 per cent of the emigrants had left before 1900, while for the latter 75 per cent. Perhaps in the early years, the recruiters centered their activities in these districts which were nearer Calcutta and therefore less expensive in terms of transportation costs. Moreover, they had the reputation of being very densely populated and therefore a good recruiting ground. But forces were at work which were drawing the redundant labour force in these districts elsewhere. The opening up of transportation networks may have provided the desperate people of these and neighbouring districts an opportunity and inducement to move to the city of Benares. Furthermore, railway links with Calcutta resulted in large mass migration there. Indeed, internal migration, as we shall see later, came to play a very important part in the economic life of the districts. With the increasing demand for labour from Fiji, recruiting had to be pushed further into the interior, less accessible districts which were predominantly agricultural, and had little outlet for a surplus labour force. Thus the prominence of such districts as Basti, Gonda and Sultanpur. It was the lack of availability of employment in these districts, exacerbated by their isolation from any large towns that in large part explains the differences in the volume of migration from the various districts, for in terms of their demographic, economic and social structure they all shared essentially similar characteristics. Additionally, once the pattern of recruitment was set and the recruiting agencies had established their networks in these districts, they naturally began to concentrate on them rather than extend their recruiting activities elsewhere.

Having looked at the patterns of migration within the eastern UP districts, it is important now to ask a broader question:

why eastern UP and not western UP? The most obvious, and from our point of view the most important, answer is that except in a few years, the eastern UP districts were able to furnish much of the labour demand from Fiji and the other colonies. The recruiters, therefore, did not need to venture further west, for this would have incurred them unnecessary extra expenditure. However, there were other structural factors also which made emigration an attractive expedient in the eastern districts. A fuller discussion of these is provided in the next two chapters; here we shall note only some of them which are directly pertinent to the argument.

The eastern districts were, for a start, more densely populated than the western districts, and this seems to have been one reason which led the recruiting agencies to focus their attention there. An illustration of the population densities in the two regions is provided in Table VIII. It is also clear that the rate of increase in population density was much greater in the eastern than in the western region.

The reasons for these differences between the two regions are complex and they need not detain us here. However, it may be mentioned that Edward Blunt, the 1911 UP Census Commissioner, attributed them to certain historical and social factors. The eastern region, he suggested, had, as a consequence of early establishment of British rule there, enjoyed a longer period of peace and stability which may have contributed to a more rapid increase in population. He mentioned, too, the importance of the caste structure of the two regions as a possible factor in explaining the differences: the wealthier and generally higher castes, which were against widow re-marriage and female children, were found mainly in western UP whereas the poorer and lower



TABLE VIII 88

Mean Density of Population per sq. mile in Selected Eastern  
and Western UP Districts, 1872-1921

<i>Name of District</i>	<i>Mean Density per sq. mile in</i>						<i>% of net variation 1872-1921</i>
	1872	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	
<b>Eastern UP:</b>							
Gorakhpur	443	574	675	649	707	722	62.9
Basti	525	582	637	659	653	687	30.8
Gonda	416	452	519	500	503	524	25.9
Jaunpur	662	780	816	776	746	745	12.5
Azamgarh	602	733	790	700	675	691	14.8
Fyzabad	591	624	702	707	666	677	14.6
<b>Western UP:</b>							
Sharanpur	414	458	469	490	462	440	6.3
Kanpur	483	498	510	531	482	485	0.4
Aligarh	551	525	536	617	599	546	- 0.9
Mathura	540	463	492	526	452	427	- 2.4
Agra	580	525	541	572	551	498	-14.1
Etah	480	438	406	500	504	483	0.6

ones which subscribed to quite the opposite values, in the east.<sup>89</sup>

But population density, by itself, is not usually the most important factor inducing migration, especially if the economy can sustain the pressure. This, however, was not the case in eastern UP. In many districts there, much of the cultivable areas was already under cultivation, and the peasants had to resort to double-cropping. In the sub-Himalayan East (Basti, Gonda, Gorakhpur and Bahraich), the double-cropped land was already 28.3 per cent of the total cultivable area, and further extension was quite impossible. In the central and western

Indo-Gangetic Plains, however, the percentages were 16.8 and 13.5 respectively.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, most of the landholdings in the eastern region were smaller than those in the western. In the late 1920s (and this would be typical of the earlier periods) the holdings in western UP ranged from 5.5 acres to 10.5 acres; in eastern UP, on the other hand, they were on the average between 3 - 5 acres.<sup>91</sup> Needless to say, this together with other factors — patterns of land ownership, availability of rural credit, revenue demands, etc., — acted as an impediment to agricultural expansion and development. In times of crisis and hardship, the easterners had little to fall back upon, except by seeking additional sources of income in other occupations. This trend too, was more marked in the eastern region.

But opportunities for employment within the region were becoming increasingly scarce. Whatever few industries that were there, were on the decline as a result of the extension of railways which destroyed the riverine trade of the eastern region by shifting a large part of the provincial commerce to the large western cities. Some (Indian) scholars have seen a sinister motive in this shift and have argued that this was the result of the 'stepmotherly' attitude of the British bent upon punishing the eastern region for its involvement in the 1857 uprising.<sup>92</sup> Whatever the motives, the fact of a definite decline is beyond dispute.<sup>93</sup> Benares, once the commercial centre of upper India, became in the nineteenth century a largely local commercial centre. Moneylending firms left Mirzapur, commercial centre of Bundelkhand, while Fyzabad, Ghazipur and Jaunpur also experienced decline. Railways brought wealth to western towns and cities. In the late nineteenth century, the rail-borne traffic in wheat, sugar and cotton of Chandausi increased eight times; Agra's rail-borne traffic

rose by over 44 per cent; and Kanpur's imports grew by 20 times. The result was that in the late nineteenth century west UP and the Doab, with less than half of the province's population, controlled nearly three-quarters of its trade; east UP, with more than half of the total population was left with only a quarter of the new wealth.

These developments had an important consequence for the different patterns of spatial mobility of the population in the two regions. The distressed western UP peasant could, if he wanted to, obtain employment in the burgeoning cities and towns near his home — especially in the cotton mills of Kanpur. His *poorbea* (eastern) cousin, however, would have to venture farther afield, away from his province, in search of jobs to supplement whatever meagre income he and his family derived from the land. The next chapter discusses the structure and pattern of this migration.

NOTES

- 1 The sources for this Table are: *PPs* vol.LXIX (1863), p.61; vol.LXIX (1877), p.149; vol.LXXXIX (1890-91), p.280; vol.CXII (1902), p.231; vol.LII (1919), p.203.
- 2 This phrase was coined by C.L. Tupper in his *Note on Indian Immigration during 1878-79* (Simla, 1879).
- 3 Kingsley Davis, *The Population of India and Pakistan* (Princeton, N.J., 1951), p.99.
- 4 Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India: Agricultural Labour in Madras Presidency in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1965), p.129.
- 5 Kernial Singh Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya. Some Aspects of Their Immigration and Settlement (1786-1957)*, (Cambridge, 1969), p.90.
- 6 Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore*, (Bombay, 1970), p.17.
- 7 For general descriptions of the *kangani* system, see among others, C. Kondapi, *Indians Overseas, 1838-1949* (New Delhi, 1951), pp. 29-52; R. Jayaraman, 'Indian Emigration to Ceylon: Some Aspects of the Historical and Social Background of the Emigrants', *IESHR*, vol.IV (1967), pp. 319-59; Chandra Jayawardena, 'Migration and Social Change: A Survey of Indian Communities Overseas', *Geographical Review*, vol. LVIII (1968), pp.426-49; Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, *passim*.
- 8 Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore*, p.17.
- 9 N.R. Chakravarti, *The Indian Minority in Burma. The Rise and Decline of an Immigrant Community*, (London, 1971), p.44.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p.51.

- 11 Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, p.81.
- 12 Ibid., p.82. According to Paul D. Wiebe and S. Mariappan, *Indian Malayans: The View from the Plantation*, (Delhi, 1978), p.24, North Indians, mostly Sikhs, provided only 0.8% of the total number of Indian immigrants to Malaya between 1844 and 1941.
- 13 Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, pp. 76-7, 82, 84.
- 14 See George R. Netto, *Indians in Malaya: Historical Facts and Figures* (Singapore, 1961?), p.24, for a notice of a recruiting agent, Ganapathy Pillay and Company, published in 1890. The conditions of employment offered differ substantially from those offered by the sugar colonies.
- 15 See Chapter 7.
- 16 This Table has been constructed from figures on indentured emigration from each presidency of British India, published in *British Parliamentary Papers*: vol.LXIX (1877), p.13; vol.LXXVI (1880), p.96; vol.LXXXVII (1887), p.174; vol.LXXXIX (1890-91), p.280; vol.CXII (1902), p.231; vol.XCIV (1905), p.239; vol.CXVIII (1908), p.223; vol.LII (1919), p.203; and from J. Geoghegan's *Coolie Emigration from India* (Calcutta, 1874). There are some discrepancies between Geoghegan's figure and those in the *PP*. Where this happened, I followed my calculations based on the *PP* figures.
- 17 Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery. The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920*, (London, 1974), p.55.

*Report of the Committee on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorats*, PP Cmd.5192 (1910), Part II (Evidence), p.29. Lord Sanderson was the chairman of the Committee which is usually known by his name. See also Edgar L. Erickson, 'The Introduction of East Indian Coolies into the British West Indies', *The Journal of Modern History*, vol.VI, no.2 (June 1934),

- p.142: 'The Madras natives were especially fond of liquor ...'
- 19 Calculations based on Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration from India*, pp.66, 72-80 and *PP* (see fn.16).
- 20 This is clearly evident from the *PP* figures. For a recent study of Indian immigration to Natal, see Maureen Tayal, 'Indian Indentured Labour in Natal, 1890-1911', *IESHR*, vol.XIV, no.4, (1977), pp.519-47.
- 21 Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, pp.82, 99; Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India*, ch. 8; Jayaraman, 'Indian Immigration to Ceylon', p.333. Wiebe and Mariappan, *Indian Malaysians*, p.6. The last two authors say 85.2% of the Indian immigrants in Malaya were Tamil, 6.8% Teluga and 6.4% Malyalam.
- 22 Chakravarti, *Indian Minority in Burma*, p.26. According to the 1931 census figures used by Chakravarti, the main districts supplying Indian immigrants to Burma were: Chittagong 88,000; Ganjam 49,000; Vizagapatnam 36,000; Godavari 26,000; Fyzabad 18,000; Tanjore 14,000; Ramnad 13,000; Sultanpur 12,000; and Calcutta 11,000.
- 23 K.K. Sircar, 'Migration of Indian Labour to British Plantations in Mauritius, Natal and Fiji, 1834-1914', unpublished MSc (Econ) thesis, University of London (1963), p.48.
- 24 *PR* (Madras), 1916.
- 25 Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Immigrants*, p.49.
- 26 R.D. Choksey, *Economic Life in the Bombay Deccan (1818-1939)*, (Bombay, 1955), p.28; see also I.J. Catanach, *Rural Credit in Western India, 1875-1930: Rural Credit and the Co-operative Movement in the Bombay Presidency*, (Berkeley, 1970), p.34.
- 27 Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration from India*, pp.72-80.

- 28 Panchanan Saha, *Emigration of Indian Labour, 1834-1900* (Delhi, 1970), p.31.
- 29 Source cited in fn.16.
- 30 J.S. Mangat, *A History of Asians in East Africa, c.1886-1945*, (Oxford, 1969), pp.38-9.
- 31 Source cited in fn.16.
- 32 For a description of the conditions of Indian immigrants in French Reunion and the reaction of the Government of India, see Tupper, *Note on Indian Immigration*.
- 33 *The Indian Emigration Act XXI of 1883: Rules and Notifications*, (Calcutta, 1898).
- 34 G.A. Grierson, *The Administration of the Lower Provinces of Bengal, 1882/3 - 1886/7*, (Calcutta, 1887), p.14.
- 35 See among others, Saha, *Emigration of Indian Labour*; Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*.
- 36 H.P. (Emigration), A Pros 15-20, 4 Nov. 1840, NAI; Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration*, p.5.
- 37 For extended discussion, see William Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh*, vol.II (Calcutta, 1896), pp.263-71.
- 38 S.C. Roy, *The Oraons of Chota Nagpur*, (Ranchi, 1915), p.8ff.
- 39 The list is found in *PP* vol.XXXIV (1840), pp.195-8 and 205-10.
- 40 *Ibid.* There were many other minor castes. Judging from their names, it would appear that many of them were of tribal or quasi-tribal origins.

- 41 This Table is constructed from figures in H.P. (Emigration) A files. The numbers are: Pros. 3-14, March 1845; Pros.9, 19 April 1845; Pros.11-13, 1 Feb. 1850; Pros.11-12, 4 March 1853; Pros.25-26, 26 May 1854; Pros.48-49, 10 Aug. 1855; Pros.60-61, 30 May 1856; Pros. 59, 27 Aug. 1858; Pros.14-15, 4 July 1862; Pros.65-67, 13 June 1864. All of these are in the National Archives of India, New Delhi.
- 42 G.D. (Emigration), A Pros 3/6, 1 Aug. 1838, NAI.
- 43 H.L. (Emigration), A Pros 8/16, 27 Sept. 1845, NAI.
- 44 *PP* vol.XXII (1837-38), Appendix B, no.32, p.225. See also Sircar, 'Migration of Indian Labour', p.28.
- 45 *PP* vol.XXII, *ibid.* See also Edgar L. Erickson, 'The Introduction of East Indian Coolies into the British West Indies', pp.128-9.
- 46 Roy, *The Oraons of Chota Nagpur*, p.39.
- 47 J.C. Jha, *The Kol Insurrection of Chota Nagpur*, (Calcutta, 1964), p.28.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p.29.
- 49 Roy, *The Oraons*, p.41 ff.
- 50 L.S.S. O'Malley, 'General Survey' in L.S.S. O'Malley (ed.), *Modern India and the West*, (London, 1941), p.708. For very similar views on the oppression of tenants, see R. Rickards, *India or Facts Submitted to Illustrate the Character and Conditions of the Native Inhabitants*, vol.II (London, 1832), p.123; F. Bradley-Birt, *Chota Nagpur. A Little Known Province of the Empire*, (London, 1903), p.5.
- 51 Vera Anstey, 'Economic Development' in L.S.S. O'Malley (ed.), *Modern India and the West*, p.279. See also O'Malley's *Sambalpur D.G.*, vol.XVI (1909), p.30.



- 52 L.S.S. O'Malley, *Birbhum D.G.*, vol.XIX (1910), pp.16-17.
- 53 O'Malley, 'General Survey', *Modern India and the West*, p.730.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 This song, apparently recorded by S.C. Roy, was given to me by Prof. Krishnadev Upadhyay of the Folklore Institute, Varanasi.
- 56 One such rebellion is described at length in Jha, *The Kol Insurrection*. See also O'Malley, *Birbhum D.G.*, p.25 ff. For tribal hostility towards plains people, see R. Carstairs, *The Little World of an Indian District Officer*, (London, 1912), p.227; W.J. Culshaw, *Tribal Heritage. A Study of the Santals* (London, 1949), Ch.II; W.J. Culshaw and W.G. Archer, 'The Santal Rebellion', *Man in India*, vol.XXV, no.4 (Dec. 1945), pp.218-39.
- 57 W.W. Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal*, (London, 7th edn, 1897), p.225.
- 58 Saha, *Emigration of Indian Labour*, p.100.
- 59 H.P.(Emigration), A Pros 1, October 1858, NAI.
- 60 Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*, p.49.
- 61 Hunter, *Annals*, pp.226-7.
- 62 See C.P. Simmons, 'Recruiting and Organising an Industrial Labour Force in Colonial India. The Case of the Coal Mining Industry, c.1880-1939', *IESHR*, vol.XIII, no.4 (Oct-Dec. 1976), pp.455-85.
- 63 Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Early Railwaymen in India: "Dacoity" and "Train-Wrecking" (ca.1860-1900)' in Barun De (ed.), *Essays in Honour of Prof. S.C. Sarkar*, (New Delhi, 1976), pp.523-50.

- 64 See Chapter 5. Two readily available accounts of this migration are: S.M. Akhtar, *Emigrant Labour for the Assam Tea Gardens*, (Lahore, 1939), and Sir Perceival Griffiths, *The History of the Indian Tea Industry*, (London, 1967).
- 65 Statistics on Bihari migration are provided in several places, including O'Malley's *Bengal District Gazetteers* (vol. nos. are listed in the bibliography), various *Census Reports*, *Administration Reports*, and the *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (1907).
- 66 For example, in 1881-82, the UP supplied 78.6% of the total demand, in 1888 69.8%; in 1889 69.2%; 1890 83.0%; 1891 90.8%; 1892 81.4%; 1893 78.4%; 1894 84.1%; 1895 91.7%; 1896 91.4%; 1897 88.9%; 1901 66.1%; 1902 60.3%; and in 1914 85.5%. These figures have been derived from an analysis of the *PR*.
- 67 Derived from my analysis of the Emigration Passes: see vol.II, Appendix II, pp.5-6.
- 68 Yearly variations are shown in vol.II, Appendix III, pp.7-11.
- 69 Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, p.45.
- 70 Quoted in *Bengal Administration Report* (1884-85), p.296.
- 71 See vol.II, Appendix IV, pp.12-28.
- 71a *Bengal Administration Report* (1885-86), p.297-8.
- 72 *Annual General Report of the Patna Division* (1883-84), p.27.
- 73 Around 1901, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company built a sugar mill at Lautoka — now the largest in Fiji.
- 74 See vol.II, Appendix IV, pp.12-28. The figure for Jabalpur is obtained by adding the figures for codes 43 and 223. There was

an unfortunate repetition at the coding stage.

- 75 For an account of this, see Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs (1839-1964)*, vol.II (Princeton, N.J., 1966).
- 76 See the testimony of Colonel Duncan Pitcher to the Sanderson Committee, *PP Cmd. 5192 (1910)*, Part II (Evidence), p.178.
- 77 Quoted in Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*, p.58.
- 78 Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, p.49.
- 79 *Ibid.*, p.48. District figures derived from vol.II, Appendix IV, pp.12-18.
- 80 E.P. A Pros 8-9, October 1894, NAI.
- 81 See vol.II, Appendix IV, pp.12-28. For British Guiana, the total figure is derived by adding the totals for codes 89 and 156.
- 82 These are found in the despatches of Fiji's Emigration Agent at Calcutta or Madras to the Agent General of Immigration in Fiji. They are in the National Archives of Fiji, Suva. The following figures derived from an analysis of the shiplists.
- 83 *Census of India*, vol.I, Part I (1901), pp.70-1.
- 84 *United Provinces of Agra and Oudh Administration Report (1904-5)*, p.26.
- 85 *Ibid.* (1907-8), p.ii.
- 86 See vol.II, Appendix IV, pp.12-28.
- 87 For yearly variations see vol.II, Appendix V, pp.29-40.
- 88 Derived from *Census of India*, vol.XVI, Part 1 (1921), p.26.

- 89 *Census of India*, vol.XV, Part 1 (1911), p.11.
- 90 Birendranath Ganguly, *Trends of Agriculture and Population in the Ganges Valley*, (London, 1938), p.43.
- 91 Government of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, *Report on the Present Economic Situation in the United Provinces*, (Nainital, 1933), p.2.
- 92 R.L. Singh, *India: A Regional Geography*, (Varanasi, 1971), p.189.
- 93 For the following paragraph I have relied heavily on Francis Robinson, 'Municipal Government and Muslim Separatism in the United Provinces, 1883-1916', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol.VII, no.3 (1973), pp.389-441.

## CHAPTER 5

## PATTERNS OF MIGRATION FROM THE U.P.

Many people in India and elsewhere express remarkable surprise, even disbelief, at the fact that so many people emigrated from North India to Fiji and to other parts of the world. In view of the popularly held belief that migration is 'unnatural' to Hindu tradition due to the rigid strictures of caste, *dharma* (duty) and *karma* (fate), it is usually assumed that the Indians must have left their homes largely under considerable deception and trickery. The apparent immobility of the population in the region from which the emigrants came is asserted as 'proof' of this view.<sup>1</sup>

A classic exposition of the immobility thesis is provided by William Crooke, the scholar-official and nineteenth century authority on North Indian ethnography, who wrote in 1897:

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

narrow circle, and if he allows his daughter to reach womanhood unwed, he commits a grievous sin. Should he die in exile, he may fail to win the heaven of gods because no successor will make the due funeral oblations, and no trusted family priest be there to arrange the last journey of his spirit. So he may wander through the ages a starving, suffering, malignant ghost, because his obsequies have not been duly performed.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the peasants' immemorial habits, lethargic passivity, and the rather peculiar aversion to strange and distant places referred to above, another obstacle frequently mentioned is the religious objection to crossing the *kala pani*, the terrible black waters, which resulted in the loss of caste and brought contact with *mlecchas* (polluting barbarians), both consequences inviting severe divine retribution.

To take the second point first, it must be emphasised that the importance given by scholars to the notion of *kala pani* is greatly exaggerated. Let us briefly trace the origins of the idea.<sup>3</sup> The earliest reference to the undesirability of contact with 'barbarians' is found in the *Dharmasutras* of Vasistha and Apasthamba. The *Sutra of Baudhyayana*, which dates before the Christian era, also bans travel by sea although later commentators interpreted it to apply only to the Brahmans. Manu's *Dharmasastras* (c. 100-200 AD) and the *Narada Sastra* (c. 500 AD) also speak unfavourably of travel by sea. But A.L. Basham notes that despite 'these bans it is evident that Indians of all castes, including Brahmans, frequently travelled by sea during the Hindu period. The text which forbade or discouraged ocean voyages cannot have been followed by more than a small section of the population'.<sup>4</sup> A notable example, of course, is the emigration of large numbers of Hindus in this period to countries in Southeast

Asia.<sup>5</sup> In the thirteenth century, Hemadri in the great law digest, *Caturvarga Cintamani*, states that travel by sea is *kalivarja*, an act permitted in the past but not in *kaliyug* (the present dark age). Significantly, the interdict applied only to the twice-born (*dvija*), 'but[was] probably intended here to apply only to brahmins'.<sup>6</sup> Basham has argued that with Muslim penetration into the Indian subcontinent, and consequent social and political upheaval, Hindu antipathy towards seafaring may have intensified and spread to the lower strata of society, but others have adduced evidence of continued seafaring in later periods.<sup>7</sup> The point remains, however, that the injunction against foreign travel was neither very widely followed nor, it would seem, generally intended to apply to all strata of Hindu society; those which furnished the preponderant majority of indentured emigrants (*Sudra varna*), was most certainly exempt from the injunction.

Regarding internal migration, Crooke has a point, though there is considerable exaggeration in it. India never really was a country of imperturbable changelessness as is suggested. Constant change and mobility was very much a part of its social structure as its people struggled for freedom from the exploitation of man and the vagaries of nature. Even the higher castes such as Brahmans were not averse to migrating from one region to another in pursuit of wealth and patronage.<sup>8</sup> Information on large-scale peasant migration in pre-modern India is exasperatingly scarce, but sufficient is known to suggest that migration was used as an attractive expedient to cope with oppression and adverse economic circumstances. For early India, Romila Thapar explains the notable absence of peasant rebellions by highlighting the importance of migration: 'Given the availability of cultivable land, peasant migration appears to have been the more common

form of alleviating the pressures of heavy taxation'<sup>9</sup> although this strategy, she notes, would have been more attractive in small kingdoms or in places along borders. Jaimal Rai points to the incidence of migration as a consequence of structural changes in the economy: 'the transition from self-sufficient economy to market economy and the specified wages paid in the industrial centres of accentuated migration from rural to urban centres'.<sup>10</sup> The movement was so pervasive as to lead Kautilya to 'recommend several measures which were meant to save the rural world from the eroding influence of the monetized economy'.<sup>11</sup> Peasant migration was also important in the early mediaeval period. Abhay Kant Chaudhary writes of the migration of peasants suffering from famine and taxation, oppression by feudal landlords, shifting economic balances between towns and villages, and even fear of Muslim attack.<sup>12</sup> P.C. Jain and B.N.S. Yadav corroborate this picture and find evidence of spatial mobility among Indian peasants in *Subhasitaratnakosa* and *Brhannaradiya Purana*.<sup>13</sup>

Much the same pattern persisted in the later period. Irfan Habib, in his authoritative study *The Agrarian System of Moghul India*, discusses the ease with which the peasant could migrate, given his low level of subsistence, limited immovable possessions, and the availability of vast stretches of virgin land. 'This capacity of mobility on the part of the peasants', he writes, 'should be regarded as one of the most striking features of the social and economic life of the times. It was the peasants' first answer to famine or man's oppression'.<sup>14</sup> Making a more general point, Morris David Morris has suggested that too much perhaps has been made of the stabilising effects of Indian rural social structure in acting as a barrier to



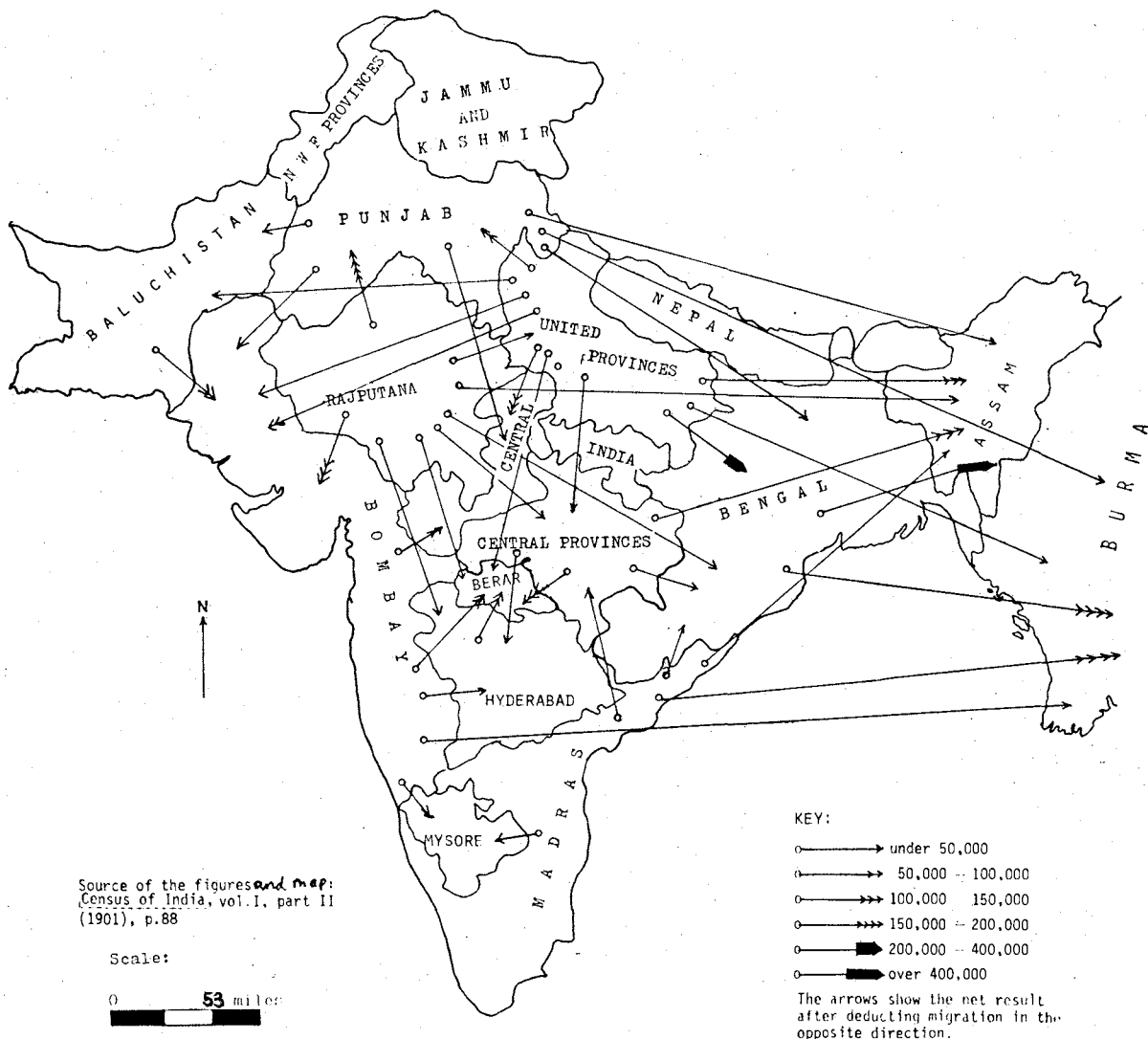
population mobility. 'It is probably safe to say', he has written, 'that the Indian populations historically have been as mobile as, for example, the population of Western Europe at equivalent stages of economic development'.<sup>15</sup> Recent theoretical and empirical studies of peasants have generally tended to support his assertions,<sup>16</sup> as does the evidence provided in this chapter.

Whatever may have been the position in earlier times, there is enough evidence to indicate the increasing incidence and importance of internal migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many scholars, especially demographers, have written authoritatively of the patterns and structural characteristics of internal migration on an all-India basis.<sup>17</sup> General provincial trends and patterns of population movement are indicated in the map on the next page. In this chapter, I shall focus on emigration from the UP as it was from there that the majority of Fiji's indentured emigrants came. My main concern will be to indicate that migration was not an 'unknown' phenomenon in UP society; on the contrary, I shall demonstrate that it was an increasingly common, and to some extent even popular, process in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The nature and extent of migration from the UP around the middle of the last century and before is not known and no mention of it is made in the few censuses that were taken.<sup>18</sup> But it could not have been significant. In the second half of the century, certain factors came into operation which served to accelerate spatial mobility. They included, first of all, rapidly deteriorating economic conditions in the UP, following the effects of British rule, especially

MAP 1

MAIN CURRENTS OF INTER-PROVINCIAL MIGRATION, 1901



Source of the figures and map:  
Census of India, vol. I, part II  
(1901), p. 88

Scale:  
0 53 miles

KEY:  
 ○ → under 50,000  
 ○ → 50,000 - 100,000  
 ○ → 100,000 - 150,000  
 ○ → 150,000 - 200,000  
 ○ → 200,000 - 400,000  
 ○ → over 400,000  
 The arrows show the net result after deducting migration in the opposite direction.

after the mutiny of 1857. These are discussed at some length in the next chapter. The second factor was the establishment of colonial enterprises like the tea plantations, collieries, repairing concerns, jute textile manufacture, and the like.<sup>19</sup> Given their magnitude, these concerns could not be worked with locally available labour and hence efforts were made to import labour from areas perceived to be over-populated. And thirdly, migration was stimulated by the availability of adequate transportation, especially railways. G.P. Dain, the Agent of the Calcutta Tramways, told the *Royal Commission on Labour* in 1931: 'It is the construction of railways which has made this migration to large cities possible, and I do know of areas where the advent of means of transport has had the effect of depopulating the area instead of increasing its population.'<sup>20</sup>

From the 1880s onwards, we are on surer grounds about the extent and direction of migration from the UP (and other parts of India), and considerable documentation on the subject is available in the decennial censuses after 1881. I shall use these to assess the volume of spatial mobility from the UP. In 1881, 814,312 UP migrants were enumerated in other provinces;<sup>21</sup> in 1891 1,370,144;<sup>22</sup> in 1901 1,510,295;<sup>23</sup> in 1911 1,408,522;<sup>24</sup> and in 1921 1,400,284.<sup>25</sup> The very large increase in the number of UP migrants in the decade after 1881 is probably due to errors of enumeration in the first census, but it is clear that the period of greatest internal migration from the UP was around the turn of the century. It was of this time that E.A.H. Blunt, the 1911 UP Census Commissioner, was thinking when he noted: 'It is said by people who should know that there is not a single family in the Benares Division which has not at least one member in the Provinces of Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Orissa.'<sup>26</sup>

The main thrust of population movement from the UP was eastwards, as is indicated in Blunt's remark. The province of Bengal was by far the largest magnet for the UP migrants. Indeed, the UP, after Bihar and Orissa, was the largest supplier of labour for Bengal. In 1881, it furnished 351,993 migrants to Bengal;<sup>27</sup> in 1891, 365,248<sup>28</sup> and in 1901, the peak period, 496,940.<sup>29</sup> There is a perceptible decrease in 1911 when UP migrants enumerated in Bengal numbered 400,956,<sup>30</sup> and a further decline in 1921 when the number was 338,442.<sup>31</sup> This decrease in the volume of migration should be treated with some caution, despite the fact that there was a general decline in the numbers migrating from the UP. Until 1911, Bihar and Orissa were parts of the province of Bengal, acquiring a separate provincial identity only after that date. This separation was an important cause for the decline in the number of UP migrants in Bengal. However, if the figures for Bihar and Orissa and Bengal are added, it is clear that there was, in fact, an increase in the total volume of migration from the UP.

A fairly large proportion of the migration from the UP was to the contiguous districts of Bengal (now Bihar). In 1891, for example, 92,163 or 25.3 per cent of the UP migrants in Bengal were enumerated in these districts, and in 1901 96,869 or 14.5 per cent. There was considerable movement of population from Gorakhpur to Champaran, from Gorakhpur and Ballia to Saran, from Ballia, Ghazipur, Benares and

Mirzapur to Shahabad, and from Mirzapur to the tribal areas of Palamau and Chota Nagpur.<sup>32</sup> The reasons for this migration are not always given though it is safe to assume that much of it would have been due to seasonal agricultural work, temporary social visits, marriages, trading, etc.

However, a large number of the UP migrants were bound for the more distant industrial centres of Bengal — Calcutta, Hoogly, Howrah and the 24 Parganas as the following Table shows.

TABLE I<sup>33</sup>

UP Migrants in Industrial Centres of Bengal

<u>Names</u>	1901	%	1911	%	1921	%
Hoogly	12,069	(2.4)	15,013	(3.7)	17,377	(5.1)
Howrah	39,727	(8.0)	47,243	(11.7)	42,242	(12.3)
24-Parganas	46,295	(9.3)	83,536	(20.7)	88,913	(25.9)
Calcutta	90,452	(18.2)	89,695	(21.1)	67,433	(19.6)
Total	188,543		235,287		215,965	
% of total UP migrants in Bengal		37.9%		58.7%		63.8%

Much of this movement can be assumed to have been due to the search for employment, for in Indian (Hindu) society marriages, one of the biggest causes for migration, are contracted within a particular regional, social and linguistic boundary, and seldom between distant and culturally different areas. Two trends are clear from the above

Table. From the turn of this century onwards, the industrial centres increasingly became the largest attraction for the UP migrants, with a consequent decline in migration to other, industrially less important, areas in the province. It is clear also that Calcutta itself remained a substantial employer of the migrants. But the figures also show the gradual rise in prominence of other areas, notably the 24-Parganas which attracted only 9.3 per cent of the UP emigrants in 1901 but 25.9 per cent in 1921.

Much of the migration from the UP to Bengal was male dominated which, of course, is not surprising, given the social conventions of Indian society, the hazards of travelling, etc. But it is interesting to note a surprisingly large number of females also migrating from the UP. In 1881, 137,435 or 29.1 per cent of the UP migrants in Bengal were females;<sup>34</sup> in 1891 45,424 or 33.2 per cent;<sup>35</sup> and in 1901 84,078 or 55.7 per cent.<sup>36</sup> Because, as we have noted above, Bihar and Orissa were not separated from Bengal, it is impossible to ascertain how much of this female migration was to the contiguous districts of that province. However figures for the period after 1911 make it abundantly clear that females were also migrating long distances to Bengal, presumably as labourers or as wives of male migrants. In Bengal as a whole in 1911, UP female migrants numbered 106,801 or 26.4 per cent,<sup>37</sup> while in Calcutta City in 1921, 371 out of 1,000 UP migrants were females.<sup>38</sup> This picture of marked female mobility, surprising in the context of the pervasive stereotype of female immobility in India, is corroborated by evidence of large female emigration to Fiji — discussed in Chapter 7.

Data on caste composition of the UP migrants is very fragmentary, but the little that is available suggests the prominence of 'lower' castes. The 1901 *Census Report* for Bengal reported that besides the high castes coming from up-country (including Bihar and the UP), there were large numbers of such castes as Tanti, Gowala, Kurmi, Kahar, Kalwar, Bhar, Dusadh, Nunia, Bind and Chamar.<sup>39</sup> The proportionate contribution of various castes cannot be determined, though scattered evidence suggests the predominance of lower, agricultural and labouring castes such as Chamars, Kahars and Gowalas.<sup>40</sup> Many of the emigrants to Calcutta and other industrial centres left home on their own volition, seeking respite from adverse economic circumstances at home; they did not have any particular occupation in mind at the time of departure:

The average incoming worker is unskilled: he comes to seek *kam*, and has no definite idea as to what *kam* may be. He prefers to work in close proximity to his fellow villagers or relations, but if work is not available in their areas, he goes elsewhere. If he settles down in a manufacturing area, where he is absorbed in a regular calling in which in due course he becomes skilled, he has no difficulty in getting employment if he loses his job, provided he is well behaved and reasonably good worker, for skilled workmen find a ready market for their services in this presidency. If he remains unskilled, he may move from place to place, as his inclinations dictate and opportunities offer. If, at the worst, he can get nothing to do, he returns to his home, and perhaps sends out a more competent younger or older brother to seek work, while he himself works on the family plot of land. Actually the immigrant may prefer casual or seasonal employment. He may not desire to settle down as a factory hand for the reason that he may not wish to be separated from his family for the greater part of the year. His home circumstances may be such that he does not require regular wages.<sup>41</sup>

Besides these 'free' migrants others were recruited by *sardars* who were sent out by the employers to engage men from districts and villages where they were well known. Usually they recruited friends

and relatives, a practice which, as in the *kangani* system, enabled them to 'exercise considerable influence and control over the gang they work'.<sup>42</sup> The employers assisted the *sardars* by providing their railway fares and money to leave with the families of the newly recruited men. Others were recruited through the agency of contractors who were paid a certain amount of commission for labour supplied to the employers. The contractors, who operated in a manner very similar to the sub-agents of indentured recruitment, were usually Europeans employing recruiters to enlist people up-country. These recruits, in contrast to their indentured counterparts, did not sign any contract, though probably they were expected to render a specified number of years' service for the concerns for which they were engaged.

The UP migrants constituted a significant part of the total industrial labour force of Bengal. As early as 1882 it was found that many of the factory operatives, 'especially in the neighbourhood of Calcutta, came from the North-Western Provinces'.<sup>43</sup> The prominence of up-country labour was also marked in the jute mills. In July 1895, a detailed enquiry in 14 jute mills employing 49,729 persons — covering over 60 per cent of the total jute labour force of 77,618 — found that 23,096 or 46.4 per cent of the labourers had come from Bihar and UP.<sup>44</sup> By the turn of the century, B. Foley reported, 'these up-country people had all but replaced Bengalis as jute mill hands'.<sup>45</sup> The textile mills also employed a large percentage of this labour. In 1921, in one of the larger Calcutta textile mills, it was found that one-third of the skilled and the same proportion of unskilled labourers came from the UP, with others originating in Bihar, Orissa, Madras, and Bengal itself.<sup>46</sup>



Both the free migrants as well as those who were recruited by middlemen and contractors came largely from the eastern districts of the UP. The picture for the nineteenth century is not clear, but the figures available on the contribution of the various eastern districts in 1921 may be indicative of a general pattern. The districts which then furnished over 5,000 UP migrants to Calcutta were: Benares (16,615), Ghazipur (15,399), Ballia (14,092), Azamgarh (12,562), Jaunpur (12,341), Mirzapur (8,218), Fyzabad (6,544), Sultanpur (5,870) and Allahabad (5,483).<sup>47</sup> We have already seen that all of these districts, in varying degrees, also contributed to indentured emigration, though it would seem that for many of them internal migration was more pronounced than its indentured counterpart. This trend helps explain why many of the above districts featured less prominently in indentured emigration than did others such as Basti and Gonda which sent fewer emigrants to Calcutta and other areas. But why did the districts listed above send more migrants to Calcutta? An economic explanation does not help for, if anything, Basti, Gonda and other such districts suffered equal, if not greater, hardships than the others.<sup>48</sup> A more plausible explanation would point to the relatively easy access to transport (railways, roads) that migrants from Benares, Ghazipur and other districts had which, however, was denied those living in the more inaccessible areas. This, together with their relative nearness to Calcutta, must have prompted the middlemen and the contractors and their agents to confine their recruiting activities to these districts rather than to probe further inland into areas which were already dominated by colonial recruiters.

Besides Bengal, the Assam tea gardens were also important importers and employers of the UP labour. The introduction of tea

cultivation into India had been contemplated as early as 1834.<sup>49</sup> The Government started an experimental station at Lakhimpur in 1835, but the venture was not attended by any measure of success. The Assam Company was formed in 1839, and it began its operations by buying a garden at Jaipur in the Sibsagar district. In the 1850s, several private individuals started their own tea gardens in the Brahmaputra Valley. In Cachar, the first tea garden was established in 1855, and others were opened up at Sylhet a few years later. In 1859, a real boom began, and companies were formed to acquire gardens opened up by private enterprise. From about 1869 the tea industry began to flourish on a sound basis.

From the outset, the tea industry in Assam was plagued by problems of acute labour shortage: 'The indigenous Assamese could not be persuaded to leave their farms and villages to work on the gardens, and there were few landless labourers to be found in the province'.<sup>50</sup> It was clear, therefore, that extraneous sources of labour supply would have to be explored. This followed and in 1853 a large-scale importation of labourers began.<sup>51</sup> Throughout the history of the tea industry, the migrants from Northeastern and Central India supplied the bulk of the labour force on the tea gardens in Assam.

The regions which furnished the bulk of the labour are shown in the Table II. It is clear that the largest suppliers of labour to the tea gardens were Chota Nagpur and the Santal Parganas (principally the former). People from this region were recruited from the earliest days, and as we noted in the previous chapter, their unsatisfactory experience in the colonies may have encouraged their migration to the gardens. Probably like their indentured counterparts, many in the early

TABLE II <sup>52</sup>Regional Origins of Assam Tea Garden Labourers

Year	Regions						Total
	Chota Nagpur & Santal P.	Rest of Bengal	United Prov.	Central Prov.	Madras	Others	
1885	9,790	4,542	5,445	-	80	1,287	21,144
1886	12,160	3,649	5,934	-	189	783	22,715
1887	16,385	3,901	7,496	-	160	1,148	29,090
1888	20,252	4,408	7,995	-	285	377	33,317
1889	22,877	5,372	7,860	-	689	750	37,548
1890	13,162	3,533	6,082	-	1,895	1,533	26,205
1891	16,557	8,036	10,524	-	2,018	804	37,939
1892	17,910	9,740	9,196	1,260	2,894	802	41,802
1893	17,837	10,474	6,188	896	767	981	37,143
1894	17,833	7,662	6,954	2,014	976	267	35,706
1895	18,369	10,214	18,957	7,932	969	60	56,501
1896	16,122	8,102	19,135	17,285	568	89	61,301
1897	28,078	6,848	9,391	19,876	2,113	22	66,328
1898	18,594	3,908	4,565	7,100	1,284	65	35,516
1899	11,192	3,829	1,960	7,197	1,632	62	25,872
1900	17,605	4,029	3,617	16,962	2,749	82	45,044
1901	7,558	2,368	1,272	7,805	821	63	19,887
1902-3	6,661	4,706	966	7,112	747	7	20,199
Total	288,942	105,321	133,537	95,439	20,836	9,182	653,257
% of Total	44.2%	16.1%	20.4%	14.6%	3.2%	1.4%	

days were collected in the region of Calcutta, but later recruiting was extended to their districts of origin. The principal districts of recruitment were Ranchi, Lohardaga, Manbhum and Hazaribagh. <sup>53</sup>

In Bengal (including Bihar and Orissa), the largest districts of labour supply were Bankura, Shahabad, Gaya and Saran; in the Central Provinces, Bilaspur and Jabalpur; and in Madras, Ganjam and Vizagapatnam. The main districts of supply in the UP, judging from the number of its people resident in Assam in 1901, were the following:

TABLE III <sup>54</sup>

Districts of Origin of UP Migrants in Assam, 1901

<i>Name of District</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>
Allahabad	2,668	1,457	4,125
Azamgarh	11,761	8,843	20,604
Ballia	4,733	2,912	7,645
Benares	3,541	3,080	6,621
Ghazipur	23,876	18,696	42,772
Gorakhpur	1,856	594	2,450
Jaunpur	5,615	3,062	8,677
Mirzapur	2,952	881	3,833
Partabgarh	1,480	595	2,075
Rae Bareili	810	237	1,047
Others	6,296	2,755	9,051
Total	65,588	43,312	108,900

A great majority (71,433) of the UP migrants were found in the Surma Valley, followed by Brahmaputra Valley (30,558), and the Hill Districts (5,748).<sup>55</sup> A striking feature evident in Table III is the number of females migrating: they constituted 39.8 per cent of the total resident UP population in Assam. But while this figure is

surprisingly high, detailed year by year analysis of figures available on labour migration to Assam between 1893 and 1902-3 reveals the proportion of females to be even higher.<sup>56</sup> It shows that females constituted 46.5 per cent of total UP migrants, a figure which compared favourably with other regions.<sup>57</sup> Who these women were no one knows; perhaps many were 'single' unaccompanied women, but given that the planters wanted families, it is likely that many of them may have accompanied their husbands and children to the gardens. However, what is perhaps most important to note is that the above figures throw considerable doubt on the conventional assertions about the immobility of Indian women.

Like the industrial concerns of Calcutta, the Assam tea garden planters also employed contractors and *sardars* to obtain their labourers. The advantages and disadvantages of the two schemes were debated from the very beginning. The contractor system was prominent in the early years,<sup>58</sup> but because of abuses in recruitment brought to light by various commissions of enquiry, it was finally abolished in 1915.<sup>59</sup> Thereafter the *sardars* were the only recruiting agents. However, during the 1890s, the contractors recruited 34 per cent of the total migrants, and the *sardars* 26 per cent.<sup>60</sup> The remaining 40 per cent of the migrants were 'Non-Act Immigrants' had migrated on their own and contracted in Dhubri.

The popularity of the two methods varied in the different regions. In the case of the UP, only 9.4 per cent of the migrants in the 1890s were recruited by the *sardars*, and 13.3 per cent by the contractors,<sup>61</sup> most of them in Ghazipur district; the remaining 77.3 per cent were voluntary, that is non-recruited, migrants.

This trend is surprising, especially as both the *sardars* and the contractors were very popular in other regions,<sup>62</sup> but perhaps the greater distance of the UP from Assam and consequently greater costs of transportation may have discouraged them from extending recruiting activities to the UP districts. Looking at the operation of the various methods of recruitment by sex of the migrants from the UP, 10.4 per cent of the males were recruited by the *sardars*, 14.3 per cent by the contractors, while 75.3 per cent were voluntary migrants. In the case of the females the percentage recruited by the *sardars* and the contractors was lower than it was for the males: 8.2 per cent and 12.2 per cent respectively; 79.9 per cent of them had migrated on their own.<sup>63</sup>

Despite assertions by some officials that the 'up-country man is a good worker',<sup>64</sup> the UP migrants generally did poorly on the tea plantations; so much so that a decline in their numbers in certain years was welcomed by some planters.<sup>65</sup> This unsuitability of the UP labourers is supported by the statistics on desertions and mortality on the plantations. They bolted the gardens more frequently than did those from all other regions except the CP. Between 1893 and 1896, over 8 per cent of the UP migrants deserted each year; in 1897 it was 10.3 per cent, the highest for that year for all migrants coming from different regions. By contrast, desertion figures for the Chota Nagpur labourers never rose above the 3 per cent mark.<sup>66</sup> Desertions were more frequent among the Non-Act migrants than among the Act ones. This was perhaps because they enjoyed greater freedom than their counterparts recruited by the *sardars* and contractors: their contracts were for one year in contrast to five years for the latter. And males deserted more frequently than females

but this is not surprising.

The UP migrants also succumbed to death more easily than did others, except the CP migrants. Throughout the 1890s their mortality rate was well over 40/mille, reaching 70/mille in 1897. For Chota Nagpur labourers, in contrast, the ratio of death per mille was around 30 while for Bengal and Orissa migrants, it remained in the 20s.<sup>67</sup> But however unsuccessful and unwanted the UP migrants may have been, they still continued to furnish a significant proportion of the total labour force on the Assam tea gardens.

Besides Bengal and Assam, a large number of UP migrants were also found in other parts of India. An indication of the magnitude and direction of this movement is provided in the following Table.

TABLE IV<sup>68</sup>

UP Migrants in Parts of India Other Than  
Bengal and Assam, 1881-1921

<i>Name of Region</i>	<i>Years</i>				
	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
Bihar & Orissa <sup>a</sup>	-	-	-	122,164	155,794
Bombay <sup>b</sup>	32,720	87,356	69,030	89,521	112,496
Burma	4,125	18,233	33,760	51,253	68,592
Central Provinces and Berar <sup>c</sup>	145,568	123,009	94,983	131,567	94,029
Madras	-	4,174	3,926	2,098	2,339
The Punjab & the NWFP <sup>d</sup>	261,127	248,708	232,724	149,233	178,070
Central India Agency	-	289,513	320,159	128,088	135,924
Rajputana	-	99,924	74,583	70,057	56,587

*a* Figures for 1881, 1891, 1901 included Bengal.

*b* 1911 and 1921 figures include Aden.

*c* 1891 and 1901 figures do not include Berar.

*d* 1881 figures for the Punjab do not include the NWFP.

The exact nature or purpose of this movement is difficult to determine as the reasons are not clearly indicated in the official reports. In the case of Bihar, much of the migration to the contiguous districts was female dominated, no doubt due to marriage and perhaps to seasonal work. Thus in 1911, of 28,035 UP migrants in Shahabad district, 19,585 (69.8 per cent) were females, and in Saran district of 24,503, 17,487 (71.4 per cent) of the migrants were females.<sup>69</sup> But in the case of more distant districts males predominated. Some of them may have migrated as semi-permanent or even permanent labourers to such districts as Purnea, where large tracts of vacant land were available, while others left as temporary skilled and unskilled labourers. The UP supplied on the average about 10 per cent of the labour force on the coal fields in Bihar.<sup>70</sup> These labourers were, by some accounts, the best available in the coal-fields. Most of them came from the districts of Unao, Rae Bareilly, Partabgarh, Fatehpur, Allahabad and Benares, and castes which featured prominently were Pasis, Lodhs, Kurmis, Ahirs, Koeris, Chamars and also Muslims.<sup>71</sup>

Migration from the UP to the Central Provinces and Berar was predominantly male dominated,<sup>72</sup> and was usually for purposes of employment. J.T. Marten commented in the 1911 *Census Report*:

Though the common frontier is comparatively small the United Provinces has sent a larger number of immigrants to these Provinces than any other Province. These have chiefly found homes in the northern districts of Jubbulpore, Saugor, Hosangabad, but a considerable number have reached as far south as Nagpur, Berar and the Chattisgarh districts. They include persons of all races and occupations, but the temporary immigrants are mostly contractors and labourers in connection with road, railway and irrigation works or up-country soldiers temporarily located here with their regiments; while some of the semi-permanent immigrants are in Government service especially the Police force, or are in the private service of money-lenders or landlords as *havaliers* or *darwans*.<sup>73</sup>



Much of the UP migration to Central India Agency, where vast stretches of vacant land were available, was reported to be of permanent or semi-permanent nature.<sup>74</sup> Rajputana's UP migrants came from the western region and this was 'largely due to the close relations existing between the Jain community of the United Provinces and that of Rajputana'.<sup>75</sup> In the case of the Punjab, a majority of the UP migrants went to such districts as Ambala, Karnal, Delhi and Gurgaon,<sup>76</sup> but in the 1880s it was reported that they were 'largely camp followers who have eventually settled in large cantonment stations'.<sup>77</sup> The UP migration to Bombay was for 'purely economic' reasons, the chief attractions being the textile mills at Ahmedabad, as well as Bombay city itself.<sup>78</sup> Finally, in the case of Burma, most of the UP migrants came from Fyzabad and Sultanpur and were engaged in business, cultivation and domestic service.<sup>79</sup>

It is fairly clear from our discussion thus far, brief though it has been, that migration was not an unheard of or alien phenomenon in the UP, especially in its eastern districts which (as we have seen), contributed a large number of migrants, especially to eastern India. Advocates of the 'home-loving' thesis would say that the volume of migration was insignificant in the context of the total population of the province.<sup>80</sup> This, of course, is true. But it seems that all too often the spatial mobility of population in India has been measured in terms of population mobility in Western Europe or other developed nations, without taking into account important structural impediments that exist in the subcontinent. If these are borne in mind, it is possible to suggest that the figures on the volume of migration, in fact, show migration to be an important phenomenon in the UP. Migration took place from all the districts, though in varying degrees. In Azamgarh,

it was 'known to be considerable'<sup>81</sup> and in Allahabad, 'at all times an appreciable proportion of the population is absent in search of employment far afield'.<sup>82</sup> In Gonda, migration 'in such [adverse] circumstances was a natural way out of the difficulties with which the population did not know how to grapple'.<sup>83</sup>

Much of this movement was probably intended to be temporary and perhaps because of this the migrants remitted large sums of money to their relatives at home. In Sultanpur, where migration was used as a strategy for 'restoring fallen fortunes or of easing off a redundant population which have long been familiar to the inhabitants of this district', the migrants remitted Rs 1,627,700 between October 1894 and September 1897.<sup>84</sup> In Azamgarh, the Settlement Officer noted that in the 1890s, yearly remittances amounted to Rs 13 lakhs, rising to Rs 14.5 lakhs in famine years. After the turn of the century, these rose to Rs 16 or 17 lakhs and in years of scarcity exceeded Rs 22 lakhs.<sup>85</sup> In Ghazipur, which was an important migration district, the

tendency to migrate is no new thing, but the movement has grown in importance and extent during the last few years ... and since 1901 the wave of migration has assumed extraordinary proportions, so that it is hardly an exaggeration to say that there are few families in the district of which one member at least is not absent in Bengal for the whole or portion of the year. Proof of this is to be found in the immensely increased passenger traffic of the railways, and also in the remarkable amounts remitted to the district through the agency of the post-office. The importance of all this can hardly be estimated. In spite of the exceptionally dense population labour is becoming dearer and more important every year; and even the cultivating classes no longer rely solely on the produce of their fields, for the savings of the emigrants are almost equal to the entire rental demands, the same thing occurring in Ballia and Jaunpur.<sup>86</sup>

From the colonies, too, the emigrants were remitting large sums of money. From Fiji between 1889 and 1912, the returning emigrants deposited £62,773 for transmission to India, while they brought with them jewellery and other items worth £117,962.<sup>87</sup> In the same period, time-expired emigrants returning from British Guiana brought with them money and jewellery worth £1,719,554. Similarly, large sums were being sent back from other colonies. The impact of these extraneous sources on the economy of the eastern UP districts cannot be gauged, but that it was significant seems beyond doubt. It was noted in the 1891 *Census Report* that migration from the eastern districts in search of temporary employment was 'very extensive and in many families subsistence is only possible with the assistance derived from the emigrant members.'<sup>88</sup> Birendranath Ganguly expressed a similar view about the importance of migration to the economy of the eastern UP districts in the 1930s:

Indeed, it is these remittances from emigrants which make it possible for the rural population in the Sub-Himalaya, East, in the Indo-Gangetic Plain, East, and in the Indo-Gangetic Plain, Central, to make both ends meet in spite of the large size of their families and their uneconomic holdings.<sup>89</sup>

Further evidence of population mobility in the UP is provided in the Emigration Passes, and it is to these that we will now turn. Our analysis shows two features that should be noted. The first is that there was considerable movement of population in those remote and isolated districts of the UP — Basti, Gonda — which did not contribute substantially to inland migration but which were important for indentured emigration. And secondly, it shows that a substantial proportion of the indentured emigrants who went to Fiji — and to other

colonies also — were part of a large floating population of uprooted peasants who had already left their homes and were recruited elsewhere.

The Emigration Act forbade the registration of indentured recruits outside their districts of origin *unless* the officials were convinced that the recruits had left their homes voluntarily.<sup>90</sup> This was done to check abuses which inevitably crept in when recruiters took their catch to other districts where it became difficult to check the personal and social backgrounds of so-called 'suspicious' cases. No doubt there were evasions of the regulations, with recruiters 'running about from district to district picking up a few men here and a few men there and eventually taking them to be registered in some other districts.'<sup>91</sup>

But to assume, as critics of indenture have tended to do so often, that this was the norm is to deny the facts. We have already shown that the system of recruitment and registration did work, if not always to the liking of the critics. In this chapter we have suggested that migration was an increasingly important and frequent occurrence in the UP and that, consequently, its benefits as well as its disadvantages were not unknown. In view of all this, our contention is that the majority of those who were registered outside their districts were men and women who had left their homes on their own. Their motives for doing so can only be guessed, though if what was happening in western districts of Bihar held true for the eastern UP districts, then many of them may have left their homes in search of employment outside. It is also likely that some of the recruits were 'wanderers [who] have left their own province or district

under the shadow of some misdeed',<sup>92</sup> but here we have no means of ascertaining their numbers. Others could easily have been traders, labourers or ordinary travellers moving from one place to another.

The districts which accounted for 2 per cent or more of the registrations for the indentured emigrants between 1886 and 1916 are shown in the Table below. The former date has been used here because it was only after then that the data on district of registration was entered into the Emigration Passes; for the six years of indentured emigration before 1886, registration figures are not available. Hence the rather large number of 'Don't Knows'.<sup>93</sup>

TABLE V

Districts Accounting for  $\geq$  2% of the Registrations for Fiji

<i>Name</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Fyzabad	5,927	15.3	Calcutta	1,555	4.0
Kanpur	3,208	8.3	Gonda	1,533	4.0
Basti	2,991	7.7	Ghazipur	1,526	3.9
Gorakhpur	2,371	6.1	Agra	1,202	3.1
Benares	2,070	5.4	Delhi	1,076	2.8
Lucknow	1,940	5.0	Jabalpur	792	2.1
Alipur	1,896	4.9	Other		
Allahabad	1,657	4.3	Districts	1,754	4.5

It can be seen that the majority of the emigrants were registered in the UP itself. The large cities of the province — Kanpur, Allahabad, Benares, Lucknow, Agra and Delhi — account for just over a quarter of the registrations, a figure which is surprisingly small, especially if one remembers the picture portrayed in impressionistic accounts of very large numbers of people being deceived in such cities into emigrating.

What percentage of the emigrants registered at the various centres finally emigrated to Fiji? Were there any distinct variations among the different districts? It is possible to answer these questions by using the registration figures available in the Protector of Emigrants' *Annual Reports* in conjunction with those in the Emigration Passes. The former gives us the total figures of those emigrants registered in the districts and the latter the figures for those who actually landed in Fiji. By subtracting the Emigration Pass figures from the *Annual Report* figures, it is possible to calculate the total number who did not emigrate. The following Table gives a breakdown. It should be stressed the Emigration Pass figures for the various districts included here are only for the years 1889, 1891, 1893-7, 1900-2 and 1914.<sup>94</sup> The reason

TABLE VI

Number of Fiji Recruits Registered in Selected Districts,  
who did/did not Emigrate to Fiji

<i>District of Registration</i>	<i>Registered in the Districts</i>	<i>Emigrated to Fiji</i>	<i>Did not Emigrate</i>	<i>% of those who did not Emigrate</i>
Gonda	811	386	425	52.4
Basti	1,360	700	660	48.5
Ghazipur	1,207	757	450	37.3
Benares	1,282	809	473	36.9
Lucknow	1,124	728	396	35.2
Agra	669	447	222	33.2
Kanpur	1,823	1,224	599	32.9
Jaunpur	774	534	240	31.0
Fyzabad	3,168	2,197	971	30.7
Gorakhpur	1,198	876	322	26.9

for this is that it was only for these years that the *Annual Report* figures were available for comparison.

One somewhat striking feature the Table shows is the relatively high 'failure' rate in the two largest districts of labour supply, Basti and Gonda. Both of these were large and predominantly rural districts, insulated from large urban centres. It could be argued that because they were rural and isolated districts, the recruiters frequently resorted to questionable practices and that the high 'failure' rate was an indication of this. But it is equally, if not more, likely that in these heavy recruitment districts, the recruiters were not always able to impose their dictates upon the recruits who could easily walk out on them if they disapproved of the terms offered. This, if we may repeat a point made earlier, was not difficult as the recruits were still on familiar terrain.

Let us now turn to the major districts of registration and see where the emigrants who were registered there came from. This will enable us to determine precisely the numbers of people who were registered outside their districts of origin as well as the general direction in which they were moving. A breakdown of the districts of registration by districts of origin is provided in the following Tables:

TABLE VII-A 95

FYZABAD: Main Districts Whose Emigrants  
Were Registered at Fyzabad

<i>Districts of Origin</i>	<i>Total Registered</i>	<i>% Fyzabad Registered</i>	<i>% of the D/O Total</i>
Basti	1,598	27.0	24.9
Fyzabad	1,458	24.6	62.6
Gonda	1,316	22.2	36.7
Sultanpur	564	9.5	32.3
Bahraich	144	24.4	19.2
Bara Banki	133	2.2	17.3
Azamgarh	77	1.3	4.5
Rae Bareili	49	0.8	4.5
Gorakhpur	71	1.2	4.2
Jaunpur	32	0.5	2.7
Lucknow	31	0.5	5.1
Partabgarh	43	0.7	4.8
Kanpur	19	0.3	3.3
Benares	13	0.2	1.9
Unao	12	0.2	2.2
Jaipur	10	0.2	2.1



TABLE VII-B : KANPUR

Main Districts Whose Emigrants Registered at Kanpur

<i>Districts of Origin</i>	<i>Total Registered</i>	<i>% of Kanpur Registered</i>	<i>% of the D/O Total</i>
Unao	365	11.4	65.6
Rae Bareili	350	10.9	32.2
Kanpur	322	10.0	55.2
Sultanpur	198	6.2	11.3
Lucknow	129	4.0	21.0
Bara Banki	121	3.8	15.7
Partabgarh	113	3.5	12.5
Gonda	105	3.3	2.9
Allahabad	72	2.2	5.9
Fyzabad	58	1.8	2.5
Basti	45	1.4	0.7
Bahraich	33	1.0	4.4
Jaunpur	29	0.9	2.5
Jaipur	28	0.9	5.9
Azamgarh	27	0.8	1.6
Gorakhpur	13	0.4	0.8

TABLE VII-C : BASTI

Main Districts Whose Emigrants Registered at Basti

<i>Districts of Origin</i>	<i>Total Registered</i>	<i>% of Basti Registered</i>	<i>% of the D/O Total</i>
Basti	2,607	87.2	40.6
Gonda	197	6.6	5.5
Gorakhpur	41	1.4	2.4
Azamgarh	10	0.3	0.6
Fyzabad	15	0.5	0.6

TABLE VII-D : GORAKHPUR

Main Districts Whose Emigrants Registered at Gorakhpur

<i>Districts of Origin</i>	<i>Total Registered</i>	<i>% of Gorakhpur Registered</i>	<i>% of the D/O Total</i>
Basti	1,050	44.3	16.4
Gorakhpur	943	39.8	56.0
Gonda	93	3.9	2.6
Azamgarh	73	3.1	4.3
Fyzabad	30	1.3	1.3
Sultanpur	12	0.5	0.7

TABLE VII-E : BENARES

Main Districts Whose Emigrants Registered at Benares

<i>Districts of Origin</i>	<i>Total Registered</i>	<i>% of Benares Registered</i>	<i>% of the D/O Total</i>
Jaunpur	363	17.5	30.6
Benares	288	13.9	42.9
Azamgarh	273	13.2	15.9
Mirzapur	200	9.7	38.0
Allahabad	140	6.8	11.5
Ghazipur	117	5.7	10.4
Fyzabad	110	5.3	4.7
Partabgarh	85	4.1	9.5
Sultanpur	76	3.7	4.4
Basti	45	2.2	0.7
Shahabad	30	1.4	2.6
Gorakhpur	26	1.3	1.5
Gonda	25	1.2	0.7
Rae Bareilly	17	0.8	1.6
Bahraich	15	0.7	2.0
Bara Banki	14	0.7	1.8

TABLE VII-F : LUCKNOW

Main Districts Whose Emigrants Registered at Lucknow

<i>District of Origin</i>	<i>Total Registered</i>	<i>% of Lucknow Registered</i>	<i>% of the D/O Total</i>
Bara Banki	290	14.9	37.7
Rae Bareilly	250	12.8	22.9
Lucknow	232	12.0	37.8
Gonda	156	8.0	4.3
Sultanpur	136	7.0	7.8
Bahraich	97	5.0	12.9
Fyzabad	90	4.6	3.9
Unao	53	2.7	9.5
Partabgarh	42	2.2	4.6
Basti	38	2.0	0.6
Azamgarh	27	1.4	1.6
Kanpur	23	1.2	3.9
Jaunpur	19	1.0	1.6
Allahabad	11	0.6	0.9
Ghazipur	10	0.5	0.9

TABLE VII-G : ALIPUR

Main Districts Whose Emigrants Registered at Alipur

<i>Districts of Origin</i>	<i>Total Registered</i>	<i>% of Alipur Registered</i>	<i>% of the D/O Total</i>
Shahabad	149	7.9	13.2
Basti	136	7.2	2.1
Gorakhpur	136	7.2	8.1
Azamgarh	109	5.7	6.4
Allahabad	88	4.6	7.2
Ghazipur	78	4.1	6.9
Gaya	66	3.5	8.6
Benares	54	2.8	8.0
Sultanpur	53	2.8	3.0
Fyzabad	47	2.5	2.0
Partabgarh	45	2.4	5.9
Patna	50	2.6	7.8
Gonda	37	2.0	1.0
Mirzapur	30	1.6	5.7
Kanpur	19	1.0	3.2
Rae Bareili	18	0.9	1.7
Lucknow	17	0.9	2.8
Bara Banki	12	0.6	1.6

TABLE VII-H : CALCUTTA

Main Districts Whose Emigrants Registered at Calcutta

<i>Districts of Origin</i>	<i>Total Registered</i>	<i>% of Calcutta Registered</i>	<i>% of the D/O Total</i>
Basti	258	16.6	4.0
Gonda	131	8.4	3.7
Fyzabad	102	6.6	4.4
Gorakhpur	69	4.4	4.1
Sultanpur	53	3.4	3.0
Allahabad	38	2.4	3.1
Rae Bareili	53	3.4	4.1
Kanpur	31	2.0	5.3
Azamgarh	30	1.9	1.7
Bara Banki	26	1.7	3.4
Bahraich	25	1.6	3.3
Jaunpur	24	1.5	2.0
Partabgarh	23	1.5	2.6
Shahabad	22	1.4	2.0
Benares	22	1.4	3.3
Unao	17	1.1	3.1
Lucknow	15	1.0	2.4
Jaipur	14	0.9	1.9
Gaya	8	0.5	1.0

TABLE VII-I : GONDA

Main Districts Whose Emigrants Registered at Gonda

<i>Districts of Origin</i>	<i>Total Registered</i>	<i>% of Gonda Registered</i>	<i>% of the D/O Total</i>
Gonda	1,097	71.6	30.6
Bahraich	223	14.5	29.7
Basti	138	9.0	2.2
Bara Banki	14	0.9	1.8
Gorakhpur	10	0.7	0.6
Fyzabad	8	0.5	0.3

TABLE VII-J : GHAZIPUR

Main Districts Whose Emigrants Registered at Ghazipur

<i>District of Origin</i>	<i>Total Registered</i>	<i>% of Ghazipur Registered</i>	<i>% of the D/O Total</i>
Ghazipur	483	31.7	42.9
Azamgarh	361	23.7	21.0
Shahabad	89	5.8	7.9
Gorakhpur	73	4.8	4.3
Benares	62	4.1	9.2
Jaunpur	48	3.1	4.0
Allahabad	43	2.8	3.5
Basti	42	2.8	0.7
Partabgarh	21	1.4	2.3
Fyzabad	17	1.1	0.7
Sultanpur	17	1.1	1.0

Several features are clearly shown by the above figures. It is evident that in the case of most districts of registration, the bulk of the emigrants came from neighbouring, rather than distant, districts. In the case of Fyzabad, for instance, Fyzabad, Basti, Gonda and Sultanpur account for 83.3 per cent of the total registration. For Kanpur, the neighbouring central and western districts provide the largest numbers. Indeed this is the pattern in all the districts. Another most striking feature is the very small amount of migration between the eastern and western districts of the UP; and this picture is confirmed if one looks at the figures for major registration districts situated in the two regions: Fyzabad in the east and Kanpur in the west. There seems to be slightly greater migration, small as it is, to the west from the east than vice-versa. But this is not

entirely surprising given that employment opportunities in the west — in the textile mills, factories etc. — were greater than in the east, where practically none existed. In the eastern districts, the movement seems to have been towards the east.

In view of what has been said about internal migration in earlier parts of this chapter, the following picture seems to emerge: the distressed and uprooted peasants, from say Basti and Gonda, who were looking for employment, first turned to the neighbouring urban centres, and failing these proceeded to the more distant cities such as Calcutta. Those however in Benares, Ghazipur, Allahabad and other such areas favourably located in terms of rail transportation proceeded to distant centres of employment in the first place.

The figures for Calcutta and Alipur are interesting for they show that apart from migrants from districts of Bihar — Shahabad, Gaya, Patna — there were also many others from eastern UP districts who were registered there, districts which do not appear from census reports and other sources to have been active in internal migration, especially to Bengal. It is possible that emigration from Basti, Gonda and other such districts to Calcutta has been underestimated. But a more plausible explanation may be that the emigrants from these districts were recruited in their home districts, taken to Calcutta by the recruiters, and transferred to the Fiji agency when requisitions for other colonies for which they had been recruited were filled. This practice, as we saw earlier (Chapter 3), certainly existed.

Another feature which has become clear from the Tables — and which has been mentioned in passing above — is the large number of people who were registered outside their districts of origin. In a very large number of cases — Basti, Gonda, Benares, Ghazipur, Lucknow — well over half of the emigrants were registered outside. In the case of Gonda and Basti, for example, only 30.6 per cent and 40.6 per cent of the emigrants were registered in their home districts. Others were registered mainly in the neighbouring districts: Fyzabad accounted for a quarter of Basti's and over one-third of Gonda's emigrants. A similar pattern obtained in western UP as Table VII-B has shown.

It would seem from the above discussion that migration was, after all, not as unnatural and strange a phenomenon in the UP in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as has been suggested, whatever else may have been the position in earlier times. But as we have seen, even in pre-modern India, migration for purposes of economic advancement or for escaping the predatory tendencies of feudal landlords was not entirely unknown. For the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it is clear that migration was on the increase, and that it was playing an important part in alleviating distress, although the extent to which it was doing so cannot be determined with any precision. Data from the Emigration Passes corroborate the picture of mobility suggested by census reports and other such statistical sources. It is likely that much of the movement within India was of a circulatory nature, the migrants expecting to return to their homes once they had acquired some wealth. This is not to say that the emigrants were essentially sojourners who saw their stay in the cities or other places of employment as a temporary resort. But the



emigrants never completely severed their ties with their rural past. Perhaps migration to the colonies was viewed in this light. For the peasants in straitened circumstances, already uprooted from their homes and in search of employment, going to the *tapus* (islands) was like going to Assam or some other distant place. They hoped to return to India after the completion of the five-year contract. Many of course did not for reasons that are outside the scope of this study. But who were the people who emigrated and what (push) factors compelled them to leave their homes in the first place? To these questions we must now turn.

NOTES

- 1 I rely here on oral evidence gathered in India during my field trip, August 1978 – May 1979. Hugh Tinker, Panchanan Saha and C.F. Andrews generally seem to take this view.
- 2 William Crooke, *The North-Western Provinces of India. Their History, Ethnology and Administration* (London, 1897), p.326. See also *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. I (1907), p.467; *Census of India*, vol. X (1911), p.49; Gail Omvedt, 'Migration in Colonial India: The Articulation of Feudalism and Capitalism by the Colonial State', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. VII, no. 2 (January 1980), p. 188.
- 3 Here I have relied heavily on A.L. Basham's 'Notes on Seafaring in Ancient India', in his *Studies in Indian History and Culture* (Calcutta, 1964), pp. 146-66.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p.163.
- 5 G. Coedés, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, 1964); R.C. Majumdar, *Hindu Colonies in the Far East* (Calcutta, 1963).
- 6 Basham, 'Notes on Seafaring', p. 164.
- 7 See M.N. Pearson, 'Across the Blackwater: Indian Seafarers in the Sixteenth Century', unpublished MS 1979. Dr Pearson shows how Hindu traders used different strategies to circumvent the interdict on crossing the *kala pani*.
- 8 For examples, see V.S. Pathak, *Ancient Historians of India* (Bombay, 1965).
- 9 Romila Thapar, *The Past and Prejudice* (New Delhi, 1975), p.58.

- 10 Jaimal Rai, *The Rural-Urban Economy and Social Changes in Ancient India, 300 BC - 600 AD* (New Delhi, 1974), p. 128.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Abhay Kant Chaudhary, *The Early Mediaeval Village in North-Eastern India* (Calcutta, 1971), pp. 49, 105, 264.
- 13 P.C. Jain, *Socio-Economic Explorations of Mediaeval India* (New Delhi, 1976), pp. 110-11; B.N.S. Yadav, 'Immobility and Subjection of Indian Peasantry in Early Mediaeval Complex', *Indian Historical Review*, vol. I, no.1 (March, 1974), p.25. See also S.C. Misra, 'Social Mobility in Pre-Moghul India', *Indian Historical Review*, vol.I, no.1 (March, 1974), p.36.
- 14 Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Moghul India* (Bombay, 1963), p.117. Ravinder Kumar has suggested that migration was a 'passive form of protest' in nineteenth-century India. See his 'The Transformation of Rural Protest in India', in S.C. Malik (ed.), *Dissent, Protest and Reform in Indian Civilization* (Simla, 1977), p.284.
- 15 Morris David Morris, *The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India. The Case of the Bombay Cotton Mills, 1854-1947* (Berkeley, 1965), p.42.
- 16 The literature here is vast, but for a start see articles published in the *Journal of Peasant Studies*. A brief summary of the field is provided in Anand A. Yang, 'The Optimising Peasant: A Study of Internal Migration as an Option in a Northeast Indian District', paper presented at the conference on the Effects of Risk and Uncertainty on Economic and Social Processes in South Asia, University of Pennsylvania, 10-12 November, 1976.

- 17 See K.C. Zachariah, *An Historical Study of Internal Migration in the Indian Sub-Continent, 1901-1931* (London, 1964), and Kingsley Davis, *The Population of India and Pakistan* (Princeton, N.J., 1951). A summary of research on migration in the Indian subcontinent is provided in P.B. Desai, *A Survey of Research in Demography* (Bombay, 1975), and J.J. Mangalam, *Human Migration: A Guide to Migration Literature in English, 1955-1962* (Lexington, 1968).
- 18 The first two censuses of the UP were taken in 1853 and 1865. These are generally agreed to be unreliable. No mention of migration is made in either of them.
- 19 See Ranajit Das Gupta, 'Factory Labour in Eastern India: Sources of Supply, 1855-1946. Some Preliminary Findings', *IESHR*, vol.XIII, no.3 (July-Sept. 1973), pp. 277-329; Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *Private Investment in India, 1900-1939* (Bombay, 1975).
- 20 *RCL*, vol. V, part 1, p.215 (written evidence).
- 21 Revenue and Agriculture (Famine) B Pros 1-2, March 1887, *NAI*.
- 22 *Census of India*, vol. XVI, Part 1 (1911), p. 49.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 *Census of India*, vol. XVI, Part 1 (1921), p.51.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 *Census of India*, vol. XVI, Part 1 (1911), p.49.
- 27 *Census of India*, vol. I (1883), p.151.
- 28 *Census of India*, vol. I, Part 1 (1901), pp.102-3.
- 29 *Ibid.*

- 30 *Census of India*, vol.XVI, Part 1 (1921), p.51.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 *Census of India*, vol.V, Part 1 (1911), p.198.
- 33 *Census of India*, vol.V, Part 1 (1921), p.143.
- 34 *Census of India*, vol.I (1883), p.151.
- 35 *Census of India*, vol.I, Part (1901), p.143.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 *Census of India* (Bengal), Part II (1911), p.110.
- 38 *Census of India*, vol.VI, Part 1 (1921), p.22.
- 39 *Census of India*, vol.I, Part 1 (1901), p.143. Among other castes mentioned in a footnote on the same page were: Koiri, Halwai, Gaur, Mallah, Kewat, Pasi, Dhanuk, Dhobi, Kandui, Julaha and Dhunia.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 *RCL*, vol.V, Part 1, p.3.
- 42 Ibid., p.252.
- 43 Gupta, 'Factory Labour in Eastern India', p.238.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 B. Foley, *Report on Labour in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1906).
- 46 *Census of India*, vol.XI, Part 1 (1921), p.111. For other industries and for more detailed treatment of various aspects of the problems of labour supply, see *RCL*, Bagchi, *Private Investment*, and Gupta, 'Factory Labour'.

- 47 *Census of India*, *ibid*; *RCL*, vol.V, Part 1, p.11.
- 48 This impression is obtained from reading the literature (*Settlement Reports, District Gazetteers*) on agrarian conditions of the UP. Further discussion is provided in Chapter 6.
- 49 Several good studies on the history of the tea industry in India are available. Among the most comprehensive is Sir Perceival Griffiths' *The History of the Indian Tea Industry*, (London, 1967). S.M. Akhtar provides a factual account of various legislations enacted to curtail abuses in the system of labour recruitment in his *Labour Emigration to the Assam Tea Gardens* (Lahore, 1939). The *RCL* as well as a number of specially commissioned reports also deal with aspects of labour supply to the tea gardens. This paragraph is based on the *Report of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee* (Calcutta, 1906), p.7.
- 50 Margaret Read, *The Indian Peasant Uprooted* (London, 1931), pp.131-2, quoted in Davis, *The Population of Indian and Pakistan*, p.116.
- 51 Rana Pratap Behal, 'Labour in the Tea Plantations in Upper Assam during the 19th century', paper presented at the 36th Session of the Indian History Congress, Aligarh 1975, especially pp.7-8.
- 52 *Report on the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee*, p.14.
- 53 A full list of the districts which furnished labour to the Assam Tea Gardens is in *Census of India*, vol.IV-A (1901), Table XI, pp.66-71.
- 54 *Resolution*, 1901, p.69.
- 55 *Ibid*.

- 56 Ibid. We begin with 1893 because before then, Bihar and UP labourers were collectively listed as 'North-West Immigrants'. After 1902-3, they were again grouped as 'Plains, UP and Bengal Immigrants'.
- 57 *Resolution, passim.* For the CP, females constituted 46.4% of the total from that region, for Bengal and Orissa 48.7%, Bihar 40.2% and Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas 46.3%.
- 58 *Report of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee, p.7.*
- 59 Griffiths, *The History of the Indian Tea Industry, p.281.*
- 60 *Resolutions, 1893-1902/3.*
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 In the case of the CP, 29.6% of the recruits were collected by the *sardars* and 33.5% by the contractors; in Chota Nagpur 39% and 40.2% respectively; and in Bengal and Orissa 21% and 47.6%.
- 63 *Resolutions, 1893-1902/3.*
- 64 *Report of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee, p.151.*
- 65 *Resolution, 1894, p.4.*
- 66 *Resolutions, 1893-1902/3.* Figures derived from Tables on Mortality and Desertion.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Revenue and Agriculture (Famine), B Pros 102, March 1887, *Census of India, vol.I, Part 1 (1901), pp. 102-3; Census of India, vol.XVI, Part 1 (1921), p.51.*

- 69 *Census of India*, vol.V, Part III (1911), p.68. A full list of all the districts in Bihar which had UP emigrants is given on this page.
- 70 *RCL*, vol.IV, Part 1, p.5. See also C.P. Simmons, 'Recruiting and Organising and Industrial Labour Force in Colonial India: The Case of the Coal Mining Industry, c.1880-1939', *IESHR*, vol.XIII, no.4 (Oct.-Dec. 1976), p.456, and *Census of India*, vol.VII, Part 1 (1921), p.106.
- 71 Revenue and Agriculture (Internal Emigration) B Pros 9-10, April 1897, *NAI*, summarising the findings of the *Report of the Labour Enquiry Commission* of 1896.
- 72 *Census of India*, vol.X (Report) (1911), p.86.
- 73 *Ibid.*, p.50.
- 74 *Census of India*, vol. XVIII, Part 1 (1931). Marriage migration also played a large part.
- 75 *Census of India*, vol.XV, Part 1 (1911), p.93.
- 76 *Ibid.*
- 77 Revenue and Agriculture (Famine), B Pros 1-2, March 1887, *NAI*.
- 78 See fn.75. Evidence of employment of UP labour in Bombay textile mills is found in 'Copy of Report of the Recent Commission on Indian Factories', *PP*, vol. LIX (1890-91), p.69. See also, *RCL*, vol.I, Part 1, p.5; Baniprasanna Misra, 'Factory Labour During Early Years of Industrialization: An Appraisal in the light of the Indian Factory Commission, 1890', *IESHR*, vol.XII, no.3 (July-Sept. 1975), pp.203-27.
- 79 *Census of India*, vol.XV, Part 1 (1911), p.93; N.R. Chakravarti, *The Indian Minority in Burma* (London, 1971), p.26.



- 80 See Omvedt, 'Migration in Colonial India'.
- 81 D.L. Drake-Brockman, *Azamgarh DG* (Allahabad, 1911), p.74.
- 82 H.R. Nevill, *Allahabad DG* (Allahabad, 1911), p.84.
- 83 *Census of India*, vol.XV, Part 1 (1911), p.69. See p.70 for similar statements about Jaunpur and Ghazipur.
- 84 F.W. Brownrigg, *Sultanpur SR* (Allahabad, 1898), p.6.
- 85 C.E. Crawford, *Azamgarh SR* (Allahabad, 1909), p.7.
- 86 H.R. Nevill, *Ghazipur DG* (Nainital, 1908), p.79.
- 87 These figures are derived from Mr James McNeill, I.C.S. and Mr Chimman Lal, *Report of the Government of India on the Conditions of Indian Immigrants in Four British Colonies and Surinam*, Cd. 7744-5 (Simla, 1914), Appendices.
- 88 *Census of India*, vol.XVI (1891), p.332. See also p.283 where it is noted that the emigrants afford 'by their absence and by the considerable sums they bring or send back to the more congested districts, a relief the extent of which would be difficult to calculate'.
- 89 Birendranath Ganguly, *Trends of Agriculture and Population in the Ganges Valley* (London, 1938), pp. 40-1. See also S.L. Srivastva, 'Impact of Emigration on Structure and Relations in a Village in Eastern UP', *Journal of Social Research*, vol. XI, no.2 (Sept. 1968), p.73.
- 90 E.P. B Pros.56-7, Dec. 1879; E.P. B Pros.25-35, Nov.1898, *NAI*.
- 91 E.P. A Pros.44, 30 Sept. 1882, *NAI*.
- 92 *Ibid.*

93 See vol.II, Appendix VI, pp.41-55.

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{\text{No. Registered in a District}}{38,845} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

38,845 is the number of emigrants whose Districts of Registration are known, i.e. 45,439 — 6,594 (Don't Knows).

94 Source: *PRs* for the years mentioned and vol.II, Appendix VIB, pp.44-55.

95 See vol.II Appendix II, pp.56-81. The total figures for the various districts derived by adding the figures for males (pp.56-68), and females (pp.69-81).

## CHAPTER 6

## SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ORIGINS OF THE INDENTURED EMIGRANTS

Very little is known about the social, particularly caste, origins and characteristics of Fiji's indentured migrants. There are several reasons for this gap, perhaps the most important being the dearth of relevant material on the subject. Ignorance often leads to the creation of myths, and in India and the colonies one of the most pervasive myths about the origins of the indentured emigrants is that they were, invariably, the lowest castes of people who were tricked into emigrating by unscrupulous recruiters. The situation is very much the same today as it was in 1882 when G.A. Grierson wrote: 'I have been assured by every native from whom I have enquired, and by most Europeans, that only the lowest castes emigrate, and that nothing will ever induce men of higher class of life to leave India.'<sup>1</sup> In Fiji, the stereotype of the low social origins of the indentured emigrants was frequently used in the colonial days to remind the Indians of their proper place in society.

This chapter probes the social and economic origins of the indentured emigrants, and shows that the evidence is often at variance with the myth. It argues that, on the whole, the emigrants represented a fair cross-section of rural UP society. It demonstrates that while a large number of lower castes were emigrating, there were clearly others who were of higher caste and social status among the emigrants. Furthermore, by discussing the widespread agrarian changes

taking place in Indian society largely as a result of British penetration, it shows that various strata of that society were caught in the grips of adverse economic circumstances. In the context of the discussion in the previous chapter, it would seem that migration was an important means of coping with the resulting distress.

The data which is presented here on the social/caste background of the indentured emigrants is derived from the Emigration Passes. Our analysis of the Passes shows that members of over two hundred and sixty social groups comprising Hindu castes/sub-castes, Muslims, and tribals embarked for Fiji at Calcutta during the thirty-seven years of indentured emigration.<sup>2</sup> For reasons already mentioned, we ~~did~~ not organise these groups into broad social categories during the coding or processing stage. However, the difficulties of categorisation notwithstanding, and at the risk of some over simplification, even distortion, it is necessary here to group the various castes and sub-castes into a general framework to gain an idea of their proportionate contribution to the emigrating indentured population.

No single method of classification can be followed, hence here we have employed broad principles of hierarchy, status and occupation.<sup>3</sup> In the category of 'Brahmans and Allied Castes' are included all those castes which claimed, or were generally recognised to have, the status of Brahmans. Among the Kshatriyas are included those castes which claimed Kshatriya ancestry and were accorded status befitting that *varna*. Among the Banias we include those which clearly were high status trading castes such as Khatris, and others who traditionally followed the occupation of petty traders. Kayasths, or writer castes, are listed separately. In the category of 'Middling Castes' are included middle-order agricultural and artisan castes whose

occupation was not generally considered to be ritually impure, and from whose hands the higher, mostly twice-born, castes drank water and even ate *kaacha* (uncooked) food. Among the 'Low Castes' we include those who did menial jobs and whose occupation was generally deemed to be ritually impure — such as Charmars (leather workers) and Khatiks (Hindu butchers). Many of these castes would today be placed in the category of 'Untouchable' scheduled castes. Tribal emigrants have been included in a separate category. Those listed here by and large, followed tribal customs, ideology and rituals, while others, such as Mushars, who had through time become 'Hinduised', have been included among Hindu low castes. Among Muslims, we list those who stated their identity as Musalmans as well as high status groups such as Pathans, Sheiks, Saiyids and Moghuls. We have also included here Julahas, Hajams, Qassais and other such groups as authorities agree that these essentially occupational castes were largely composed of Muslims rather than Hindus.<sup>4</sup> Thus Hindu weavers were usually called Koris and Muslim ones Julahas. Hindu barbers were called Naos, Muslim Hajam; Hindu butchers Khatik, Muslim Qassais.

Besides these groups, there were many castes, sub-castes and social groups whose origin was either outside India (Gurung-Nepal), or who came from outside North India (Velama and Poindi seem to be South Indian names), or whose names derive from and are confined to certain localities (Pahari, Tawala, Kali). These and others whose identity and origins were uncertain, are grouped under 'Miscellaneous' category.

The castes or groups included in each category and their numerical strength is as follows:

A. Brahmans and Allied Castes

Brahman (1,535), Gaur (65), Gosain (48), Bhat (20), Sarwariya (7), Dugdha (2), Gangari (2), Sanad (2), Agnihotri (1), Chaube (1), Pathak (1), Saraswati (1), Vallabhcharya (1).

Total: 1,686.

B. Kshatriya and Allied Castes

Thakur (3,416), Rajput (652), Bhuihar (205),<sup>\*a</sup> Rawat (178), Dhakara (71), Jaiswar (18), Bais (5), Gharwar (4), Baghel (2), Chandel (2), Jadon (2), Johiya (2), Nagbansi (2), Surajbansi (2), Monas (1), Nikumbh (1), Parihar (1), Raikwar (1).

Total: 4,565.

\*a includes Bhuihar and Bhuihar.

C. Bania and Allied Castes

Khatri (1,182), Kandu (211), Bania (162), Mahur (17), Agrahari (4), Gindauriya (4), Roniyar (3), Bishnoi (2), Dhusar (2), Kasarwani (2), Marwari (2), Lala (1).

Total: 1,592.

D. Kayasths

Mathur (39), Kayasth (36), Kaieth (28), Kaiesto (2).

Total: 105.

E. Middling Agricultural and Artisan Castes

Ahir (4,197), Kurmi (2,307), Kahar (1,500), Koeri (740), Lodha (735), Jat (708), Kewat (656), Murao (563), Luniya (559), Kumhar (451), Kacchi (447), Gowala (396), Teli (373), Barhai (362), Kunbi (279), Mallah (255), Nao (241), Gujar (203), Mali (200), Kalwar (177), Sonar (66), Bhojwa (62), Mina-Meo (58), Dheemar (48), Kisan (43), Halwai (41), Tamboli (30), Saithwar (26), Bhurjee (17), Sadgop (10), Chasa (9), Kasera (6), Nayak (6), Taga (6), Sorhiya (5), Bhagban (4), Kathak (3), Thatera (3), Goriya (2), Kamboh (2), Kharadi (2), Rain (2).

Total: 15,800.

F. Low, Menial Castes

Chamar (6,087), Kori (1,942), Pasi (999), Dusadh (464), Bhar (444), Lohar (343), Mushar (310), Dhobi (226), Khatik (145), Dhanuk (111), Bari (94), Sweeper (92), Rajwar (83), Bind (79), Panika (78), Beldar (46), Bhangsi (41), Bansphor (40), Arak (35), Chai (30), Rajbhar (30), Bahelia (22), Dom (21), Balai (18), Mehtar (16), Mochi (14), Chipi (12), Kamkar (11), Kharwar (11), Lakhera (11), Nat (11), Gaur-Chamar (6), Bagdee (5), Dharkar (5), Basor (4), Biyar (4), Katwa (3), Khangar (3), Mirasi-Dom (3), Bhagat (2), Patwar (2), Rahwari (2), Patharkat (1), Radha (1).

Total: 11,907.

G. Tribal Groups

Gond (541), Kol (200), Santal (65), Soeri (18), Banmanus (15), Baur (15), Ghasiya (11), Manjhi (10), Bhuiya (9), Bhil (8), Beriya (4), Baiswar (3), Munda (3), Agariya (3), Dargi (2), Khairwa (2), Oraon (1), Patari (1).

Total: 911.

H. Muslims and Groups Predominantly Muslim

Musalman (5,455), Pathan (584), Sheik (493), Julaha (106), Hajam (95), Nau-Muslim (37), Dhuniya (31), Saiyid (30), Ranghbar (11), Darzi (10), Moghul (10), Momin (6), Qassai (3), Rangrez (3), Hijra (2), Saiqilghar (1), Fakir (1).

Total: 6,878.

I. Christians: 25.J. Miscellaneous Groups: 1,980.

From the above figures, the religious composition of the emigrating population can clearly be seen. Hindus (Brahmans, Kshattriyas, Banias, Kayasths, Middling and Lower castes) provided 78.5 per cent of the total;

this figure would be higher if we include the 'miscellaneous castes', many of which are or seem to be Hindus. Muslims furnished 15.1 per cent of the emigrants, Tribals 2 per cent and Christians 0.05 per cent. Among the Muslims, the high status groups, Pathans, Sheiks, Saiyids, and Moghuls, contributed 1,117 emigrants, or 16.3 per cent of the Muslim total. The overwhelming majority clearly were 'ordinary' Muslims, perhaps converts from Hinduism during the period of Moghul rule in India. Among the Hindus, Brahmans and allied castes contributed 4.7 per cent of the emigrants, Kshatriyas 12.8 per cent, Baniyas 4.5 per cent, Kayasths 0.3 per cent, Middling castes 44.3 per cent, and Low and Menial castes 33.4 per cent. What proportion of the Hindu population was Sanatani (orthodox sect) or Arya Samaji (reformist sect) cannot be ascertained from the available data. However, if the religious composition of the population of eastern Uttar Pradesh and of the Indian community in Fiji today is any indication, then the majority of the Hindus emigrating to Fiji must have been Sanatanis.

The above figures on the social and religious composition of the emigrating population are sometimes at variance with the estimate provided by other scholars.<sup>5</sup> However, the discrepancies are not particularly glaring or even significant, and would not merit attention except perhaps in a detailed sociological study of aspects of Fiji Indian society. From the data given in the Appendix, other scholars may devise their own frameworks and come up with a slightly different estimate of the contribution of the various groups to the indentured population. But the general picture presented above will remain unchanged. The evidence presented here calls in question the assertions about the predominantly low caste origins of the indentured emigrants. Low castes, of course, contributed a large percentage of the total



numbers emigrating; but the proportion of high and middling castes is noteworthy. Caste has generally lost its relevance in the social structure of Indian communities in the sugar colonies; nevertheless, it may still be satisfying for the descendants of the indentured labourers to know that not all their ancestors were of lowly origins as they have been so often told and have come to believe themselves.

The castes and social groups which provided the largest numbers of indentured emigrants were well represented in the UP in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The following Table gives an indication of their numerical strength. A comparison of the

TABLE I <sup>6</sup>

Selected Castes and Their Numerical Strength in UP, 1891-1911

Name	Contribution to		Numerical Strength in UP Society in					
	Inden. Emigrants		1891		1901		1911	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Ahir	4,197	9.2	3,918,846	8.4	3,823,668	8.0	6,407,000	8.2
Brahman	1,686	3.7	4,719,882	10.1	4,706,332	9.9	4,659,738	9.9
Chamar	6,087	13.4	5,816,053	12.4	5,890,639	12.4	5,305,833	11.2
Kori	1,942	4.3	919,649	2.0	990,027	2.1	859,582	1.8
Kurmi	2,307	5.1	2,005,657	4.3	1,963,575	4.1	1,887,564	4.0
Pasi	999	2.2	1,219,311	2.6	1,239,282	2.6	1,311,220	2.8
Kshattriya	4,565	10.0	3,632,241	7.8	3,354,058	7.0	3,428,831	7.3
Khatri	1,182	2.6	45,099	0.1	49,518	0.1	41,764	0.1
Muslims	6,878	15.1	6,179,000	13.0	6,532,000	13.5	6,407,000	13.3

contribution of various castes to the numbers emigrating to Fiji with their numerical strength in the UP reveals an interesting feature. It shows that, with the exception of Brahmans, there is a broad correlation between

the contribution of most groups to the emigrating population and their numerical strength in the UP. Thus for example Muslims and Chamars, constituting the largest components of UP society, were also the largest suppliers of indentured emigrants. Kshatriyas and Ahirs, both important elements in the UP, also contributed very large numbers of the total. A closer look at the figures reveals another interesting feature. It shows that, again with the exception of Brahmans, the percentage contribution of the various groups to indentured emigration is greater than their proportionate strength in the UP. Thus Muslims, constituting 13 per cent of the provisional population, furnished 15 per cent of the emigrants; Chamars, comprising 12 per cent of the total population provided 13 per cent of the emigrants, Thakurs and Rajputs, being on the average 7 per cent of the UP population, furnished about 10 per cent of the emigrants; and Khatri, who were less than 1 per cent of UP population, provided over 2 per cent of the indentured labourers. In the case of Pasis, there is an approximate equivalence between their numerical strength in the UP and their contribution to the emigrant population. The peculiar case of the Brahmans cannot be explained in terms of their economic position in the UP, for as we shall see later they, like the other castes, were deriving their livelihood from the land, and their economic situation was in many ways very similar to that of the Kshatriyas. The discrepancy between the two sets of figures may, perhaps, be explained in social terms, their strict adherence to traditional ideology discouraging them from travelling over long distances to strange places with all the peril that such travel entailed. Nevertheless, as we shall see later, many Brahmans *were* registered for emigration outside their districts of origin.

The full details of the districts of origin of the different castes and social groups which came to Fiji are shown in the Emigration Passes. To get an idea of the patterns of migration among different castes, we present in the Table below the case of four castes drawn from different strata of UP society: Brahmans representing the high strata, Kurmis and Ahirs the middle and Chamars the low strata.

TABLE II

Districts of Origin of Selected CastesA - Brahmans

<i>District of Origin</i>	<i>No. of Brahman Emigrants</i>	<i>% of total Emigrants from Dist.</i>	<i>% of Caste Total</i>	<i>No. in the Dist. in 1911</i>	<i>% of Dist. Pop.</i>	<i>No. of Emigrants as % of Dist. Total</i>
Basti	157	2.4	10.5	194,345	10.6	0.08
Gonda	140	3.9	9.3	214,117	15.2	0.06
Fyzabad	124	5.3	8.3	144,505	12.5	0.08
Sultanpur	71	4.1	4.7	151,381	14.4	0.04
Jaunpur	42	3.5	2.8	140,922	12.2	0.02
Gorakhpur	38	2.3	2.5	280,157	8.8	0.01
Allahabad	34	2.8	2.3	164,485	11.2	0.02
Azamgarh	34	2.0	2.3	115,429	7.7	0.02
Bara Banki	34	4.4	2.3	73,008	6.7	0.04
Kanpur	31	5.3	2.1	158,554	15.4	0.01

TABLE II-B

Ahir

<i>District of Origin</i>	<i>No. of Ahir Emigrants</i>	<i>% of total Emigrants from Dist.</i>	<i>% of Caste Total</i>	<i>No. in the Dist. in 1911</i>	<i>% of Dist. Pop.</i>	<i>No. of Emigrants as % of Dist. Total</i>
Basti	531	8.3	12.7	185,981	10.1	0.28
Gonda	343	9.6	8.2	140,168	9.9	0.24
Fyzabad	325	14.0	7.8	138,571	12.0	0.23
Sultanpur	255	15.0	6.1	129,124	12.3	0.19
Rae Bareili	223	20.5	5.3	129,017	12.7	0.17
Gorakhpur	216	12.8	5.2	342,210	10.7	0.06
Allahabad	211	17.3	5.1	153,263	10.4	0.13
Azamgarh	181	10.5	4.3	218,958	14.7	0.08
Partabgarh	175	19.6	4.2	107,714	11.3	0.17
Ghazipur	126	11.2	3.0	145,105	17.3	0.08
Jaunpur	188	15.8	4.5	173,208	14.9	0.10

TABLE 11-C

Kurmi

Basti	582	9.1	25.3	144,190	7.9	0.40
Gonda	414	11.5	18.0	113,496	8.0	0.36
Fyzabad	106	4.6	4.6	69,431	6.0	0.15
Bara Banki	80	10.4	3.5	144,422	13.3	0.05
Gorakhpur	80	4.8	3.5	109,842	3.4	0.07
Bahraich	77	10.3	3.3	90,887	8.7	0.08
Partabgarh	70	7.8	3.0	105,491	11.7	0.06
Sultanpur	70	4.0	3.0	38,135	3.6	0.18
Rae Bareili	53	4.9	2.3	42,654	4.2	0.12
Azamgarh	39	2.3	1.7	35,770	2.4	0.10
Allahabad	35	2.9	1.5	131,532	9.0	0.02
Jaunpur	24	2.0	1.0	43,552	3.8	0.05

TABLE II-D

Chamar

<i>District of Origin</i>	<i>No. of Chamar Emigrants</i>	<i>% of Total Emigrants from Dist.</i>	<i>% of Caste Total</i>	<i>No. in the Dist. in 1911</i>	<i>% of Dist. Pop.</i>	<i>No. of Emigrants as % of Dist. Total</i>
Basti	1,727	26.9	28.8	280,357	15.3	0.61
Azamgarh	566	33.0	9.4	264,604	17.7	0.21
Fyzabad	470	20.2	7.8	174,670	15.1	0.26
Jaunpur	325	27.4	5.4	175,290	15.2	0.18
Ghazipur	324	28.7	5.4	117,145	14.0	0.27
Gorakhpur	250	14.9	4.2	391,952	12.2	0.06
Sultanpur	255	14.6	4.3	143,937	13.7	0.17
Gonda	194	5.4	3.2	45,148	3.2	0.42
Benares	144	21.4	2.4	101,236	11.4	0.14
Allahabad	115	9.4	1.9	157,492	10.7	0.07

Two features become clear from the above figures. The pattern of large discrepancy between the numbers of the Brahmans in the UP and their contribution to emigration, noted above in the context of the province generally, is reinforced by the figures for those districts from which the largest numbers of the emigrants came. In fact in none of the districts does the percentage of Brahman emigrants surpass the percentage of the Brahman population in the various districts. A possible reason for this trend has been suggested above. On the other hand, in the case of Chamars, a completely different pattern obtains: in all the districts, except Allahabad, their proportional contribution was greater, sometimes far greater — as in the case of Azamgarh — than their proportional numerical strength in the districts of supply. The reason for the difference in the number of Chamar emigrants from the different

districts and their numerical strength there, however, is not clear. The middling castes, Ahirs and Kurmis, show a pattern that incorporates elements of both Chamar and Brahman migration. Among the Ahirs, in most districts, the proportionate strength of the emigrant population was greater, though sometimes not too markedly, than their numerical strength in the various districts. In the case of Kurmis, however, this pattern is evident in fewer districts. The reason for this difference between these two castes and Chamars will become apparent later when their economic position is discussed.

Another feature evident from the above figures is that despite the numerical strength of the different castes in the various districts, large numbers tended to come from particular districts. In the examples given above, Basti provided the largest number of Brahman, Ahir and Chamar emigrants, even though there were other districts where these castes were present in greater numbers or constituted a more significant proportion of the total population. This difference does not seem to be a result of the economic position of these castes in Basti *vis-à-vis* other districts. Documents of the agrarian history of eastern UP, such as the *Settlement Reports*, indicate clearly that on the whole there was little *real* difference in their position in the various districts in the region. The reason, as we suggested before, could be in the focus of recruitment activities which were concentrated in Basti and Gonda and to a lesser extent in other contiguous districts.

One of the surprising findings that emerges from the caste data of the Hindu emigrants is the relatively large number of the higher castes in the emigrating population. It is surprising because popular imagination still perceives Hindu society in terms of the four *varnas* —

Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras — where the first two are seen as being above and insulated from the common vicissitudes which afflict the ordinary people lower in the hierarchy. The Brahmans occupy the apex of the hierarchy. Created, as the mythology has it, from the head of the *parampurusa*, the mythical primeval man, they were sanctioned the pursuit of six occupations which included study, teaching, sacrificing, officiating as priests, acceptance of gifts from a worthy person from the three higher *varnas*, and making gifts. They were traditionally prohibited from the pursuit of agriculture which, of necessity, involved contact with polluting objects and the destruction of certain forms of life.<sup>8</sup> The Kshatriyas, created from the torso of the primeval being, were given the occupations of rulership and protection of others. And the Vaisyas, created from the limbs, were assigned the duties of trade, commerce and agriculture, while for the Sudras, created from the feet, *moksha* (salvation) lay on the service of the higher three *varnas*.

This ideal structure did not always correspond as we know with reality. None of the four *varnas* were homogenous categories. The Brahmans, for example, from very early times were divided on the basis of clan, family etc. Distinctions were also made on the 'basis of occupation, learning, moral purity, religion, region or locality, and family, some of which gave rise to a number of sub sections among them'.<sup>9</sup> The *Mitaksara* makes a ten-fold gradation among the Brahmans, ranging from the *Deva* — 'a professor devoted to religion, always content and master of his senses, and knows the truth about the *Vedas* and the *sastras*' — to the *Candala* — 'who does not perform *sandhya* three times a day, who does not know the *Vedas* and is devoid of religious acts'.<sup>10</sup> The Sudra *varna* was similarly differentiated, being

divided into *sat*-Sudras and *asat*-Sudras, depending upon the purity or impurity of their profession. Another division was by *bhojyana* : food prepared by the Sudras, which could be eaten by the Brahmans; and *abhojyana*: 'impure' food which could not be touched by the twice-born. Again, some such as the *Candalas* were required to live outside the village while others were not. And finally, the Sudras were divided into *asrita* and *anasrita*, on the basis of their dependence upon others. The Kshatriyas and the Vaisyas were similarly heterogeneous categories.<sup>11</sup> Then, too, members of the various classes followed occupations other than those which were specifically sanctioned for them. This may seem to be re-stating the obvious, but what is not often realised is that provision was made in the various Hindu legal treatises for change of occupation. Lakshmidhara in his *Krtyakalpataru* allows that in distress (*apaddharma*) members of the higher *varna* could take up temporarily the occupation of a lower one; the reverse, however, was not usually allowed. Thus, the *Parasara Smrti* recommends agriculture for Brahmans in addition to their six-fold duty. But the *Kalyug*, or the present dark age of existential agony, was to be an age of permanent distress, and recognising this, it allowed agriculture as 'more or less a regular vocation of the *Brahamana*, and not as his occupation in distress,'<sup>12</sup>

The extent to which members of one *varna* took up the occupation of another in pre-modern India cannot be determined with any precision. In the nineteenth century, some idea of this can be gained from the remarks of William Crooke, writing in 1896:

It must not be forgotten that there are few of the present occupational groups which invariably adhere to the original trade or handicraft which may have caused their association in past times ... The Chamar is no more always a worker in leather than the Ahir a grazier; the Banjara a carrier, or



the Luniya a salt maker. They all at some time or other cultivate or do field labour or tend cattle ... There are about 6.1/2 million agricultural tribes; while Mr Baillie estimates the actual number of persons connected with the land as no less than 34.3/4 millions. There are about 4.3/4 millions of Brahmins recorded priests but only 412,449 declare this as their occupation. There are about 5.1/2 millions of so-called pastoral trades, while only 336,995 people recorded cattle breeding and trading as their occupation. The instances of this might be largely added to if necessary. What is quite clear is that the existing groups which may have been, and very possibly were, occupational in origin, do not now even approximately confine themselves to their primitive occupation.<sup>13</sup>

The first precise idea of the extent of occupational mobility and changes among various castes in the UP is provided in the 1911 Census. Table III<sup>14</sup> on the next page gives the exact figures. Several trends are clearly evident from the figures. Perhaps the most significant feature to be noted is the great extent to which so many castes had left their own traditional occupations for others. In the case of Ahirs, Brahmins, Chamars, Kewats and Pasis, less than 10 per cent practised their traditional occupation. The rest took to other occupations and as the figures show, for the most part it was agriculture. In the case of Ahirs, Brahmins and Kewats, over 70 per cent derived their livelihood from cultivating land. In the case of Chamars and to a lesser extent Pasis, while cultivation was important, many also derived sustenance as labourers. In fact, Chamars provided 55 per cent of the field labourers, 28 per cent of the industrial artisans, and 50 per cent of the general, unspecified labouring population; they constituted only 16 per cent of the cultivating class.<sup>15</sup>

In the nineteenth century, all strata of rural North Indian society were affected by the profound changes that were wrought as a result of British penetration. The introduction of new forms of land tenure, derived from Western notions of ownership and property and markedly

TABLE III

## OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY/CHANGES AMONG SELECTED CASTES/GROUPS IN UP, 1911

Caste	Traditional Occupation	Actual no. of workers	I			II				III Industries as artisans, etc.	IV Labourers unspecified
			No. whose traditional occupation returned as: Principal means of livelihood	Subsidiary means of livelihood	No. whose traditional occupation the principal means of livelihood but some secondary occupation	Exploitation of surface of the earth		Field labourers wood cutters, etc.	Raisers of livestock, etc.		
					Income from rent	Cultivators of all kinds					
Ahir	Pastorals, cattle owners, breeders dealers of milk produce.	1,316,524	121,686 9.2%	30,989 2.4%	12,610 0.1%	10,296 0.8%	969,338 73.6%	145,301 11.0%	-	12,303 0.9%	22,870 1.7%
Brahman	Priesthood	1,945,681	153,697 7.9%	66,349 3.4%	30,106 1.5%	42,613 2.2%	1,432,690 73.6%	3,079 0.2%	26,286 1.4%	22,980 1.2%	24,043 1.2%
Chamar	Leather workers	3,467,317	130,233 3.8%	38,205 1.1%	26,112 0.8%	14,613 0.4%	1,354,622 39.1%	1,245,312 35.9%	107,922 3.1%	142,248 4.1%	331,244 9.6%
Gadariya	Shepherds, goatherds, and blanket weavers	534,420	122,689 22.5%	44,334 8.3%	19,074 3.6%	3,368 0.6%	312,244 58.4%	51,305 9.6%	-	11,094 2.1%	16,333 3.1%
Jat	Cultivation and landowning	291,798	247,590 84.8%	2,034 0.7%	17,483 6.0%	-	-	17,008 5.8%	7,892 2.7%	4,783 1.6%	4,441 1.5%
Kewat	Riverine occupations (boatmen, fishermen)	76,310	782 1.0%	278 0.4%	125 0.2%	153 0.2%	55,716 73.0%	12,699 16.6%	1,463 1.9%	2,179 2.9%	1,887 2.5%
Koeri	Cultivation	271,315	238,540 87.9%	3,961 1.5%	23,446 8.6%	1,064 0.4%	-	18,085 6.7%	3,061 1.1%	2,873 1.1%	2,392 0.9%
Kumhar	Potters	408,328	176,661 43.3%	65,035 15.9%	48,366 11.8%	1,301 0.3%	166,960 40.9%	27,177 6.7%	7,604 1.9%	6,408 1.6%	7,198 1.8%
Kurmi	Cultivators	651,286	549,138 84.3%	5,704 0.9%	39,037 6.0%	2,289 0.4%	-	53,940 8.3%	8,840 1.4%	10,695 1.6%	7,430 1.1%
Julaha	Weavers	495,559	25,039 5.0%	14,869 3.0%	24,398 4.9%	1,205 0.2%	126,484 23.5%	31,052 6.3%	5,806 0.2%	24,783 5.0%	5,817 1.2%
Kahar	Personal service and palaquin carriers	611,920	213,306 34.9%	45,167 7.4%	28,344 4.6%	2,928 0.5%	251,716 41.1%	36,295 5.9%	10,144 1.7%	38,303 6.3%	24,430 4.0%
Nai	Barbers	477,807	254,432 53.2%	78,798 16.5%	56,734 11.9%	2,382 0.5%	165,368 34.6%	13,074 2.7%	5,231 1.1%	4,720 1.0%	5,160 1.1%
Pasi	Tari makers	776,336	3,804 0.5%	2,466 0.3%	1,144 0.1%	3,501 0.5%	491,541 63.3%	181,876 23.4%	32,691 4.2%	12,530 1.6%	22,620 2.9%
Rajput	Military service, landlords	1,532,087	738,145 48.2%	32,006 2.1%	100,463 6.6%	-	619,582 40.4%	40,294 2.6%	24,337 1.6%	19,767 1.3%	19,673 1.3%
Teli	Oil pressers and sellers	497,158	216,884 43.6%	83,873 16.9%	49,679 10.0%	2,396 0.5%	213,011 42.3%	21,481 4.3%	5,139 1.0%	7,415 1.5%	9,086 1.8%

opposed to traditional norms and practices; heavy, indeed in the first half of the last century extortionate, land revenue assessments and settlement; competitive money economy; increased commercialisation of crops; better means of communication; and consequent subordination of the economic interests of India to those of Britain, all followed hard upon the heels of the imposition of *Pax Britannica*. These problems have been studied in great detail by many writers, but the debate on the ultimate causes and consequences of the British presence in India is far from over.<sup>16</sup> Some (nationalist) historians have emphasised the harmful effects of the encounter by painting a picture of a self-contained and self-sufficient village economy in pre-British India. They have also tended to attribute the industrial backwardness of modern India to the extractive and exploitative nature of British imperialism, while others, mostly Western, historians have attempted to explain the phenomenon with reference to structural impediments and constraints inherent in Indian society. Our intention in the ensuing pages is not to contribute to that debate, but to note some of the well-known aspects of the problem that have bearing on our discussion. Our chief concern is to provide a corrective to the view that emphasises 'pull' factors by suggesting that there were forces at work in the UP in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which may have provided some pressure for emigration.

The first and most important problem faced by the British in India was the collection of revenue which was needed to provide for their armed forces, cover the costs of administration and finance their entrepreneurial ventures.<sup>17</sup> Land revenue clearly had to be the most important source of finance. The British began with the principles of the assessment and collection of revenue that had been developed under

the Moghuls. It was important, first of all, to find individuals who were to be held responsible for the collection of the revenue. Under the Moghuls, the system of revenue collection was varied and diffuse. There were some individuals who paid revenue based on their rights of 'conquest or clearing the land, other on royal grant; others were tax farmers who had rented from the government the right to pay the revenue for the differences between what they collected from the tillers and intermediaries and what they were obliged to pay to the state'.<sup>18</sup> Land was not a saleable commodity or the property of any single individual; indeed, as Walter Neale has suggested, the basic features of the Indian village were cooperation and co-ownership rather than exclusive or individual ownership.<sup>19</sup> In ancient India, even the King's interest in land 'consisted of his right to a share of the produce'.<sup>20</sup> In the Muslim period, too, the concept of individual ownership was absent: 'The Zamindars both in theory and actual practice were regarded as mere tax gatherers or state officials, they were not held to possess an indefeasible right of property. The resident cultivators possessed a permanent, hereditary, and, in most cases, an unalienable right to cultivate their holdings at the customary or *perganah* rates'.<sup>21</sup>

The British, not fully comprehending the complexity of the Indian land tenure system, applied Western notions of economic rationality, creating zamindars who were given legal rights comparable to those enjoyed by English landlords, 'including the right to sell, mortgage, and transmit through inheritance the titles to their land. The sole responsibility of the zamindars was prompt and full payment of the revenue demanded by the government; failure on the part of a landlord to pay led to the sale of his lands to another landlord who claimed he

could pay the revenue'.<sup>22</sup> Land under the British thus became an economic property that could be bought, sold, mortgaged or auctioned, and this change brought about fundamental transformation in agrarian relations. The landlords, now with reduced social and moral obligations to their tenants, and with their position backed by the vast British bureaucracy, increasingly began to secure their rights by talking to the courts and evicting tenants who failed to pay up the exacting revenue demands (see below).

Another consequence of the spread of notions of private ownership was a rush in the latter half of the nineteenth century by the proprietors to secure their own individual rights to property. This resulted in constant and large-scale subdivision of holdings and fragmentation of property, frequently to the point where these became uneconomic. The proprietors then either had to borrow money from the village money-lender to support their families in the face of the deteriorating situation, or they descended to the rank of cultivators and, less commonly, to the rank of labourers.<sup>23</sup>

A related change was the conversion from rent in kind to rent in cash. This change did not come about suddenly because in some less developed parts of the UP in the latter half of the nineteenth century, rents were still paid in kind. The rent in kind, paid as custom and power dictated, had several advantages from the tenant's point of view. In the first place, it gave him a virtual fixity of tenure; consequently, the question of ejection did not arise. It fixed for him what was generally considered to be a fair rent, determined by custom and unaffected by notions of competition. It secured for him a remission of rent in times of acute distress caused by unexpected seasonal calamities. And, perhaps most important of all,

it fostered a bond of mutual interest between the tenant and the landlord in the improvement of the land and the protection of its produce.<sup>24</sup> These benefits were largely lost with the advent of cash rents which became increasingly prevalent in the nineteenth century as a result of the growth in the number of cultivators which complicated the collection of rent in kind, increased circulation of silver, and the development of cash crops.<sup>25</sup> One official, noting the changes, wrote:

The fixity of tenure, which naturally prevailed when landlords had nothing to gain by evicting, has disappeared. The fair rent prescribed by immemorial custom, in the shape of a fixed share of the produce, has been replaced by a fluctuating demand in silver, constantly forced higher and higher by the rise in prices, the increase of population, and chiefly by the direct facilitation of the action of competition on rent, produced by the conversion itself, coinciding with the decay of manufactures, the loss of military and quasi-military service, and the narrowed choice of livelihoods that has resulted from the drain of wealth out of India. The elastic, self-adjusting scale of remission for calamity has been lost. The improvement and protection of the soil and its produce, so far from contributing a *nexus* of great moral and economic value between rent-payer and rent-receiver, are now a fertile source of dissensions between them, fatal alike to the maintenance of kindly relations and to the development of agricultural prosperity.<sup>26</sup>

W.C. Bennett, the Settlement Officer of Gonda, echoed the same feelings when he wrote that the 'introduction of money payments for cultivation led ... to the gradual effacement of the old lines on which the rural society had been constructed'.<sup>27</sup>

The change from one form of rent to another was not smooth, and there were areas where old and new relationships between the landlord and the tenant continue to exist side by side. In such a situation of ambivalence, rent was neither customary nor governed by universal competition and it contained elements of both privilege and coercion. Dietmar Rothermund has described the situation eloquently:

The ambivalent rent structure did not behave in the proper Ricardian way but it had also lost its customary stability; it could combine the worst of both the worlds by responding to a rise in prices and then cutting so deep into the earnings of the tenant as to leave him without a sufficient margin for the cost of production. The vicissitudes of rural credit added further complication to this rent structure. The tenant had to sell the crop at a low price so as to pay the rent and repay his loan from the same grain-dealers to whom he had sold his crop and to whom he was indebted because the dealer was also the moneylender. In many places the moneylender soon became a landlord and in this case the credit-system and the rent structure merged into a perfect blend. But even when he did not become a landlord the moneylender was able to exploit the existing pattern of agrarian relations to his advantage. His activities were restricted only in those areas where the landlords provided credit to their tenants.<sup>28</sup>

Sometimes, if the tenant paying money rent was left with more surplus than he could have retained under the customary rent in kind, he could be tempted to sublet his land to get some profit or raise a larger family to provide additional labour. But both these processes ultimately produced adverse circumstances which nullified the benefits of the surplus. They led to an increase in population which in turn induced a rise in price which would then tempt the landlords to raise the rent. This would contribute to a further rise in prices. The success of this process depended upon steady supply of money, a condition that was present in the period after 1876. As Rothermund puts it, a 'stream of silver tore landlords and tenants away from their customary moorings and swept them into a new world where their relationship had to be defined in different terms.'<sup>29</sup>

The commercialisation of agriculture also increased markedly in the nineteenth century, largely due to the introduction of market economy and availability of transportation.<sup>30</sup> This phenomenon was not unknown in pre-British India.<sup>31</sup> But what was perhaps novel about the nineteenth century was that commercial crops were grown not as much for

Indian consumption as for British and European markets. The farmer whose small holdings were planted with cane sugar, tobacco, spices and indigo, sometimes at the expense of food grown for domestic consumption,<sup>32</sup> derived relatively little benefit from commercialisation of agriculture: the profits went to British firms. Apart from small-scale commercial crops, plantation agriculture, too, increased rapidly under the British, one of the largest and most important examples being the tea gardens of Assam. Quite aside from the fact that the gardens were owned by British firms which enjoyed all the profits of the enterprise they were worked, as we saw earlier, by a cheap immigrant labour force drawn from Bihar and the UP.

Another development that followed British penetration was the destruction of indigenous handicraft industry which could not compete favourably with the cheap, machine-produced goods of Britain. Historians still disagree on the causes of the decline,<sup>33</sup> and it is possible that it may have set in even before the arrival of the British, with the decline of the native Indian courts.<sup>34</sup> But that it was on the increase in the nineteenth century cannot be denied.<sup>35</sup> Between 1831 and 1901 in the UP, the population dependent on making ploughs and agricultural equipment declined by 69.9 per cent; on cotton ginning and processing by 41.7 per cent; on gold and silver-wire drawing and braid-making by 47.6 per cent; on brass and copper-work by 24.8 per cent; on pottery and pipe-making by 20.7 per cent; and on basket and mat-making by 27.1 per cent. What happened to those whose traditional occupations were in jeopardy? Here is an example of one caste, Julahas, who were among the most severely affected:

Many of them have now forsaken their hereditary calling for more profitable occupations, and others who still work their looms eke out their slender earnings by



agriculture and labour of various kinds. Every year large numbers of them seek service in the jute mills on the Hoogly or work as menials in Calcutta, and those that still ply the trade have seldom more than one loom at a time, whereas formerly the number was limited by that of the numbers of the family who could work.<sup>36</sup>

Some of the changes in rural Indian life brought about by British influence have thus far been outlined in general terms. It is important to emphasise that the extent of the changes varied between different regions of India, indeed, even within parts of a particular region. The thrust of most recent studies on Indian social and economic history has been to demonstrate the importance of regional or local factors on aspects of British policy and practice. It is also important to emphasise, especially in the context of the subject of this chapter, that the 'impact' of the changes varied between different strata of Indian society; that is, some were more adversely affected than others. We shall now discuss this in some detail.

Hindu society can be perceived in terms of a pyramid. We noted above how the high castes occupied the apex of that pyramid. In the traditional scheme of things, their social superiority was apparently divinely preordained, being the natural result of good deeds in a previous life. But economically, too, the higher castes occupied the premier place in the pyramid of the agrarian structure. In most of the eastern UP districts, the higher castes owned a very substantial proportion of the landed property. In Basti in the late 1880s, Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Bhuinhars, Baniyas, Gosains and Kayasths owned 79.8 per cent of the total area;<sup>37</sup> in Sultanpur<sup>38</sup> and Azamgarh<sup>39</sup> at the turn of the century 83.2 per cent and 67 per cent of the land respectively. The middle and low castes constituted an inconsequential part of the proprietary. In Azamgarh district, Ahirs in 1879 owned 7,601 acres

or 0.6 per cent of the land, which increased to 10,637 (0.8 per cent) in 1906. Kurmis and Koeris were barely able to maintain their ground in the same period.<sup>40</sup> The Chamars were in the least enviable position. In Basti in the late 1880s, constituting the largest component of the total population, they owned merely 29 acres.<sup>41</sup> In Azamgarh it was a similar story. In 1879 they owned 12 acres and in 1906, a mere 93 acres.<sup>42</sup> The higher castes also experienced changes in proprietary status, but these were not significant. In Basti in 1919 for example, they still controlled two thirds of the land.<sup>43</sup>

In many districts, a large proportion of the land was held by small proprietors: in Basti after the turn of the first decade of this century, for example, 63 per cent of the area was held by corparcenary communities.<sup>44</sup> The situation was, of course, different in the taluqdari districts such as Gonda where the taluqdars held 61.83 per cent of the land.<sup>45</sup> The large landowners were, because of social and institutional factors, insulated from the problems that were affecting the smaller proprietors. The remarks of H.K. Gracy, the Settlement Officer of Kanpur district in 1907, are relevant for many other districts as well.

The fact is that the only zamindar for whom the Indian economy has a place is either the big taluqdar governed by the law of primogeniture and owning so large an estate that he can afford to be generous, or the peasant proprietor cultivating his own land. For the small middleman who tries to live on his rent and whose property is being constantly split into smaller and smaller shares under the Hindu or Muhammedan heirship there is no niche. Indeed, he is rapidly becoming a curse of the country, absorbing as he does without any permanent benefits to himself or anyone else a large share of the profits of agriculture, and by his attitudes towards the peasantry preventing their acquisition of the stability of tenure that alone can help them to real prosperity or tend towards genuine improvement in agriculture.<sup>46</sup>

The partition of property rights was indeed one of the most important reasons for the straitened circumstances of small proprietors. In Etah district, it was regarded as the 'primary cause' for the 'struggling indebtedness and hopeless insolvency' of the proprietors. There, in the last 30 years of the last century, the number of Thakur proprietors had risen from 6,583 to 12,552; while the average holdings had decreased from 63 acres to 25 acres.<sup>47</sup> In Azamgarh, in 1879, there were 5,532 villages in the temporarily settled *panganas* of the district, ranging in area from 1.1/4 acres to 5,513.3/4 acres. These villages constituted 3,446 mahals. In 1906, there were 5,369 temporarily settled villages — divided into 11,323 mahals, many of which were of infinitesimal size. The number of proprietors also increased markedly. While in 1879 there were 64,057 recorded proprietors with an average area each of 21.1/2 acres of which 12 could be cultivated, in 1906 there were 85,137 proprietors holding 9.3 acres of cultivated area.<sup>48</sup> Basti, too, witnessed what the Settlement Officer called 'an orgy of partition': in 1890, the number of mahals exceeded the number of villages by only 513; in 1919, the difference was 4,980.<sup>49</sup> The increased desire for individual ownership of land is strikingly indicated in the following Table on Basti district. It indicates a clear preference for perfect *pattidari*

TABLE IV <sup>50</sup>

Structure of Land Ownership in Basti

	1890 %	1915 %
Single Zamindari	14.0	14.0
Joint Zaminari	21.0	21.0
Perfect Pattidari	0.5	27.0
Imperfect Pattidari	64.5	36.0

where land is divided and held in severalty by different proprietors each managing his own land and paying his own fixed share of revenue through an accredited representative, over imperfect *pattidari* where land is held in common and severalty, with the profits from the land being first used to pay government revenue and village expenses, and the surplus later distributed to the members.<sup>51</sup>

Another development, and one which followed from the above trend, was the transfer of the right of property. It has to be emphasised that the right to transfer land was less frequently exercised in pre-British times, partly because of the practical difficulty posed by the joint ownership of property and partly because of the absence of competition or speculation in landed property owing to the complex patterns of ownership and cultivation. But these factors were increasingly being made obsolete in the nineteenth century. There were many causes for the transfer. Many officials consistently blamed the 'recklessness' or 'indolence' of the Indian peasants but in fact, there were two more important reasons. One was the forcible sale of land for arrears of revenue. This was more pronounced in the early years of British rule when the revenue demands were extremely heavy. With more experience the revenue officials reduced the demands over time, realising that these could not be met. Nevertheless the sale of land for arrears was not abandoned altogether. In Sultanpur district in the 1870s, 110,000 acres were mortgaged, sold, auctioned or pre-empted for non-payment of revenue through coercive processes.<sup>52</sup> Another important reason was the sub-division of property rights and the reduction of holdings to uneconomic sizes. The Settlement Officer of Unao wrote that 'in the great majority of the instances transfers have taken place simply because the share was insufficient to

feed those who lived on it, and after a struggle more or less prolonged the owner saw his rights pass on to some wealthier person'.<sup>53</sup> Some indication of the extent and character of transfer of land rights in the UP is provided in Table V.<sup>54</sup>

Looking at this process in certain districts in eastern UP shows the actual extent to which transfers had been carried. In Gonda, between 1875 and 1906, (the dates of two settlements of the district), no less than 29 per cent of the sub-proprietary land had been transferred,<sup>55</sup> while in Basti, in the 30 years up to 1890, 32 per cent of the total area had changed hands of which 13 per cent was sold outright.<sup>56</sup> It is interesting to note in this context that sales or mortgages were done mainly within the proprietary castes,<sup>57</sup> and in most of the eastern districts, the trading castes had not been able to make any significant inroads into land ownership. The situation in Ghazipur district in 1909 was typical. H.R. Nevill wrote: 'Of late years the old families have managed to retain their ground with more success than in the first half of the nineteenth century, and the recent acquisitions on the part of the money-lender have been relatively unimportant.' Indeed, probably 'the only class that has failed to improve has been that of the traders.'<sup>58</sup> In western UP, the situation was quite the opposite.<sup>59</sup>

Sub-division and transfer of land rights led to indebtedness, for with their own resources declining, and with various social obligations and costs incurred during marriages and festivals and other such occasions, the proprietors had to borrow to live. The Settlement Officer of the Sultanpur district acknowledged indebtedness as a major problem. He wrote: 'That a few of the big men and many of the small communities are in a bad way, and find the struggle for

TABLE V

Extent and Nature of Land Transfer in NWP and Oudh

A. Av. Annual No. of Registered Sales of Immovable Property

	<i>Compulsory</i>			<i>Optional</i>			<i>Total</i>		
	<u>1878-83</u>	<u>1883-88</u>	<u>1888-93</u>	<u>1878-83</u>	<u>1883-88</u>	<u>1888-93</u>	<u>1878-83</u>	<u>1883-88</u>	<u>1888-93</u>
NWP	21,163	22,022	35,928	11,025	10,339	-	3,488	32,361	35,928
Oudh	3,223	3,916	7,078	3,034	2,756	-	6,257	6,672	7,078

B. Av. Annual No. of Registered Mortgages of Immovable Property

NWP	35,612	34,319	37,621	20,828	17,474	18,602	56,440	51,793	56,223
Oudh	9,870	11,476	13,157	8,413	7,062	7,731	18,283	18,538	20,888

existence growing harder year by year, is a fact that cannot be denied.<sup>60</sup> But he asserted in a somewhat optimistic way that the proprietors had 'by hook or by crook pulled through the last forty years'.<sup>61</sup> In Azamgarh, too, the situation was much the same. The Settlement Officer put it succinctly that the 'share of the ordinary Zamindar is so small that it is difficult to think of him as otherwise than poverty stricken'.<sup>62</sup> And in Gonda the sub-proprietors were reported to be 'seriously embarrassed'.<sup>63</sup>

Clearly, then the landed classes, despite their somewhat favourable social and economic position, were increasingly being affected by the widespread changes that were taking place in India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But the predicament of those less favourably placed, the cultivators, was even graver. One enquiry found that those cultivators who had other professions besides their own, those whose relations and kinsmen had taken up service, those who had accumulated some fortune or those who were 'diligent and laborious' were in a 'fair condition'; the rest were 'poverty-stricken and penniless'.<sup>64</sup> The cultivating community was, of course, not homogeneous; those, for example the occupancy tenants, who had more secure rights in land were naturally better off than the tenants-at-will (of the landlord), bereft of any power or status. It would seem also that the higher castes were in some ways better placed than the lower castes. In the pages that follow, we attempt to analyse the changing predicaments of the cultivating and labouring classes in (mostly) the UP districts which furnished the largest number of emigrants to Fiji. The discussion is based principally upon published sources on the agrarian conditions in the various districts. In the appendix which follows this chapter are included actual portraits of the various cultivating and labouring castes

in the 1880s. They confirm the picture which emerges from the analysis of documentary evidence: that the overwhelming bulk of the lower strata of UP society was increasingly being placed in precarious circumstances as a result of pervasive structural changes sweeping India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The higher caste cultivators generally held rights to land out of all proportion to their numerical strength or to their reputation as cultivators. In Azamgarh they held cultivating rights to 31 per cent of the land,<sup>65</sup> in Sultanpur 29 per cent<sup>66</sup> and in Basti 36 per cent.<sup>67</sup> In most cases they, especially the Brahmans, did not actually till the soil themselves but employed agricultural labourers, usually of the lower castes. In most districts in eastern UP at least, they paid 25 per cent less rent than the lower caste cultivators.<sup>68</sup> But officials disagreed on whether this was due to their caste status per se, or whether it was the result of their inferior cultivation.<sup>69</sup> However, a 'levelling tendency' was at work, and in some areas there was no or very little difference between high and low caste rates. In Kheri district it was found that the 'superstitious awe' of the Brahman's 'power for mischief' was a thing of the past and that he cultivated poppy and other crops like 'ordinary mortals' and paid his due rent. As for the Rajputs 'the fighting element is not required now, so [their] privileged position is lost'.<sup>70</sup> In Basti, the Settlement Officer found that by 1915, the difference between high and low caste rent had disappeared, indeed that the higher castes were frequently paying a higher rent.<sup>71</sup> But this perhaps was an exception rather than the rule.

Sometimes the higher caste cultivators could close ranks and attempt to frustrate the efforts of the landlords to eject them for arrears or enhancement of rent. The Settlement Officer of Gonda described how this worked:



The slower rate of increase of high caste tenants' rents is due, partly to their more independent spirit, which leads them to resist demands for illegal enhancements the lower castes have not the courage to refuse, and partly to their less justifiable resistance to any enhancement at all. The Thakurs and Brahmans are distinguished by a faculty for combination which, when they are present in great numbers in a village, makes them very difficult to manage. They will then combine to resist any coercive process issued against one of their caste numbers; if one tenant is evicted, his caste fellows will prevent any newcomer from taking his land, and few caste tenants of other castes would be bold enough to thrust themselves into a Thakur or Brahman's stronghold. Distraint or attachment often lead to violence, and there is nothing of which the ordinary landlord has greater dislike than being involved in criminal proceedings. Where the high caste element is strong, the landlords are more concerned in realising their rents than in enhancing them.<sup>72</sup>

As evidence of high caste recalcitrance, he produced figures showing the arrears of rents in various *parganas* of Gonda (see Table) demonstrating the close correspondence between the percentage of arrears and the strength or weakness of the high caste tenantry. Such figures are not available for other districts but it can be assumed that this situation

TABLE VI<sup>73</sup>

Arrears of Rent Among High Caste Cultivators in Gonda

<i>Parganas</i>	<i>% of Area Held by High Caste Tenants</i>	<i>% of Arrears to the Av. Demand During Past 12 years</i>
Mahadewa	53.71	13.16
Digsar	58.49	13.10
Nawabganj	50.43	10.57
Paharpur	57.15	9.19
Sadullanagar	24.60	6.23
Utraula	11.28	5.32
Bahmniipur	14.33	2.91
Burhapar	9.47	1.66

also existed in other areas. However, there were instances also where caste status played little part in enhancement of rent, and where high castes were, in fact, evicted. Indeed, it may appear paradoxical to note that in Gonda district itself in 1873, of the total number of tenants who were evicted entirely, 53 per cent were Brahmans, and 24 per cent Rajputs and other higher castes.<sup>74</sup> In Rae Bareili district in the 1870s, altogether 658 tenants were totally evicted, and of these 261 were Brahmans and 235 Rajputs, constituting 75 per cent of the total evicted.<sup>75</sup> The reason for this is not far to seek. Times were changing and the landlords, motivated by the desire for more profit, had little compunction in ejecting those who raised impediments to their income. Moreover, given the rapid population increase in many parts of the UP, there were always tenants willing to occupy the land vacated by another tenant and this naturally provided an added inducement to the landlord to exercise his powers of ejection.

What happened to those who were evicted? Of the 261 Brahmans evicted in Rae Bareili, 109 cultivated land in other villages, but retained their residence in the village, 33 were subsequently given land in the same village, while 77 were non-resident tenants of other villages and retained their cultivation there. Of the 235 Rajputs, 88 cultivated land in other villages, while still living in their old village, 36 subsequently obtained land in their old village, while 85 of the evicted were non-resident tenants who lived in other villages. The rest either lived in the village and took up another trade or moved elsewhere in search of a livelihood.<sup>76</sup>

The above discussion serves to emphasise that the high caste tenants did not always enjoy certain privileges merely because of their high status. But the figures on enhancement can mislead us by giving the

impression that the lower castes did not face enhancements or were able to pay up more easily than the higher castes. The fact was that in the case of the lower castes, enhancements of rent were brought about without recourse to the courts whereas in the case of the high castes, the issue of a notice for enhancement was required, which possibly resulted in a court case, before they would pay or leave.<sup>79</sup>

Consequently, the actual volume of enhancement in the case of the lower castes will not be known but that it was taking place to an equal, if not greater, extent than the higher castes cannot be doubted.

The best cultivators were drawn from the middling and lower castes such as Ahirs, Kurmis and even Chamars. The *District Gazetteer* of Bahraich, reflecting the general opinion, said of the Kurmis: 'They are, as everywhere, most industrious, efficient and prosperous cultivators and with the Ahirs form the backbone of the agricultural community'. And of the Koris and Chamars: 'Their holdings are small, and they are careful and industrious, if not in the first rank of cultivators'.<sup>78</sup> But in relation to their importance as agriculturalists they held relatively little cultivating land. In Sultanpur, in the 1890s, Ahirs held 11.6 per cent of the cultivating land, Kurmis 6 per cent, Muraos 4.6 per cent and Chamars 3.9 per cent.<sup>79</sup> In Azamgarh around 1909, Koeris cultivated 4.7 per cent of the land, Kurmis 3.4 per cent, Chamars 8.9 per cent and Ahirs, somewhat better placed, 22.2 per cent.<sup>80</sup> Given their large population and ownership of relatively little land, the holdings of these tenants were very small: in Basti in 1915, the average area of each resident tenant was only 1.6 acres.<sup>81</sup> Such small holdings tended to reduce the margin between subsistence and starvation in situations of distress caused by the failure of crops or because of famines. With few resources of his own to fall back upon, the small cultivating tenant had little

alternative but to borrow from the local money-lenders: the debt never ended.

Debt was indeed one of life's major problems for the small cultivator. The actual extent to which the peasantry was indebted was revealed by an enquiry into the subject in 1868-9. The details need not detain us here, but it should be noted that in most districts, indebtedness was pervasive. The figures varied from district to district: In Lucknow, between 66 to 90 per cent of the cultivators were estimated to be in debt; in Unao and Fyzabad 90 per cent; and in Sitapur between 60 to 80 per cent.<sup>82</sup> For our purposes it can safely be assumed that over three-quarters of the peasantry were shackled with debt.<sup>83</sup>

There were many reasons why the peasants had 'a kind of running account with the Mahajan'.<sup>84</sup> Sometimes the debt had descended from father to son, while sometimes it was contracted for a marriage ceremony or a law suit. In addition, however, the peasants also had to borrow for agricultural and related purposes. In Azamgarh in the 1920s, 40 per cent of the indebtedness was due to non-payment of land revenue/rent; 20 per cent to famine and other distress; 15 per cent to payment of accumulated interest; 10 per cent to purchase of cattle; 8 per cent to seed; 5 per cent to litigation, and only 2 per cent for marriage and other social obligations.<sup>85</sup> In one respect — having to borrow for the purpose of agricultural production — the Indian cultivators were different from their European counterparts. One official remarked that the Indian 'cultivators and families, unlike the *Metayers* of Europe, provided their own farming stock, bullocks, ploughs, tools, gears and manure' whereas in Europe these were provided by the landlords.<sup>86</sup>

The process of borrowing began at the time of sowing, and how it operated to the detriment of the borrower is described vividly in the following quotation:

A large majority of the petty zamindars and agriculturalists take an advance of seed from the *sahukar* at the time of sowing, and repay it at the time of harvest. They borrow seed generally at the *sawai* rate, that is, with the promise to pay for one, one and a quarter. Payment of one and a quarter is only apparent, as really it amounts to double and sometimes more than double. The reason is this: they have not to pay one and a quarter of grain, but one and a quarter of the value of grain taken, for when they take the seeds grain generally sells dear, and when the time comes for repayment, grain is cheaper owing to the harvest season. The *sahukar* knowing this, cunningly enough agrees to have repayment in value: so if 16 seers of grain were taken, the *sahukar* won't take 20 seers at the time of harvest, for that would be less than a rupee, but would take one and one-fourth of the price which prevailed when 16 seers were taken: say the price then was 16 seers per rupee, and at harvest time 24 seers per rupee, the *sahukar* would take 24 seers and one-fourth thereof, that is a total of 30 seers, which is nearly double the quantity taken ... This state of things is pretty general, and has a very unwholesome effect on the condition of the agriculturalist. At the time of the harvest he has to pay away to the *sahukar* for the seed borrowed; next he has to pay the landlord; and after both these payments in grain, the quantity left with him is generally not enough to avoid the chance of borrowing seed when the time for sowing comes next.<sup>87</sup>

The cycle never ended; the cultivating tenant, one observer noted, 'is born in debt, increases his debt throughout his life and dies more hopelessly in debt than ever'.<sup>88</sup>

Added to the problem of indebtedness for the cultivators was the constant increase in the land revenue demanded by the government. In Gorakhpur at the settlement in 1889, the revenue demanded increased from Rs. 1,332,775 to Rs. 1,944,175, that is, by 46 per cent.<sup>89</sup> In Basti, the land revenue payable to the government increased from 20 to 27 lakhs between the two settlements (1891-1915), an increase of 35 per cent.<sup>90</sup> In Fyzabad, the demand had increased by 44 per cent in the

30 years up to 1899;<sup>91</sup> and in Sultanpur in 1899 the revenue was enhanced by 24 per cent.<sup>92</sup> The increases were justified on the grounds of the 'progress' the districts had made in the period between settlements.

The 'progress' of a district was measured by a number of factors, including the extension of railways, the increase in the area of cultivated land, improvement in the area under irrigation and construction of wells, increase in *do fasli* crops, rise in prices, and other such factors. To be sure, measured in terms of the above criteria, most districts did experience 'progress'. In Azamgarh district, at the end of the century, just to take one example, communications had improved, the cultivated area had increased by 65,000 acres, or by 8 per cent, *do fasli* cultivation had increased to 20 per cent of the total, prices had risen by 25 per cent and rents by 17 per cent.<sup>93</sup> But here mere statistics did not tell the full story. An increase in cultivation often took place on borrowed money which deepened the problem of indebtedness. Furthermore, the more land that was taken up for cultivation meant that less could be left as fallow. This consequently led, over a long period, to the declining productivity of the land. One official found from his investigation that the 'universal opinion of the natives is that the quantity of the outturn has diminished materially: their expression is two mounds where three were grown'.<sup>94</sup> It meant, too, that much pasture land was taken up in cultivation, reducing the number of cattle and, therefore, dung for manure: because jungle land was being cleared, dung had to be used for fuel. An increase in irrigated area was important and beneficial to agriculture. But sometimes the Settlement Officers concentrated perhaps too much on the area that was watered during the survey year and on crops on the ground that needed irrigation in that year, to the exclusion of crops which were

not irrigated because of the adequate rainfall but which otherwise needed irrigation. In Basti in 1890, 45 per cent of the cultivated area was irrigated, but what the Settlement Officer overlooked was the fact that a very large part of the unirrigated area was occupied by *jarhan* rice which depended more than any other crop upon a sufficient and timely supply of water. As the Joint Secretary of the Board of Revenue remarked, 'A very large proportion of this area, therefore, must be considered as insecured against prolonged delay or cessation of natural rainfall; and the consequence of deficient rainfall must be all the more serious because the land bears nothing except *jarhan* rice'.<sup>95</sup>

Enhancement or over-assessment led to rack-renting by landlords; indeed they were disposed sometimes to passing the entire burden of enhancements on to their tenants. Once the rent was increased, and the landlord found that the tenants could cultivate at abnormally high rents, it seldom came down, despite reduction at the time of revision of assessment. The landlords, with large families to provide for, heavy debts to pay, and their social position to maintain, showed little charity or compassion. In Basti, the Settlement Officer noted that the zamindars, with few 'honourable exceptions', 'regard their tenants as a source of income and nothing more. The conception that landholding involves duties as well as rights is still almost unknown.'<sup>96</sup> This was the situation throughout the UP. In Oudh, by 1873, notes historian Thomas Metcalf, the landlords issued 60,000 notices of eviction annually, 'with the object not of clearing land but of forcing the tenant to submit to an enhanced rent'.<sup>97</sup> Enquiries ten years later showed rack-renting to be pervasive. Rent rates 'have now reached a limit so high', noted one officer, 'as to press most severely on tenants', for 'the only law

guiding the landlord is to get all he can and let the tenant shift for himself.<sup>98</sup>

All tenants suffered, but the tenants-at-will, particularly of the lower caste bore the heaviest burden. In Basti, while their population increased, their amount of land they cultivated declined because of increase in occupancy area and increasing 'thirst' of proprietors for *khudkasht* land.<sup>99</sup> There, as in many other districts, besides the high rent they paid for which they seldom got a receipt, they had to pay a certain cash sum — *nazrana* — on admission to tenancy. Then there were other cesses to be paid which grew 'more numerous and ingenious year by year'.<sup>100</sup> The purchase of a horse or an elephant by the landlord, the costs of his litigation, a war loan, and other such *chandās* (dues) were met by contributions from the tenants. Cash payments were frequent during festivals or on the occasion of marriage or birth in the landlord's family, or even a *nauch* to entertain the landlords. On one occasion at least, the tenants were required to contribute a large sum required by a taluqdar lady for distribution among *fakirs* in order to facilitate her recovery from an illness.<sup>101</sup> Tithes on *bhusa* or straw were common. Sites for houses and the supply of water afforded additional income for the landlord. But most lucrative of all was the *sawai* system of lending grain by landlords to their tenants, which was, as one official put it 'one of the most profitable gilt-edged investments in the world'.<sup>102</sup>

The labouring population among whom Chamars, Pasis and other lower castes and tribals featured prominently, was also a hostage to adverse circumstances. Some officials thought the labourers to be in a better position than the tenants. One wrote that in 'a great many cases these people have a holding of land; but even when this is not the case,



their general circumstances, so long as the general labourer remains in health and there is no famine in the land, are fairly comfortable. There is rarely an actual want of food'.<sup>103</sup> He demonstrated his assertion by taking the case of an ordinary village Chamar who was generally thought to be gainfully employed throughout the year. The Chamar, he said, worked as a ploughman for five months of the year from Asarh to Kartik,<sup>104</sup> then he and his family were employed as reapers in the month of Aghan, in Pus and Magh, he utilised his time in *kaccha* building and other forms of earthenwork (*matkan*) in Phagun and Chait was employed in reaping the *rabi* crop, and for the remainder of the year, until his round as a ploughman came again in Asarh, he was engaged in marriage processions and similar light activities.

Others have made similar points in the context of the *jajmani* system — a system of institutionalised relationship where the *kamins*, usually low caste workers, provided certain specified services for the *jajmans*, usually the dominant castes of the particular region. Wisner, who was probably the first Western scholar to write about it, described the *jajmani* system as a benevolent institution, providing contentment for all the villages.<sup>105</sup> Morris Opler and Rudra Datt Singh, too, took a sanguine view and noted that it gave all the members of the community an opportunity to feel 'indispensable and proud'.<sup>106</sup>

No doubt it did, and helped to cushion the distressed labourers against sudden, unexpected changes. But sight should not be lost of the fact that the relationship between a *kamin* and a *jajman* was based on the principle of systematic, socially sanctioned inequality.<sup>107</sup> The terms of the relationship and remuneration for the services rendered were determined by the *jajman* and it is not difficult to

imagine that, on the whole, the system depended upon the acquiescence of the *kamin*, however much he was disadvantaged by the system. If he decided to break out, his life could be made extremely difficult by the *jajman*. His cattle might not be allowed to graze on the common land while his access to the wells or to the jungle could be stopped. And because he was so heavily in debt, the *jajman* could suddenly demand the full payment without notice. The possibilities for enforcing the acquiescence of the *kamins* were enormous. In reality, the *kamin* led a life of permanent servitude.

Those who ploughed the land for their landlords were not much better placed. Indeed they led the lives of bonded slaves.<sup>108</sup> This status began with the taking out of a loan by low caste men such as Chamars and Dusadhs. They then committed themselves and their descendants in perpetuity to the landlord until the loan was repaid. In return the landlord allowed the *sewaks* (bonded slaves) an agreed share of the produce of the field that they cultivated. In most cases, the share was barely sufficient to feed the *sewak* and his family. The landlord therefore provided further supplies, their value being added to the principal loan. The son of the *sewak*, once old enough, shared, and at his death succeeded to, his father's bond. In the meantime, the principal loan was perpetually being increased by the addition of the value of the food supplied by the landlord, and there was little prospect of the debt ever being repaid. The only difference between a *sewak* and a slave was that a *sewak's* contract was not valid in court. and when the *sewak* was dissatisfied he could desert his employer, and take up service with another who would then pay up his debt.<sup>109</sup>

The position of the landless labourer was well summed up in the remarks of A. Cadell, the Collector of Mathura that 'the margin between their

ordinary life and actual want is a very narrow one'.<sup>110</sup> Cadell's remarks are supported by evidence from folksongs. The picture of drudgery and frustration in a labourer's life is movingly depicted in the following tribal (Gond) road-mender's song:

Hungry and thirsty we break these stones in the heat of  
the sun.  
The chips of stone fly up and batter our naked bodies.  
Our life is empty and useless.  
Our naked bodies shine with sweat, the tears flow from  
our eyes.  
Sometimes the chips of stone pierce the flesh, and the  
blood flows.  
Those who have plenty of money gorge themselves with food,  
and live peacefully at home.  
But it is when the heat is greatest that we have the  
heaviest work.  
The ground burns beneath our feet: the sky blazes above.  
The hot wind scorches our faces: why cannot we escape?  
Sometimes the young men and girls die by the roadside,  
Yet my sinful life will not leave me.

O mother, how long must I break these stones?  
I am tired of living any longer.  
In the cold days when all are warm in bed,  
Then I must be breaking stones on the frosty ground.  
In the night sleep comes not because of the cold.  
All this I do and what do I get for it?  
Only two annas for a long day's toil.  
All this I do for my children's sake to keep them alive.  
My flesh wastes away with this suffering: only my bones  
remain.  
O that I might die quickly, and return to earth in a  
different form!  
Hungry and thirsty we break these stones in the cold of  
winter. 111

In the song below, a desperate agricultural labourer, fed-up with a life of degradation, says that anything in the colonies would be preferable to the life in India:

Born in India, we are prepared to go to Fiji,  
Or, if you please, to Natal to dig the mines.  
We are prepared to suffer there,  
But Brothers! Don't make us agriculturalists here. 112

Added to the distress caused by the operation of institutional factors was the constant and menacing spectre of famine which stalked the land with increasing frequency and stubbornness in the nineteenth century. Between 1860 and 1908, there were some 20 famines and scarcities in various parts of India.<sup>113</sup> Before the advent of modern forms of transportation, famine was largely a localised affair which meant, of course, acute distress and extreme hunger in the affected areas. With the development of railways, the transfer of grain from less distressed to the more severely affected areas became possible, and this to some extent improved the situation by accelerating relief operations. But the scarcity of food meant high prices which, in turn, considerably reduced the purchasing power of the large masses who were affected. The hardest hit were those without secure means of sustenance — the tenants-at-will, the landless agricultural labourers and certain artisan castes — Julahas, Koeris, Chamars, and others. For them, the joint family or corporate village life offered little hope; hence, disillusioned and pauperised, they took to the road which, according to Colonel Baird Smith, was 'by far the most important, or, more accurately, the only important'<sup>114</sup> alternative to starvation.

The role of migration as a strategy for alleviating distress, especially by the lower classes, has been stressed by many observers. A.G. Clow, the Settlement Officer of Basti in 1915, wrote: 'Emigration offers the only alternative to a man of enterprise who has no security of tenure, and it is fortunate that so many find it.'<sup>115</sup> G.M. Broughton has made similar remarks about the landless labourer:

From time to time he comes across other men who have risen from the same position as himself, and who, because they had sufficient enterprise to migrate, are in more comfortable circumstances. The pressure of his wants and the example of his fellow villagers induce him to try his fortune in

distant parts. As in the case of the tenant emigrant, he too looks forward ordinarily to returning to his native village. He has left either his wife and children behind or some other members of the family to satisfy the demands for labour made by the landlord. Or less frequently he has taken his wife and children with him to add to his earnings by their toil.<sup>116</sup>

The extent to which the various castes took to migration can be gauged from the analysis of figures on where they were registered for emigration to Fiji. In the previous chapter, we looked at this process at the district level and it was clear that a very substantial proportion of the emigrants were registered outside their own home districts, thereby indicating that the initial break had already been made before they were registered for migration overseas. Here our purpose is to explore this trend in relation to the various castes.<sup>117</sup> Among Brahmans, 68.1 per cent of the emigrants were registered outside their district of origin; among Rajputs 71.1 per cent; Khatri 64.1 per cent; Ahirs 54.9 per cent; Kurmis 62.1 per cent; Kahars 64.1 per cent; Koris 60.3 per cent; Chamars 44.7 per cent; Pasis 47.6 per cent; Godariyas 49 per cent; and among Muslims 60.9 per cent of the emigrants had left their homes before they were registered for Fiji. The figures clearly show the prevalence of spatial mobility among all the groups including Muslims. There are interesting variations in the extent to which the various groups had broken away from their homes prior to their registration. The pattern of migration tends, at first glance, to contradict the main thrust of the discussion of the economic position of the different caste groups in UP society. From the above discussion, one would have expected a higher percentage of the low castes to be registered outside their home districts, as their position was the most precarious. However, the above figures show the higher and middling castes to have a greater tendency to leave their homes. The position of the Brahmans seems

peculiar. Earlier (Table II-A), we saw that their proportionate contribution to Fiji's North Indian indentured population was significantly lower than their numerical strength in the various districts of the UP. We suggested that this trend may have been due to their traditional social position and their aversion for migration to distant and strange places. And yet, as the figures above show, they were, after the Rajputs, the most mobile caste group among the emigrants.

This contradiction is more apparent than real. While as a group, the Brahmans did not migrate as much as did the other groups, there were nevertheless sections of that caste which were clearly mobile, and those which were, tended to emigrate more freely and frequently than the other groups. The reasons for the difference in the patterns of mobility among the different castes are not too far to seek. It may be suggested that the greater mobility among the higher castes was, in fact, related to their economic position *vis-à-vis* other groups in the UP. They were, as we have suggested, sometimes slightly better placed although their privileged position was increasingly being eroded. They, therefore, had the means to emigrate and seek remunerative employment elsewhere. The middling cultivating castes who generally seem to rank second in the order of mobility, did not enjoy the privileges of the high castes, but they were nevertheless in a marginally more fortunate position than the low castes, and consequently showed a greater tendency to migrate. It is clear that relatively fewer emigrants of low castes were registered in other districts (that is not their districts of origin) than those of the middling castes. This situation, it would seem, was a direct result of their economic circumstances.

Many of the low castes were either small tenants or landless labourers, dependent for their survival upon landlords or *jajmans*. Employed year round on a pittance as they were, they had little time and even less resources than the others to contemplate migration.

Where were emigrants from the different castes registered, and were there any significant differences in the pattern of their migration from the various districts? Here, for the sake of convenience, we present the relevant data for three castes: Brahmans, Ahirs and Chamars. These have been chosen to represent the three strata of Indian society.

TABLE VII-A

Districts of Origin and Registration of

## BRAHMANS

*District of Registration**District of Origin*

	<u>Basti</u>		<u>Fyzabad</u>		<u>Gonda</u>		<u>Azamgarh</u>		<u>Sultanpur</u>		<u>Gorakhpur</u>	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Allahabad	0	0	2	1.6	0	0	0	0	3	4.8	0	0
Basti	37	24.2	0	0	2	1.4	1	3.0	0	0	0	0
Benares	1	0.7	8	6.5	3	2.2	10	30.3	2	3.2	2	5.3
Kanpur	0	0	1	0.8	1	0.7	1	3.0	8	12.9	0	0
Fyzabad	59	38.6	76	61.3	59	42.8	1	3.0	24	38.7	8	21.2
Gonda	6	3.9	0	0	28	20.3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gorakhpur	20	13.1	2	1.6	1	0.7	2	6.1	1	1.6	20	52.6
Jaunpur	1	0.7	0	0	0	0	2	6.1	2	3.2	0	0
Lucknow	0	0	2	1.6	1	0.7	0	0	2	3.2	0	0
Ghazipur	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	6.1	0	0	0	0
Alipur	2	1.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1.6	0	0
Calcutta	11	7.2	4	3.2	12	8.7	1	3.0	0	0	1	2.6



TABLE VII-B

Districts of Origin and Registration of

## AHIRS

*District of Registration**District of Origin*

	<u>Basti</u>		<u>Fyzabad</u>		<u>Gonda</u>		<u>Azamgarh</u>		<u>Sultanpur</u>		<u>Gorakhpur</u>	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Allahabad	3	0.6	2	0.6	2	0.6	3	1.8	15	6.5	0	0
Basti	198	38.4	1	0.3	16	4.7	0	0	0	0	11	5.4
Benares	3	0.6	14	4.4	0	0	51	30.7	14	6.1	1	0.5
Kanpur	2	0.4	14	4.4	12	3.6	2	1.2	25	10.9	2	1.0
Fyzabad	142	27.6	215	67.0	138	40.9	9	5.4	85	37.0	10	4.9
Gonda	16	3.1	2	0.6	98	29.1	0	0	1	0.4	4	2.0
Gorakhpur	109	21.2	2	0.6	11	3.3	11	6.6	2	0.9	139	68.1
Jaunpur	1	0.2	4	1.2	0	0	23	13.9	12	5.2	0	0
Lucknow	4	0.8	13	4.0	7	2.1	0	0	28	12.2	0	0
Ghazipur	3	0.6	1	0.3	0	0	38	22.9	1	0.4	10	4.9
Alipur	5	1.0	5	1.6	0	0	8	4.8	3	1.3	13	6.4
Calcutta	14	2.7	15	4.7	9	2.7	4	2.4	8	3.5	10	4.9

TABLE VII-C

Districts of Origin and Registration of

## CHAMARS

*District of Registration**District of Origin*

	<u>Basti</u>		<u>Fyzabad</u>		<u>Gonda</u>		<u>Azamgarh</u>		<u>Sultanpur</u>		<u>Gorakhpur</u>	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Allahabad	0	0	3	0.6	0	0	5	0.9	11	6.2	0	0
Basti	916	54.2	3	0.6	46	24.3	3	0.6	1	0.6	6	2.7
Benares	10	0.6	17	3.7	2	1.1	59	11.1	14	7.9	1	0.4
Kanpur	7	0.4	3	0.6	4	2.1	6	1.1	4	2.3	1	0.4
Fyzabad	333	19.7	339	72.9	54	28.6	29	5.5	67	37.9	3	1.3
Gonda	12	0.7	1	0.2	47	24.9	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gorakhpur	241	14.3	4	0.9	9	4.8	11	2.1	0	0	165	73.3
Jaunpur	1	0.1	26	5.6	0	0	87	16.4	30	16.9	0	0
Lucknow	4	0.2	10	2.2	11	5.8	14	2.6	6	3.4	0	0
Ghazipur	7	0.4	4	0.9	0	0	162	30.5	3	1.7	10	4.4
Alipur	25	1.5	10	2.2	1	0.5	22	4.1	15	8.5	24	10.7
Calcutta	84	5.0	31	6.7	11	5.8	8	1.5	12	6.8	6	2.7

Several features are clear from the above Tables. It is evident, for instance, that in the case of all three castes, there was very little migration from the eastern districts to the western districts of the UP. This is illustrated by the absence of Agra and Delhi as centres of registration. Because they were inconsequential,<sup>118</sup> they have not been included in the above Tables. Even to Kanpur, there was very little emigration from the east. The most important centres of registration for all three castes were the cities in the eastern UP region, especially Fyzabad and Gorakhpur. In the case of all the castes coming from Basti, Gonda, Sultanpur and Fyzabad itself, Fyzabad remained the most important centre of registration. In the case of Basti, however, Gorakhpur, too, was significant. For Azamgarh, Benares was an important registration centre. This would seem to be a result of its contiguous borders with Benares as well as the availability of employment there.

It is important to emphasise that for none of the three castes were the large cities such as Allahabad, Benares, Lucknow, Kanpur, Alipur and Calcutta important centres of registration. It is important, too, to point out that a large proportion of the emigrants registered in the large cities were not residents of the cities, but had come from other areas. In the case of Benares, only eight of the 78 Brahmans, 70 of the 346 Chamars, three of the 27 Kurmis, five of the 32 Koris, four of the 46 Khattris and 26 of the 171 Muslims registered there actually came from that district; the rest were from outside. In the case of other cities such as Agra, Delhi, Kanpur, Alipur and Calcutta, the number was even lower. And finally, although with respect to the pattern of mobility among the three castes no clear trend is evident, one comment can be made. It would seem that even though Brahmans were

more mobile than most castes, they tended in the main to travel to certain places more than they did to others. For many of them, Fyzabad seems to have been an important destination. As can be seen from the figures, 38.6 per cent of the Basti Brahmans, 42.8 per cent of the Gonda and 38.7 per cent of the Sultanpur Brahmans were registered there. The significance of these figures becomes apparent when one looks at the percentage of Chamars and Ahirs registered at Fyzabad. In the case of Chamars, 19.7 per cent from Basti, 28.6 per cent from Gonda, 37.9 per cent from Sultanpur were registered there. These two groups tended to be more dispersed in terms of their districts of registration.

But these detailed statistics on the variation and differences in the patterns of migration should not detract from the central point they all emphasise: that a great deal of mobility was under way, and that members of all castes and groups were increasingly migrating in large numbers to other areas. A large proportion of the indentured emigrants came from this already displaced 'flotsam of humanity'.

This chapter has attempted to probe the social and economic origins of Fiji's North Indian migrants. It has shown that, on the whole, the indentured emigrants represented a fair cross-section of the rural UP population. Contrary to conventional stereotypes, there were many middling and high castes in the emigrating population besides, of course, those of low social origins. Most of the emigrants irrespective of their caste or status were, in the nineteenth century, deriving their livelihood from the land, whether as proprietors, cultivators or

labourers. Their position in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was rapidly deteriorating due to a host of factors, many of which ultimately had their origins in the character of British rule in India. The discussion of agrarian changes in Indian society has been brief, and necessarily so, given the enormous complexity of the subject. The main emphasis has been on those aspects which bear directly on the issues at hand: an understanding of those 'push factors' which created the conditions for emigration. An awareness of these as well as of the prevalence of spatial mobility among all the social groups should serve as a corrective to the view which stresses the 'pull factors', especially the role of the recruiters. With this broad picture of the social and economic background of the emigrants, we shall now look at two specific, but little known, aspects of indentured emigration: women and family migration.

APPENDIX I 118

Profiles of Cultivators and Labourers in the UP in the 1880s

'Hira Singh, son of Patram, caste Brahman, is a cultivator, and holds 20 bighas kham in the village. He put cotton seeds in four and juar in 11 bighas, but the crops failed as they were four weeks under water. As soon as the water subsided, he tilled the land, and put grain seed in them and also in other five bighas that he had reserved for the rabi sowings.

He has no wife, but four sons who are unmarried, and the youngest is 12 years old.

Having lost their kharif, the father and sons had no other alternative but to live on labour, and so the eldest son sought employment under a Bania in the village at Rs 2-8-0 a month. The second son commenced cleaning cotton, while the father with his youngest sons looked for other miscellaneous work in the village.

Their daily income thus amounted to four annas a day, and with this they took their meals once and sometimes twice a day. The father and his two sons then fell sick, and consequently they passed several weeks with the utmost difficulty. While sick, the family had very little to eat sometimes.

They have now harvested their own rabi crop, and take their meals three times a day as usual.

They had three old quilts with which they passed their winter. They used to spend about Rs 4 or Rs 5 on clothing in other seasons, but none this time. Hira Singh's two sons are still attacked with fever now and then.'

\* \* \*

'Tunda, son of Balwant, is a cultivator, and holds 4 pakka bighas of land in the village: of this he sowed eight bighas, 16 biswas in kharif, viz:

Cotton in	:	3 pakka bighas
Chari in	:	1 bigha 3 biswas
Bajra and Juar in	:	1 bigha 17 biswas
Juar-urd in	:	2 bighas 16 biswas

One bigha 11 biswas of cotton was under water for some time, and produced nothing. The remaining one bigha nine biswas produced two maunds uncleaned cotton, which was sold for Rs 10. Chari, bajra, and juar served the bullock for his fodder, and two bighas 16 biswas produced one maud juar and one and a quarter maunds urd only.

He has a wife and three girls in the family, the eldest being nine, the second five, and the third about one and a half years old. The eldest daughter was betrothed in November last to a boy in Mauza Baroka in the Gurgaon district for which Tunda received a present of Rs 12, and he paid this sum to the zamindar as part of his kharif rent.

With his kharif produce he supported his family for two and a half months, viz., up to the end of 'Magh' or January. During this interval of time, one seer of coarse flour was cooked as *dalia* in the morning, and another seer of flour was cooked as bread at night. The two young girls used to go and eat wild plums in the jungle during the day time.

When the stock of their kharif produce was exhausted, the wife, early in February, took out the cotton from the *lihaf* or quilt made in the last year, and spun thread, which fetched her one anna a day or one seer of grain, in which she mixed two seers of *gular* fruit, and then cooked food for the family.

They thus passed 20 days, and when there was no more cotton in hand, they got a loan of 20 seers/grain from their neighbours and relations on the prospect of their rabi produce. This kept the family on till Holi, and then the family found that their own barley field was able to maintain them. The family then with great rejoicing visited their field in the morning, picked up the ripe ears, and parched them then and there for their meal. A week after they found grain also in their field ready for their food, and they commenced eating that both *kaccha* and *pakka*.

For about 20 days after Holi they could not get bread to eat, but green food; but when the rabi harvest began, they were able to have their meals both morning and evening.

His rabi fields consists of five *pakka* bighas and four biswas barley, and one bigha and 11 biswas of bejhar. The outturn is expected to be good. From this they intend to pay Rs 23 as rent, and keep the rest

for their use.

During the past cold weather, they had three quilts with them, one of them was utilised by the wife, the second by the two girls, and the third by the husband. The wife used to sleep in the *kotha*, where they had spread *bhusa* with a view to keep them warm, while the husband slept in a thatched room alongside his bullocks, where he provided himself with grass bedding.

Last year Tunda bought a pair of *dhotis* for Rs 1-8-0, a turban for Rs 1-1-0, and spent Rs 3 in the clothing of his wife and children. They could not afford to buy any clothes this year.

In ordinary seasons they had three meals a day. Tunda suffered from fever for about two months, but is now better.'

\* \* \*

'Kamle, Chamar.

1. Family - himself a boy of 8 years  
                   wife a girl of 10 years  
                   a boy of 15 years a girl of two years

2. Crop and Cultivation - cultivates 17 fields in all

	Rs	a	p
12 bighas 17 biswas or 7.57 acres as occupancy tenant at rent	25	11	0
<u>4 bighas 2 biswas or 2.47 acres as non-occupancy tenant at rent</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>0</u>
16            19            10.04	39	9	0
	[35	7	0 ?]

In rabi 1294 fasli only three bighas 18 biswas were sown with grain. His fields are canal-irrigated, but no water could be had for rabi. In this 10 maunds of grain were raised, which were sold to a Bania at the rate of 25 or 26 seers a rupee, say for Rs 16.

In kharif 1295 fasli crops sown were -

Juar, urd, patsan til	...	in 7 bighas 6 biswas (in five bighas arhar as well)
Cotton, arhar, patsan, til	...	in 4 bighas 7 biswas (in over three bighas moth as well)
Bajra, mung	...	in 2 bighas 7 biswas (in one bigha four biswas, arhar, til, patsan as well)
Indigo	...	in 2 bighas 11 biswas
Hemp	...	in 6 biswas
Ramas	...	in 2 biswas



He says cotton was weeded three times, and that eight men weeded a bigha a day: they were paid six pice to two annas. Supposing they only got an anna each (and this is fair, as he probably helped them in turn), the cost of weeding would be Rs 6-8-0.

Nothing was paid for weeding the other crops: most of the juar was destroyed by pigs, and only four maunds were produced, which he and his family ate. Bajra suffered too, and only two maunds were produced, a part of which was sold at 20 seers a rupee for Rs 2; the remaining maund he ate. The indigo was sold for Rs 16, at the rate of Rs 25 per 100 maunds. Each bigha of cotton produced 2 maunds, which was sold at Rs 3 a maund; i.e. for Rs 13 in all. The arhar was spoiled by frost and only the stalks were left, which were used for thatching. Hemp was made into ropes for private use, 24 seers of til were sold for Rs 2. Four maunds of urd and mung were produced, half was sold for Rs 4. The five seers of ramas were eaten by the children. I omitted to make any enquiry as to seed. I doubt if any was kept back for the next year, but as the produce of juar and bajra was probably higher than stated above, the item of seed may be safely neglected.

3. Cattle - Kamle has a bullock which he bought for Rs 20 seven years ago. When he wishes to plough, he borrows another bullock and lends his in turn. He has two cows, for which he paid Rs 15 and Rs 10, respectively some years ago. The milk is in the house. He has also a female buffalo, bought two years ago for Rs 25. Her milk gives one-eighth seer of ghi daily, which is sold at market rates at Muttra and Brindaban, say for Rs 22-12-0 a year.

4. Employment - Kamle and his boys (as far as they are able) are employed in their fields for the best part of four months at kharif and three months at rabi. The rest of the year he and his eldest boy work for hire. He earns from a half to two annas a day, his boy from a half to one anna. Say they get regular employment for four months at an anna a day (and this estimate is as high as it is safe to take), they would earn Rs 15-8-0. The wife is employed in household work.

5. Food, Tobacco, etc. - Kamle eats twice a day when he can, and in default once. In good times the household eats five seers a day: now urd and grain are being used. However, taking an average all the year round, I doubt whether three and a half or four seers or so much is the

daily consumption. The children get the milk from the cows as well. According to Kamle's own story, he had in a very bad year a little over seven maunds of his grain for consumption. Supposing this lasted the family 80 days, and during 285 days they used only three and a half seers daily, even at the rate of 20 seers a rupee, Rs 50 would have to be spent on food. Despite this Kamle smokes two and three times a day, and spends four annas a month. Oil and salt cost him a pice a day, say Rs 5-12-0 yearly.

6. Clothing - Kamle possesses two *dhotis* (price Rs 1-4-0), a *mirzai* (10 annas), a *pagri* (eight annas), and shoes (12 annas). During the cold weather at night he puts on the rags of the old clothing he has. His wife has a *lahanga* (Rs 1-4-0) and a *orhni* (eight annas). His boys each have two *dhotis*, and *angarkhi*, and shoes and *pagris*; his little girl a *ghagra* (10 annas) and a small *orhni* (six annas). He and his wife renew their clothing yearly, but the children get the cast-off clothing, and new clothing less frequently. Cost of clothing yearly is not more than Rs 7-8-0 or Rs 8.

7. Dishes, etc. - In the house Kamle has a metal *thali* (Rs 1 or Rs 1-4-0) a *lota* or *garua* (12 annas or Rs 1) and 10 or 15 earthen vessels. The service he renders the potter is probably set-off against the services the potter renders him.

His wife has no sihar ornaments, only a few pewtar ones. He has to borrow a plough when required.

8. House - Kamle's house has two rooms and a thatch under which cattle are kept.

9. Marriages and other expenses - Kamle says if in funds he will spend Rs 40 at the marriage of his son; and if not, it can be done for Rs 10 only. Similarly, the expenses of his daughter's marriage will cost him from Rs 15 to Rs 50.

10. Debts - Kamle owes roughly Rs 70 or Rs 80 in several quarters to Chamars and Thakurs as well as Banias. He pays six pice in Rs 1 monthly as interest. He had to borrow this year, and borrowed Rs 4 lately. To sum up, the state of Kamle's accounts as stated by him stands thus:

<u>Receipts</u>	<u>Rs a p</u>	<u>Expenditure</u>	<u>Rs a p</u>
Grain	16 0 0	Weeding	6 8 0
Bajra	2 0 0	Rent (out of Rs 35-9-0)	32 0 0
Indigo	16 0 0	Tobacco	2 0 0
Cotton	13 0 0	Salt, oil, etc.	5 12 0
Til	2 0 0	Clothing	7 8 0
Urd-Mung	4 0 0	Food	50 0 0
Ghi	22 12 0		
Labour	15 4 0		
Total	91 0 0	Total	104 12 0

The result is Kamle would have to borrow Rs 13-12-0 to meet his expenses. His is a case of a cultivator of a low caste eking out the produce of his field labour and selling ghi. He suffers from an absentee landlord, belonging to the heirs of the Lala Babu, who are badly served by their agents. Kamle and other Chamars of the village have to give their services often for nothing.

Kamle has, I think, understated the amount of his produce, and probably kept a larger share for his own use than he says; this would reduce the price of food items, and it has to be remembered that his statements refer to an exceptionally bad year.'

\* \* \*

'Sukhi, son of Sahib Ram, Jat, is a cultivator, and owns one bullock. He holds 40 *kaecha* bighas of land, out of which he had cotton in three, juar in eight, guar in four, and bajra in four *kaecha* bighas. He also sublet 10 bighas of land to Nanwan, Chamar, on the same rent at which he had got it from the landlord. Nanwan sowed juar in this land.

Sukhi's field produce was as below:

Cotton	: 2 maunds
Juar-urd	: 8.1/2 maunds
Mung in the bajra field	: 2.1/2 maunds

The bajra produce being very poor was eaten green; juar plants served the bullock for his fodder.

He received Rs 4 as rent from Nanwan, Chamar, for the land sublet to him, sold cotton for Rs 19 and four maunds urd-juar for Rs 7-8-0, and thus paid Rs 21-8-0 to the zamindar as his kharif rent.

After all he saved seven maunds of grain with which he supported his family, giving them one or two meals a day.

Khushal, lambardar, gave him seed with which he sowed grain in six *kaccha* bighas. The estimated outturn is nine maunds, out of which he intends to pay the lambardar his rent, and price of seed as well.

He had a new quilt made this season, and put a seer of cotton into it. He had besides that a pair of *dhotis* and a *mirzai*, and the wife had only two suits of clothes, which she used as a quilt at night.

In other years they had three meals a day, but this season only one or two.

Since the grain harvesting began they have their meals twice a day. The husband suffered from fever for a month and a half, and the wife is still suffering from asthma.'

\* \* \*

'Family of Tika, Kachhi, age 25 years.

1. Occupation - his occupation is chiefly service. He cultivates also, but is not a regular cultivator; has no cultivating holding.
2. Earnings - last year he cultivated five *kaccha* biswas of land jointly with another Kachhi, and the estimated value of the outturn of the poppy crops sown amounted to Rs 7. Out of this Rs 7, Rs 1-8-0 was paid on account of rent, and from the balance Rs 5-8-0, he received Rs 2-12-0 on account of his share. He is in the service of one of the proprietors of the village on Rs 3 per mensem or Rs 36 per annum. His pay is generally in grain, but receives cash payment too, whenever he wants money for purchasing cloth or household furniture.

3. Family - there is one adult, one woman, and one girl in this family. One girl who has been married has not been included, as, though she has not yet gone to her husband, will ultimately separate.

4. Income and Expenditure - his income and expenditure are as follows:

<u>Receipts</u>	<u>Rs a p</u>	<u>Expenditure</u>	<u>Rs a p</u>
Income from cultivation	2 12 0	Diet expenses	29 2 0
Pay of service	36 0 0	Clothing expenses	6 11 0
		Purchasing household furniture	1 0 0
		Cost of grain given to barber and washerman (18 seers to each)	1 0 0
			<u>1 0 0</u>
Total	38 12 0	Total	37 13 0

Thus, deducting his expenses from his income, he appears to make a little saving of 15 annas.

5. Furniture - his furniture is of the usual description, and valued at Rs 12-15-3.

6. Food - his food consists always of grain of the lower quality: in summer and rainy season he eats barley and bejhar; in winter, maize and bajra; wheat is eaten only occasionally, i.e. at festivals, family or religious ceremonies, but is always given for food to guests. They eat pulse only in a very small quantity, i.e. 20 seers a year. Vegetables, such as chana, bathna greens, gundar, carrots and radishes are much used when they can get neither pulse nor vegetables; they take bread with salt. His consumption of grain is two seers, estimated to cost Rs 2-1-4, or Rs 30-2-0 for the whole year. He has to purchase his food from the market.'

\* \* \*

'Naina, son of Hota, caste Gadaria, is a labourer. He has a family of six, viz:

- (1) he himself, about 25 years old
- (2) his wife
- (3) his brother, 20 years old
- (4) his brother's wife
- (5) a boy eight years old
- (6) his mother

Both brothers earned by labour about three annas a day, and with this they bought three seers of grain, which gave them meal once a day. The day they could not get labour, they subsisted on sag and gular.

Such was the case with them till the middle of March, when the harvest began, and they now earn sufficient to provide the family with two meals a day. In other seasons they used to eat three times a day.

Each of the two brothers had a blanket, and the women had nothing but their usual dress, which answered them for quilts at night. The whole family used to sit and sleep by the fireside at night.

Both brothers have been suffering from fever for some months, and they have become very thin.

In other seasons they used to provide themselves and their family with suitable clothing, which cost them about Rs 4 or Rs 5; but they could not do so this season.'

\* \* \*

Lutna, Chamar of Lahurra near Kalinjar.

'There is only myself and my old mother: have been married, but *ganna* has not taken place. I work as an agricultural labourer, getting about Rs 2 a month as wages. My father died some Rs 20 in debt, and I have to work it off. I cut grass for the zamindar's cow, and so on. Just now the zamindar gives me one anna a day. I ate masur bread last night with salt. In crop time I get wheat or gram bread: generally have to eat arhar, masur, rice and juar. Have been married for five or six years, but cannot get my wife to live with me yet for want of money.

My mother also works for the zamindar and gets wages: but she is very old and feeble. I get my clothing from my share of cotton-picking. For every five seer of cotton picked the labourers get half seer. Then I got the Koeri to weave it into *dhoti*. I pay the Koeri four annas for one *dhoti*.

\* \* \*

Madho, Kahar of Naseni.

'Ours is the only family of Kahars in the village. I have father, mother, two brothers, two sisters, grandmother, maternal uncle and his son. I cultivate 25 bighas with two ploughs, paying rent at Rs 2 per bighas. Have sown 12 bighas with wheat. I eat bread twice daily of barley, gram or juar. The family expenditure is five or six seers daily. I never eat wheat. I sell my wheat to pay my rent. I got Rs 1 a month for supplying water to certain villages. I sometimes work as *palki-bearer*, getting half anna a *kos*. I also make something at weddings. I borrow seeds at *sawai* rates: have not yet paid anything. I have just enough to get on with. My clothing consists of a *pagri*, a *dhoti*, and a body-cloth. I am not a fisherman. My father is not in service: he carries the zamindar's *palki* as a *begari*: he gets no pay for this, but something in kind. I do not make nets. I do not sew *singharas*. My womenkind do not serve the zamindar's family. They help in agriculture and do the housework. I have two bullocks and one cow. I have not yet paid my rent, but have set off to claim for work done in carrying the zamindar's *palki*. If the Kahar goes on a long trip, he is paid half anna a *kos*.'

\* \* \*

NOTES

- 1 E.P. A Pros 12, August, 1882, NAI. Grierson, however, found the assertions to be greatly exaggerated.
- 2 See vol.II, Appendix VIII, pp.82-100.
- 3 I have based myself on William Crooke, *Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh* (Calcutta, 1896), 4 vols; E.H. Blunt, *The Caste System of Northern India* (London, 1921); J.H. Hutton, *Caste in India: Its Nature, Functions and Origin* (Bombay, 4th edn. 1963).
- 4 For detailed discussion see Ghaus Ansari, *Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh* (Lucknow, 1960); Blunt, *The Caste System of Northern India*.
- 5 See, for example, Chandra Jayawardena, 'Social Contours of an Indian Labour Force During the Indenture Period in Fiji' in Vijay Mishra (ed.), *Rama's Banishment: A Centenary Tribute to the Fiji Indians, 1879-1979* (Auckland, 1979), pp.40-65. Professor Jayawardena, who sampled the Emigration Passes of indentured labourers in the Nausori area, suggests that Brahmans provided 7.8 per cent of the emigrants, Kshatriyas 12.5 per cent, Vaisyas (including Banias and Kayasths) 2.7 per cent, and Muslims 17.5 per cent. For comparisons with British Guiana [Guyana], see Raymond T. Smith, 'Some Social Characteristics of Indian Immigrants to British Guiana', *Population Studies*, vol.XIII, no.1 (1956), pp.34-39.
- 6 Figures in Column I are derived from vol.II, Appendix VIII, pp.82-100, while those on the numerical strength of the various groups in the UP are from caste tables in the *Census Reports* for the various years.



- 7 See vol.II, Appendix IX, pp.101-14 for the districts of origin of the castes in Table II A-D. In the case of Brahmans, we have included here only those who stated Brahman as their caste on the Emigration Passes; the various sub-castes are excluded. The figures on the numerical strength of Brahmans, Ahirs, Kurmis, and Chamars are derived from *Census of India*, vol.XV, Part II (1911), Table XIII.
- 8 Based on B.N.S. Yadav, *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century* (Allahabad, 1973), Ch.I. See also A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (London, Fontana ed.1967), Ch. V.
- 9 Yadav, *ibid.*, p.21.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 *Ibid.*, p.43.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p.16.
- 13 Crooke, *Tribes and Castes*, vol.I, pp.cxliv-v.
- 14 Constructed from *Census of India*, vol.XV, Part II (1911), Table XVI.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 See the debate between Morris David Morris and Bipan Chandra, Toru Matsui and Tapan Raychaudhri. The relevant articles on the subject are: Morris David Morris, 'Towards a Reinterpretation of Nineteenth-Century Indian Economic History', *IESHR*, vol.V, no.1, (March 1968), pp.1-15; Toru Matsui, 'On the Nineteenth-Century Indian Economic History — A Review of a "Reinterpretation"', *IESHR*, *ibid.*, pp.17-34; Bipan Chandra, 'Reinterpretation of Nineteenth Century Indian Economic History', *IESHR*, *ibid.*, pp.35-76; Tapan Raychaudhri, 'A Reinterpretation of Nineteenth Century Indian

- Economic History', *IESHR*, *ibid.*, pp.77-100. Morris's reply is in his 'Trends and Tendencies in Indian Economic History', *IESHR*, vol.V, no.4 (December 1968), pp.319-88.
- 17 Based on Bernard S. Cohn, *India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971), Ch.VIII.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p.80.
- 19 Walter C. Neale, *Economic Change in Rural India. Land Tenure and Reform in Uttar Pradesh, 1800-1955* (New Haven and London, 1962), Part II, p.51ff.
- 20 *Report of the United Provinces Zamindari Abolition Committee* (Allahabad, 1948), p.48.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p.71. See also, *Report of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee* (Allahabad, 2nd ed. 1951), p.40.
- 22 Cohn, *India*, p.80. See also Theodore Morrison, *The Industrial Organization of an Indian Province [UP]* (London, 2nd ed. 1911), p.60.
- 23 See below for fuller discussion. For general discussion see the report of the *Royal Commission on Agriculture*, vol.VII (1927), p.368ff, and *Report of the United Provinces Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee*, vol.I (1929-30), p.23 ff.
- 24 *Collection of Papers Relating to the Condition of the Tenantry and the Working of the Present Rent Law in Oudh* (Allahabad, 1883), vol.II, p.49.
- 25 Neale, *Economic Change in Rural India*, p.65; Morrison, *The Industrial Organization of an Indian Province*, pp.53-4.
- 26 *Collection of Papers*, p.49.

- 27 W.C. Benett, *Gonda S.R.* (1878), p.61.
- 28 Dietmar Rothermund, 'Government, Landlord and Tenant in India, 1875-1900', *IESHR*, vol.VI, no.4 (1969), p.353.
- 29 Ibid., p.356; see also Krishna Sahai Asthna, 'A Social and Economic Survey of Village Malhera, District Hardoi', in Radhakamal Mukerjee (ed.), *Fields and Farmers in Oudh* (Calcutta, 1954), p.115.
- 30 D.R. Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times, 1860-1939* (Delhi, 5th ed. 1971), pp. 158-9.
- 31 See Cohn, *India*, p.81: 'In some respects Indian agriculture has always had a commercial component. India has supported cities and craft production, courts and luxury consumption, as well as a range of service functions, both rural and urban, all requiring food and raw materials derived from agriculture. In pre-British times, grains had to be supplied to cities and towns for both military and the government. A wide range of other agricultural products, such as sugar, tobacco, and spices, were sold widely. Cotton and jute products were needed for weaving, indigo and other agricultural products for dye stuffs'.
- 32 H.R.C. Hailey, *Gonda S.R.* (Allahabad, 1903), p.2; see also Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India*, p.158 ff.
- 33 See the debate between Amiya Kumar Bagchi and Marika Vicziani. Their relevant published articles on the subject include: Amiya Kumar Bagchi, 'De-Industrialization in India in the Nineteenth Century: Some Theoretical Implications', *Journal of Development Studies*, vol.XII, no.2 (January 1976), pp.135-64; Bagchi, 'De-Industrialization in Gangetic Bihar, 1809-1901', in Barun De (ed.), *Essays in Honour of Prof. S.C. Sarkar*, (New Delhi, 1976), pp.499-522; Marika Vicziani, 'The De-Industrialization of India in the Nineteenth Century: A Methodological Critique of Amiya Kumar Bagchi', *IESHR*, vol.XVI, no.2 (April-June 1979), pp.105-46.

For Bagchi's response see his 'A Reply', *IESHR*, vol.XVI, no.2, (April-June 1979), pp.147-61.

- 34 Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India*, p.38.
- 35 P.C. Joshi, 'The Decline of Indigenous Handicraft in Uttar Pradesh, 1860-1948', *IESHR*, vol.I, no.1 (1963-64), pp.24-35.
- 36 Bagchi, 'De-Industrialization in Gangetic Bihar', p.516, quoting from the *DG of Gaya*; see also Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India*, p.183; *Census of India*, vol.XVI (1891), p.333.
- 37 J. Hooper, *Basti S.R.* (Allahabad, 1891), p.28.
- 38 F.W. Brownrigg, *Sultanpur S.R.* (Allahabad, 1899), pp.8-10.
- 39 C.E. Crawford, *Azamgarh S.R.* (Allahabad, 1909), p.4.
- 40 Ibid. The Table from which these figures are drawn compares the position of the various proprietary castes between the two Settlements.
- 41 Hooper, *Basti S.R.*, Appendix VIIIA.
- 42 Crawford, *Azamgarh S.R.*, p.11.
- 43 A.G. Clow, *Basti S.R.* (Allahabad, 1919), p.6.
- 44 Ibid., p.5.
- 45 Hailey, *Gonda S.R.*, p.6.
- 46 H.K. Gracy, *Cawnpore S.R.* (Allahabad, 1907), p.13.
- 47 H.O.W. Roberts, *Etah S.R.* (Allahabad, 1905), p.17.
- 48 Crawford, *Azamgarh S.R.*, pp.3-4.

- 49 Clow, *Basti S.R.*, p.6.
- 50 The figures here are derived from Clow, *Basti S.R.* (1919), p.6 and Hooper, *Basti S.R.* (1891), p.30.
- 51 For definition of these terms see H.H. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms of British India* (London, 1955), p.411.
- 52 Brownrigg, *Sultanpur S.R.*, p.20.
- 53 W.H. Moreland, *Unao S.R.* (1896), p.5.
- 54 Derived from *Note on Land Transfer and Agricultural Indebtedness in India* (Allahabad, 1893 or 1894), p.35.
- 55 Hailey, *Gonda S.R.*, p.9.
- 56 Hooper, *Basti S.R.*, p.51.
- 57 See, for example Hailey, *Gonda S.R.*, p.8; Brownrigg, *Sultanpur S.R.*, p.10; Hooper, *Basti S.R.*, p.51; Clow, *Basti S.R.*, p.5; *Collection of Papers Relating to the Condition of the Tenantry*, vol.I, p.83.
- 58 H.R. Nevill, *Ghazipur D.G.*, vol.XXIX (Allahabad, 1909), pp.118-19.
- 59 Gracy, *Cawnpore S.R.*, p.13; see also Francis Robinson, 'Municipal Government and Muslim Separation in the United Provinces, 1883-1916', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol.VII, no.3 (1973), p.401ff.
- 60 Brownrigg, *Sultanpur S.R.*, p.21.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p.10.
- 62 Crawford, *Azamgarh S.R.*, p.13.
- 63 Hailey, *Gonda S.R.*, p.8; see also Hari Har Dayal, 'Agricultural Labourers: An Inquiry into their Condition in the Unao District', in Mukerjee (ed.), *Fields and Farmers in Oudh*, p.188.

- 64 *Collection of Papers Relating to the Condition of the Tenantry*, vol.I, p.21.
- 65 Crawford, *Azamgarh S.R.*, p.15.
- 66 Brownrigg, *Sultanpur S.R.*, p.14.
- 67 Clow, *Basti, S.R.*, p.7.
- 68 Hailey, *Gonda S.R.*, p.10; Crawford, *Azamgarh S.R.*, p.16; H.E. House, *Fyzabad S.R.* (Allahabad, 1899), p.11.
- 69 H.R. Nevill, *Allahabad D.G.*, vol.XXII (Allahabad, 1911), p.117.
- 70 *Collection of Papers*, vol.I, p.135.
- 71 Clow, *Basti S.R.*, p.19; see also *Collection of Papers*, p.88.
- 72 Hailey, *Gonda S.R.*, pp.10-11; see also D.L. Drake-Brockman, *Azamgarh D.G.*, vol.XXXIII (Allahabad, 1911), p.117: 'As a rule high caste tenants of all sorts are independent in spirit, and are disposed to assume an attitude of hostility to the landlord and to oppose him in the enjoyment of his rights. They generally only acknowledge the landlord's right to a fixed rent in cash and grain, and strenuously resist enhancement. Low caste tenants on the other hand, besides being more amenable to the will of the landlord as regards land, are accustomed to rendering him a number of petty dues and services besides that ...'
- 73 Hailey, *Gonda S.R.*, p.11.
- 74 Oudh General File, 1719, UP State Archives, Lucknow.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 Ibid.

- 77 *Collection of Papers Relating to the Condition of the Tenantry*, vol.I, p.250.
- 78 H.R. Nevill, *Bahraich D.G.*, vol.XLV (Allahabad, 1903), pp.67-8; see also, Dayal, 'Agricultural Labourers', p.246; Hailey, *Gonda S.R.*, p.11.
- 79 Brownrigg, *Sultanpur S.R.*, p.14.
- 80 Crawford, *Azamgarh S.R.*, p.15.
- 81 Clow, *Basti S.R.*, p.7. In Sultanpur, half an acre was the average cultivated area per head of population: see Brownrigg, *Sultanpur S.R.*, p.15.
- 82 See Jagdish Raj, *Economic Conflict in North India. A Study of Landlord-Tenant Relations in Oudh, 1870-1890* (Bombay, 1978), p.5.
- 83 See Elizabeth Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions in Northern India. The United Provinces Under British Rule, 1860-1900*, vol.I, (Berkeley, 1972), p.162. Whitcombe provides a very detailed and comprehensive discussion of various aspects of the indebtedness problem. See also *Report of the United Provinces Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee*, vol.I (1929-30) for extended discussion.
- 84 Morrison, *The Industrial Organization of an Indian Province*, p.103, quoting the remark of Mr E. Rose of Ghazipur.
- 85 *Report of the United Provinces Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee*, vol.IV, p.428.
- 86 Raj, *Economic Conflict in North India*, p.7 quoting the remarks of Mr R.H. Davis, Chief Commissioner of Fyzabad Division.
- 87 *A Collection of Papers Connected with an Enquiry into the Condition of the Lower Classes of the Population, Especially in Agricultural Tracts in the North West Provinces and Oudh, instituted in 1887-89*

- (Allahabad, 1890), pp. 194-5. Also see individual studies in Mukerjee (ed.), *Fields and Farmers in Oudh*.
- 88 Dayal, 'Agricultural Labourers', p.188.
- 89 Dept of Revenue and Agriculture (Land Revenue), A Pros 8-9, November 1914, NAI.
- 90 Clow, *Basti S.R.*, p.9.
- 91 House, *Fyzabad S.R.*, Appendix III.
- 92 Brownrigg, *Sultanpur S.R.*, p.2.
- 93 Crawford, *Azamgarh S.R.*, pp.3-4.
- 94 *Collection of Papers Relating to the Condition of the Tenantry*, vol.I, p.89.
- 95 The Joint Secretary of the Board of Revenue reviewing Hooper's *Basti S.R.* (1891), p.5.
- 96 Clow, *Basti S.R.*, p.23. Dayal, 'Agricultural Labourers', pp.287-8, writing about the 1920s corroborates this picture: 'The zamindars and taluqdars only care to realize exorbitant rates from the poor tenants, and squander money in wasteful expenditure simply to parade the magnificence of their princely existence. They do not concern themselves in the least with the poverty, ignorance and helplessness of their raiyats, and sadly neglect the possibilities of agricultural improvements and the raiyats' prosperity.'
- 97 Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt . India, 1857-1870* (Princeton, N.J., 1964), p.196.
- 98 Ibid.
- 99 Clow, *Basti S.R.*, pp.13-14. Morrison, *The Industrial Organization of an Indian Province*, pp.73-4.



- 100 Clow, *ibid.*, p.17.
- 101 Oudh General File 1942, UP State Archives.
- 102 Clow, *Basti S.R.*, p.17.
- 103 *A Collection of Papers Connected with an Enquiry into the Condition of the Lower Classes*, p.175.
- 104 Indian months and their English equivalents are as follows:  
Chait — March 15 to April 13; Baisakh — April 14 to May 14;  
Jaith — May 15 to June 15; Asarh — June 16 to July 16;  
Sawan — July 17 to August 17; Bhadon — August 18 to September 17;  
Kunwar — September 18 to October 17; Kartik — October 18 to  
November 16; Aghan — November 17 to December 15; Pus — December 16  
to January 14; Magh — January 15 to February 12; Phagun —  
February 13 to March 14.
- 105 W.H. Wiser, *The Hindu Jajmani System* (Lucknow, 2nd printing, 1958).  
This edition has a Foreword by Oscar Lewis. The original edition  
appeared in 1938.
- 106 Morris Opler and Rudra Datt Singh, 'The Division of Labour in an  
Indian Village', in Carleton S. Coon (ed.), *A Reader in General  
Anthropology*, (London, 1950), p.496.
- 107 This paragraph borrows heavily from Oscar Lewis, *Village Life in  
Northern India* (Urbana, 1958), ch.2.
- 108 For more discussion see *Settlement Reports, District Gazetteers*  
as well as other reports on the condition of the tenantry and of  
the lower classes referred to in the notes above.
- 109 Hooper, *Basti S.R.*, p.30.
- 110 *A Collection of Papers Connected with an Enquiry into the Condition  
of the Lower Classes*, p.42. See also Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution  
of India*, p.90: 'This section of the community lives a hand to mouth

existence with low standards of comfort and abnormally sensitive to inferior harvests and calamities of season.' (Quoting 1898 *Indian Famine Commission Report*).

- 111 Verrier Elwin and S. Hivale, *Songs of the Forest. The Folkpoetry of the Gonds* (London, 1935), p.58.
- 112 This song was collected during my field work in Basti, April 1979.
- 113 Detailed discussions of famines in India are provided in B.M. Bhatia, *Famines in India* (Bombay, 1963), and H.S. Srivastva, *The History of India Famines, 1858-1918* (Agra, 1968).
- 114 *PP*, vol.LX (1862), p.15.
- 115 Clow, *Basti S.R.*, p.14.
- 116 G.M. Broughton, *Labour in Indian Industries* (London, 1924), p.14.
- 117 The following analysis of spatial mobility by caste is based on figures in vol.II, Appendix X, pp.115-94.
- 118 These portraits are culled from *A Collection of Papers Connected with an Enquiry into the Condition of the Lower Classes*. They are direct quotes from the studies included in the *Collection*.

## CHAPTER 7

## WOMEN IN INDENTURED EMIGRATION

Indentured women, especially those from Fiji, unwittingly played a very large part in the movement to abolish the indenture system. The Indian public had for a long time been aware of the sorry plight of the Indian labourers overseas, but it was the news of the molestation and abuse of Indian women on the plantations that outraged them most. The campaigns in India to 'stop the degradation of Indian womanhood in the colonies ... received wider public support than any other movement in Indian history, more even than the movement for independence.'<sup>1</sup> The Government of India which had been under pressure from Indian nationalists to end the system, finally moved and despite protests from the colonial planters, abolished the indenture system in 1916.

The stories of the treatment of two Fiji Indian women, Kunti and Naraini, attracted special attention.<sup>2</sup> Kunti, a 20-year old woman from Lakhuapur village in Gorakhpur, had emigrated to Fiji with her husband in 1908. Her first four years on the plantation passed without incident until 10 April 1912, when the overseer allocated Kunti an isolated patch in a banana field, away from all the other workers, apparently with the intention of molesting her sexually. Kunti resisted his demands until, nearly overtaken, she jumped into the river in desperation. She was, however, rescued by a boy, Jaidev. Kunti's story was published in the *Bharat Mitra* and attracted wide attention which prompted the Government of India to ask the Fiji

Government to institute an enquiry into the treatment of indentured Indian women. Naraini's story was equally tragic, if less sensational. The overseer of Naivo estate in Nadi asked Naraini to present herself at work three or four days after giving birth to a (dead) child. Naraini refused, arguing correctly that it was the recognised practice for women to absent themselves from hard physical work for up to three months after giving birth. The overseer, taking umbrage at Naraini's refusal, then beat her severely; barely able to walk, Naraini was carried to hospital on a stringed bed. The overseer was arrested, and the case came before the Supreme Court in Fiji. But much to everyone's surprise and consternation, he was found not guilty and acquitted. Naraini later lost her senses and spent the rest of her life as an insane vagrant.

These cases highlighted dramatically the iniquities of the indenture system as it affected women, but few stopped to ask how typical or pervasive were such cases of assault and molestation. Fewer still asked who these women were who had emigrated to Fiji and other places, leaving their families and friends behind in India. It was commonly accepted, and in some quarters still is, that the indentured women were mostly stray, miscellaneous, 'loose' women who had been deceived into emigrating by unscrupulous recruiters, a view supported by the widely shared assumption that Indian women of 'respectable' classes and castes did not emigrate. One official wrote that 'women of better and middling class and their families having full means of subsistence would on no account emigrate. It is nothing but want in some individuals, probably the result of crime, which induces those we do send on, to take a step which is considered among the less indigent and destitute as disgraceful'.<sup>3</sup> The Trinidad

Emigration Agent echoed a similar feeling:

Of single women, with the exception of a few farming members of the families of some of the lowest caste of emigrants, those only will be found to emigrate who have lost their caste, by which all ties of relationships and home are severed, and, having neither religion nor education to restrain them, have fallen into the depths of degradation and vice.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter discusses the social and demographic origins of the indentured women. It demonstrates with statistical evidence that the myths about the caste and social origins of the women are considerably at variance with the reality; that, in fact, the women came from both the higher as well as the lower strata of UP society, and constituted a very diverse and differentiated rather than a homogenous group. If many women were duped into emigrating by unscrupulous recruiters, there were others, we suggest, who may have left of their own volition to escape the drudgery and degradation of Indian life.

The proportion of women to men in the emigrating population varied enormously throughout the entire period of indentured emigration. In the very early years, few women were recruited as labourers. Between August 1834 and May 1837, for example, of the 7,000 indentured emigrants who left for Mauritius from Calcutta, fewer than 200 were women.<sup>5</sup> This low figure is not surprising. The colonial planters wanted able-bodied, efficient labourers and it is likely that they had instructed their agents to recruit men rather than women. The disinclination on the part of the planters to enlist women was complemented by a widespread perception that women would, in any case, be unwilling to emigrate to the colonies. However, as the indenture system was put on a firmer footing, and as an awareness of social and moral problems caused by the paucity of women on the plantations grew, it became evident that some effort was required to fix a minimum number

of female to male emigrants. But the early efforts in this direction were disheartening. In 1842, when the question of fixing the number of female emigrants was raised for the first time, the Government of India, instead of prescribing a minimum number of females, stipulated that a *maximum* of 12 females to 100 males should be required to emigrate on any ship.<sup>6</sup> The Court of Directors of the East India Company refused to sanction this directive. Later, Dr Chevers, Dr Payne and Captain Howe, appointed by the Government of Bengal to report on certain matters pertaining to colonial emigration, recommended that 'not more than 25 women to every 100 men should be embarked',<sup>7</sup> but this proposition was turned down by the Government of India.

The first efforts to secure a more adequate number of female to male emigrants were made by the Colonial Office. In 1856, the Court of Directors forwarded a copy of a despatch addressed by Mr Labouchere to the Government of Mauritius, directing that 'the number of males to be introduced in 1856 should not exceed, under any circumstances, three times the number of females introduced in 1855; that the number of males introduced in 1857 should not exceed three times the number of females introduced in 1856; and that for 1858 the number of males should not exceed twice the number introduced in the previous year'.<sup>8</sup> Similar instructions were passed on to the West Indian colonies. More developments were in the offing. In 1869, the Duke of Newcastle, for reasons which are not clear, informed the Trinidad Emigration Agent at Calcutta, that no ship to his colony should be despatched without the minimum proportion of 50 females to 100 males. In the same year, however, the Government of India, in its Convention with France formalising indentured emigration to the French colonies,

had agreed to fix the proportion of females at one-quarter of male emigrants. Hence to establish a semblance of justice and fair play, it was obliged to equalise the number of females for the British and the French colonies.<sup>9</sup> The Emigration Agents of the West Indian colonies purportedly experienced difficulty in filling the required quota of women and pressed the Government of Bengal for a reduction. The Government of India finally gave the Government of Bengal the authority to permit ships to sail 'without the full prescribed proportion of the women', for it was agreed that to keep the emigrants in the depots until the required number of women had been gathered, would be both inexpedient and expensive.

In 1867 once again, the Emigration Board advised the Government of India to fix the proportion of females to males in the emigrating population at 50:100 but the reasons for this are not clear. Expectedly, the Government of Bengal once again remonstrated with the decision, now arguing that the rule would not work since it involved 'both the recruitment of a low class of women and dangerous detention in the depot'. The Government of India heeded this advice and allowed a minimum of 33 females to 100 males to be despatched on any immigrant ship. The Colonial Office, however, fixed the proportion at 40 females to 100 males and communicated its decision to the Government of India on 30 July 1868. This rule was initially to be in operation for one year, with the provision that it would be reconsidered after receiving reports from Bengal and Madras. The reports from Bengal were negative, but not those from Madras. The Government of India therefore saw no need for further reduction, and the 40 : 100 rule remained in force throughout the later period for all the colonies except Mauritius where, perhaps because there was

an already large settlement of Indians, the number of females accompanying 100 males was reduced to 33. The stipulated number of indentured females would seem odd today but it may be noted that at the time the proportion was much larger than in any unregulated emigration from India.<sup>10</sup>

Some idea of the numbers of males and females emigrating to the various colonies in the pre-1870 period can be gained from the following Table.

TABLE I <sup>11</sup>

Male and Female Indentured Emigrants, 1842-1870

<i>Name of Colony</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>No. of Females to 100 Males</i>
Mauritius	243,853	63,459	26.0
British Guiana	53,323	16,983	31.8
Trinidad	28,030	9,280	22.1
Jamaica	10,022	3,233	32.3
Natal	4,116	1,463	35.5
St. Vincents	1,008	395	39.2
St. Lucia	1,333	401	30.1
St. Croix	244	60	24.6
Grenada	1,810	626	34.6
St. Kitts	4,587	1,595	34.8
Reunion	10,751	2,939	27.3
Guadeloupe	5,813	2,331	40.1
Martinique	3,667	1,336	36.4
French Guiana	10,800	4,118	38.1

The above Table provides a composite picture for the first phase of indentured emigration but it must be emphasised that there were very marked variations in the number of the two sexes in the



emigrating population in different years. In the very early period when, as we have seen, there was no legal minimum for the number of females, few female labourers were despatched. In the case of Mauritius in 1842, there were merely 12 indentured women to 100 men in the emigrating population; in 1870, there were 40. Similarly, in the case of British Guiana, the proportion of females to 100 males rose from 18 in 1845 to 57 in 1869,<sup>12</sup> with variations in the intervening period. The point to be noted is that the rule regarding the minimum number of women was producing some results, despite persistent protestations from recruiters about the difficulty of recruiting women. The Table above also shows that there were differences in the extent to which females emigrated to the different colonies. It would seem from the figures that, in terms of the 40 : 100 rule, proportionately larger numbers of females were emigrating to the small West Indian and French colonies than to the more established, larger Indian labour importing colonies. The reason for the differences probably lies in the fact that Indian labour emigration to the former began in the 1850s and early 1860s when the rule regarding the minimum number of females was being implemented. In the case of the latter, the relatively lower composite figures were affected by the small number of females emigrating before the 1850s when no minimum proportion was prescribed.

In the second phase of indentured emigration which began in the 1870s, coinciding with the promulgation of the 40 : 100 rule, the numbers of women in the emigrating population increased markedly. Evidence suggests that in the overwhelming majority of the cases, the rule about the minimum number of females was vigorously enforced and followed as Table II shows. The critics of the indenture system could

TABLE II <sup>13</sup>

Proportion of Females to 100 Males in Indentured Emigration  
after the 1880s

<i>Colony</i>	1881	1888	1889	1891	1893	1894	1895	1896	1900
British Guiana	40	41	40	46	41	40	43	49	50
Trinidad	40	42	41	49	43	45	57	50	61
Natal	40	-	44	41	43	44	40	41	44
Surinam	40	40	40	41	40	39	41	40	-
Mauritius	-	-	33	33	34	33	33	33	33

argue that the figures in the Table — and these, it should be noted, are for adult females only — indicate that the recruiters were barely able, in most cases, to meet the rule. But it could also be argued that as the planters, for reasons of economy, preferred male over female indentured labourers, *may have advised their governments* to secure only the bare minimum number of females required by law.

To focus specifically on Fiji now, there were altogether 13,696 females and 31,458 males who were transported during the period of indentured emigration.<sup>14</sup> Overall, therefore, there were 43.5 females to every 100 males. Taking adult females only, that is, those over 10 years of age, the figure is 41.<sup>15</sup> Despite assertions of some scholars to the contrary,<sup>16</sup> the figures — derived from our analysis of the Emigration Passes — clearly show that the 40 : 100 rule was always followed.<sup>17</sup> Indeed there was only one year when the proportion of females was not over 40 — 39 in 1883; but, as the law provided, the deficiency was made good in the following year. There were some years — 1879, 1889, 1915 and 1916 — when the number of females to 100

males exceeded 50, the highest ever was in 1879 — 53.5. This perhaps was the result of the enthusiasm and diligence of Charles Mitchell, Fiji's first Emigration Agent in Calcutta, who wanted to create a favourable impression in Fiji.<sup>18</sup> On the whole, in respect of female emigration, Fiji compared very well with most other Indian indentured labour importing colonies — despite occasional protests from the colonial government aimed at further reducing the stipulated minimum number of females.<sup>19</sup>

Most of the females were young and in the age category most desired by the planters. A breakdown of age for males and females is provided in the following Table.

TABLE III <sup>20</sup>

Ages of Males and Females

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Years</i>					
	≤ 2	3-10	11-18	19-26	27-39	40
Males	775	1,332	3,025	22,058	4,208	58
Females	778	886	1,556	9,071	1,364	41
Total	1,553	2,218	4,581	31,129	5,572	99

Of the female population, it is clear that 1,664 were 10 years or younger, and it can safely be assumed that they were unmarried little girls and infants accompanying their parents. Little definite, however, can be said about the marital status of females over 10. However, the general consensus of opinion is that, given the social conventions of rural Indian society, most females over that age were married.

Crooke noted in 1896:

Between 10 and 14 nearly nine-tenths of the female populations pass into the married state; but considerably more than one half of the males remain unmarried. Between 15 and 19 there are 15 married females for each one unmarried, whilst at the end of that period only 60 per cent of the males have been married. By 24 practically the whole of the female population has been married, almost the whole of those unmarried at this stage being women whose associations preclude marriage, or whose physical or mental health forbids it. Of men, considerably more than a fourth are married up to 24, whilst an appreciable but diminishing number remains unmarried through all subsequent age periods.<sup>21</sup>

The interesting feature about the emigration of women to Fiji is that the majority, 63.9 per cent of the adult women, went on their own, as 'single' emigrants. This is surprising, for in India (and presumably other peasant societies) women of marriageable age do not often leave their homes on their own and emigrate long distances. What type of women were these? This question is considered later in this chapter.

Of the total number of adult females who emigrated to Fiji, 4,341 or 36.1 per cent, went as married women or as 'single' mothers accompanied by their child(ren). A detailed breakdown is as follows:<sup>22</sup>

1.	Women accompanied by husbands only	3,175	73.1%
2.	Women accompanied by husbands and child(ren)	642	14.8%
3.	Mothers and child(ren) only	524	12.1%

Besides these women, there were another 130 who stated that they were married but that they were not accompanied by their husbands; presumably the latter remained in the villages, judging from the fact that most such women gave the names of their husbands as their next-of-kin. There were some women who came in the company of their cousins,

uncles, brothers or other relatives, but their number was very small, and does not make any significant difference to the broad picture. It is important to emphasise, as we shall demonstrate in the next chapter, that the overwhelming majority of the women coming as members of families had left as family units from their own villages. That is, very few had formed liaisons or joined family groups in the depots up country, or on the journey to Calcutta or even on the voyage to Fiji.

A comparison between male and female migration in this respect is interesting. Of the adult males, only 3,878 or 13.2 per cent came as married men accompanied by their wives and families or as single parents accompanied by their child(ren). Of the males who came thus, 3,175 (81.9 per cent) were accompanied by their wives only; 642 (16.6 per cent) were members of nuclear families; and 61 (1.6 per cent) as fathers accompanied by their child(ren) only. Thus 86.8 per cent of the adult males came as 'single' emigrants in comparison to 63.9 per cent of the adult females who came thus.<sup>23</sup> But this trend is not surprising: males in Indian society not only married late, but were also more mobile than females, because the predominantly patrilineal society of India places upon men greater responsibility for the well-being of the family and the women folk.

How far is the assertion that the bulk of the indentured female emigrants came from the low castes true? The data from the Emigration Passes shows that it is greatly exaggerated.<sup>24</sup> Of all the females who went to Fiji, 4.1 per cent were Brahmans, 9.0 per cent Kshatriyas, 3.0 per cent Banias, 0.3 per cent Kayasths, 31.4 per cent middling castes, 29.1 per cent low castes, 2.8 per cent tribals,

and 16.8 per cent Muslims. That is, altogether about 48 per cent were of higher or middling castes; the percentage would be slightly higher if high status Muslims are included. With the exception of Brahmans, all the other higher and middling castes tended to contribute more, percentagewise, to male migration than they did to female migration. Thus, the Kshatriyas furnished 10.6 per cent of all the males, Baniyas, 3.8 per cent, and middling castes 36.6 per cent. The trend among the low castes was exactly the opposite: they furnished 25.2 per cent of all the males. It was a similar story among the tribals as well as Muslims. The difference should not be surprising. It is generally agreed that among the higher castes, social conventions and also to some extent superior economic status, restrict the movement of females, whereas among the lower classes, economic hardships often force females to look for employment outside the household. It would seem, too, that Muslim women were not as *pardah-nashin* as has been believed. But the central point to be noted here is that women of all castes and social groups emigrated and not only those from the lower strata of Indian society.

Let us look at some detailed features of female emigration with reference to certain selected castes. Table IV<sup>25</sup> (next page) lists some features that are of interest to us. It shows the proportion of female emigrants among certain selected caste groups. With the exception of Brahmans and Jats, it would seem that in the case of middling and higher castes, the females constituted around or slightly above a quarter of the total caste population emigrating. Among the lower castes — Chamars and Koris, and among Gonds, the proportion is evidently higher. It may be suggested from this that the

TABLE IV

Aspects of Female Emigration to Fiji

<i>Name of Caste/Group</i>	<i>No. of Females Emigrating</i>	<i>% of Caste Total Emigrating</i>	<i>% of Total Females Emigrating</i>	<i>No. Emigrating as Wives and/or Mothers</i>	<i>% of caste Females</i>	<i>No. in UP in 1911</i>	<i>% of Total Female Population</i>
Brahman <sup>a</sup>	510	33.2	3.7	130	25.5	2,207,616	11.3
Thakur/Rajput <sup>b</sup>	1,025	25.2	7.5	283	27.6	1,590,872	8.2
Khatri	276	23.4	2.0	113	40.9	19,895	0.1
Ahir	1,130	26.9	8.3	305	27.0	1,851,015	9.5
Kurmi	607	26.3	4.4	199	32.8	906,653	4.7
Jat	60	8.5	0.4	29	48.3	308,006	1.6
Chamar	2,185	33.9	16.0	787	36.0	2,977,864	15.3
Kori	564	29.0	4.1	218	38.7	420,017	2.2
Gond	252	46.6	1.8	42	16.7	56,994	0.3

<sup>a</sup> We do not include here the various sub-castes of Brahmans.

<sup>b</sup> Other Kshatriya castes are excluded.

women of higher and middling castes were perhaps less mobile than those of the lower castes. To some extent, this conclusion is supported if the contribution of females of different castes to the total female population emigrating is compared with their numerical strength in UP society. Obviously, the figures are not conclusive in any statistical sense, but they do seem to indicate that in the case of all the higher and middling castes except Khattris, the numerical strength of the females in the UP is marginally more than their contribution to indentured emigration. Among the lower castes and Gonds, the opposite is the case. The disparity is particularly marked in the case of Brahmans. The reasons are not clear though in the light of what has been said before, a slightly better economic position and the prevalence of more rigid social conventions regarding the mobility of women, may explain the trend. The implications of the disparities of the patterns of female migration among the different castes for the evolution of Fiji Indian society are interesting. For instance, did the fact of relatively fewer females emigrating among the middling and higher castes mean that inter-caste marriage took place more frequently among them than among the lower castes? Or did the higher castes instead choose to be repatriated to India more often than the lower castes to avoid the ignominy of having to get married to women of lower social status? These are interesting and important questions, but they must await further research on the evolution of Fiji Indian society.

Figures on the proportion of females who accompanied their husbands and/or families do not reveal any marked trends though it would seem that on the whole, the percentage of females emigrating on their own, unaccompanied by any relative, is generally higher among



the higher castes than among lower castes. There are, of course, notable exceptions — Khattris and Jats, where over 40 per cent of the females emigrated as members of families.

It has often been assumed that the majority of women were recruited in large, distant cities away from home — Benares, Allahabad, Calcutta — where they had lost their way or had been deserted by their husbands.<sup>26</sup> Our figures indicate the opposite trend.<sup>27</sup> They show that smaller local cities accounted for a large proportion of the female registrations. Fyzabad, as usual, accounted for the largest percentage of the registrations — 14.1 per cent, while 7.3 per cent of the females were registered in Basti, 5.9 per cent in Gorakhpur and 5.2 per cent in Ghazipur. On the other hand, Allahabad accounted for only 3.5 per cent of the female registrations, Benares 5.4 per cent and Calcutta 3.4 per cent.

Another surprising trend that the figures reveal is the extent to which females were registered outside their districts of origin.<sup>28</sup> In the case of Basti, for instance, only 41 per cent of the females coming from there were registered in the districts; the rest were registered outside in Fyzabad (25.6 per cent), Gorakhpur (16.3 per cent), and other areas. In Gonda, 66.5 per cent of the females were registered outside, with Fyzabad accounting for 40 per cent of them. In Sultanpur and Azamgarh, the overwhelming majority had already left their homes before they were recruited for Fiji. However, in comparison to males, a slightly higher percentage of the females were registered in their own districts of origin.

Let us look further at the caste background of the females and males and the number of them who were registered within and outside their

districts of origin.<sup>29</sup> For purposes of illustration, we present data in the following Table on three castes — Brahmans, Ahirs and Chamars, representing the high, middling and low strata of Hindu society.

TABLE V-A

## Caste, Sex &amp; Numbers Registered Within &amp; Outside the District of Origin

## AHIR

District of Origin	Females Reg. in D/O		Females Reg. out of D/O		Males Reg. in D/O		Males Reg. out of D/O	
		%		%		%		%
Basti	54	37.8	89	62.3	144	38.7	228	61.2
Benares	14	53.8	12	46.2	14	41.2	20	58.2
Fyzabad	60	65.2	32	34.8	155	67.7	74	32.3
Gonda	25	33.8	49	66.3	73	27.8	190	72.2
Ghazipur	30	65.2	16	34.8	25	39.1	39	60.9
Jaunpur	13	25.5	38	74.5	22	16.9	108	88.5

TABLE V-B

BRAHMAN<sup>a</sup>

Basti	5	11.4	39	85.6	32	29.4	77	75.5
Benares	5	50.0	5	50.0	3	30.0	7	70.0
Fyzabad	28	59.6	19	40.4	48	62.3	29	37.7
Gonda	9	22.5	31	77.5	19	19.4	79	80.6
Gorakhpur	9	56.3	57	43.7	11	50.0	11	80.0
Jaunpur	3	16.7	15	83.3	3	12.5	21	87.5
Ghazipur	1	14.3	6	85.7	1	12.5	7	87.5

<sup>a</sup> excluding sub-castes.

TABLE V-C

## CHAMAR

Basti	346	54.9	284	45.1	570	53.8	489	46.2
Benares	44	63.8	25	36.2	26	40.6	38	59.4
Fyzabad	138	75.8	44	24.2	201	71.0	82	29.0
Gonda	11	22.9	37	27.1	36	25.5	105	74.5
Gorakhpur	51	70.8	21	29.2	114	74.5	39	25.5
Jaunpur	54	40.6	79	59.4	62	34.1	120	65.9
Ghazipur	111	67.7	53	32.3	83	59.7	56	40.3

Several features are clear from the above Table. In the case of all the three castes, more females were registered in their districts of origin than males. Thus, taking an aggregate view, 51.3 per cent of the Chamar males and 56.6 per cent of the females were registered in their place of origin; in the case of Ahirs, 38.6 per cent and 46.9 per cent, and among Brahmans 31.9 per cent and 33 per cent. There were clearly quite marked variations among the different districts, though on the whole it would seem that in the more emigration-prone districts (in terms of indentured emigration) — Basti and Gonda — a relatively larger percentage of both females and males of all the three castes were registered elsewhere. The pattern of female emigration among the three castes shows another interesting trend. It is evident that over half of the Chamar females were registered in their own districts, among the Ahirs nearly half; whereas among the Brahmans just a third were registered in their home districts. At first glance, this trend would seem to be at variance with what was demonstrated earlier: that fewer Brahman females migrated in proportion to their numerical strength in UP society. A closer look, however, reveals no such contradiction, for what the above figures show is that of the Brahman females who did emigrate, greater numbers were registered outside rather than within their districts of origin. It is interesting to note, too, that a very large number of women who were registered outside were 'single' emigrants, unaccompanied by any relative.<sup>30</sup> Once again, a greater proportion of 'single' Brahman females were registered in other districts than females of lower castes. To illustrate this with three examples, 66.7 per cent of the Brahman females coming from Basti but registered outside the district were 'single', whereas among Ahirs the percentage was 63, and among Chamars 56.7. The difference in the patterns of emigration of

Brahman females and others is difficult to explain though two propositions can be put forward, both of them purely speculative in nature. Could it be that, given the relatively more rigid observance of social conventions among the Brahmans, the women who had violated certain social norms, or had fallen in low esteem (for a variety of reasons) had more reason to leave their homes to avoid inviting the wrath of the community, than women of lower castes? Or, alternatively, is it possible that Brahman women went out on pilgrimages more often than lower caste women, and lost on their way and tricked by recruiters, were registered for Fiji? But the differences apart, it is clear that Indian women were a very mobile group, certainly much more mobile than has hitherto been acknowledged.

The discussion thus far has shown that, among other things, Fiji's North Indian female indentured migrants came from a diverse background and from different caste groups. The conventional stereotype of their invariable low status has not been borne out by the evidence adduced above. But a vexing question remains to be answered: what was the social and 'moral' character of the indentured women? Were they 'loose', fallen, miscellaneous women, living on the fringes of society? And why and how were they able to leave their homes in the first place? These questions cannot and possibly never will be answered with any degree of certitude, not only because they are probably in any event unanswerable, but more especially because there is no reliable data on the subject. The best therefore that can be done is to note what has been said, and using mainly folk literature, suggest in a general way some of the factors which may have led the women to migrate.

It has long been believed, as we have seen, that a large majority of women, or for that matter men, who emigrated to Fiji and to other colonies, did so because of the deception practised by the recruiters. Women, it has been assumed, were more susceptible to the guiles of the recruiters because they were less knowledgeable about the ways of the world than men, and for this reason were more helpless once they had been entrapped by the recruiter. As the following folksongs sung by women from Fiji and British Guiana suggest, there may be some truth in this view:

Oh recruiter, your heart is deceitful,  
 Your speech is full of lies!  
 Tender may be your voice, articulate and seemingly logical,  
 But it is all used to defame and destroy  
 The good names of people.<sup>31</sup>

---

I hoe all day and cannot sleep at night,  
 Today my whole body aches,  
 Damnation to you, *arkatis*.<sup>32</sup>

---

Oh! Registration officers,  
 May death befall you:  
 You have deprived me of my marriage bed.<sup>33</sup>

---

Because the recruiters persistently complained about the difficulty of filling the quota of 40 women to 100 men, and because they were paid a higher commission for women than for men, they no doubt resorted more often to trickery for recruiting women. But this view should not be taken too far for, as we have seen before, recruiters were not always the free agents they were thought to be. And moreover they did not always have things their way. G.A. Grierson, writing in

1883 about the emigration of married women, noted:

I have made pretty minute enquiries into this point, and I believe that, so far as Bihar is concerned, there is hardly any truth in the stories of recruiters enticing away married women. The people who ought to know most about it, the villagers of the class from whom recruits come in districts where emigration is popular, deny it, and the stories of the kind are common where it is unpopular, and where hence the people are ignorant about the matter. There are, it is true, inducements held out to recruiters to collect by hook or crook as many women as they can; but as for enticing away married women, the game is not worth the candle. One instance of it being tried would set the whole district in uproar. If the recruiter was caught in time, he would be beaten to death, and if he escaped, he would certainly be prosecuted criminally. Another result would be that recruiting of any kind in the districts would be permanently stopped.<sup>34</sup>

An enquiry by Mohan Lal, the Deputy Magistrate of Ghazipur district in 1880, throws further light on the question of deception.<sup>35</sup> As a result of persistent complaints from recruiters of the uncooperative attitude of the registration officials, especially in rejecting emigrants on the slightest suspicion of irregularity, Mohan Lal explained by using actual case studies why the prospective emigrants were not registered. Most of these were women. It is interesting to note that in only a few cases was deception of the recruiter the reason for rejection. For the majority, registration was either declined or suspended pending further enquiry because women themselves had 'falsified' their residence. The reasons for the falsification can only be speculated upon, but on the whole they would seem to lend credence to the view which emphasises the 'push' factor; that is, the women who falsified the particulars of their residence and family background wanted to desert their homes without the knowledge of their kinsmen. But it must be noted that most women did indicate (as they were required to do) the name and identity of the nearest-of-kin, which in the majority of the cases happened to be either the father or, less

frequently, the eldest brother. Whether they had sought their permission to emigrate cannot be determined, but it is clear that the women who gave the names of next-of-kin could not have been of untraceable, 'miscellaneous' origins.

C.F. Andrews estimated that up to 20 per cent of the indentured women were of 'bad character' or prostitutes but no more, for 'these had no incentive to emigrate'.<sup>36</sup> The basis of Andrews' impressionistic moral judgment cannot be critically examined either from written or oral sources, though it is possible that he based his assertions on his interviews with the indentured labourers during his visits to Fiji.

Were many of the indentured women widows? The data from the Emigration Passes suggest that they were not. Indeed, perhaps the most intriguing feature that the analysis of the Passes shows is that there was one, but only one, woman who indicated on her Emigration Pass that she was a widow. Clearly this figure cannot be taken seriously as oral evidence suggests that there were widows in the emigrating population. But it is surprising that more women, if they were indeed widows, did not indicate on the Passes their true status. This would have expedited their registration as the officials would not then have had to enquire about their past family connections, thus saving them considerable harassment. Perhaps, after all, there were fewer widows emigrating than has generally been assumed. Support for this view is provided to some extent from data on widows in India. In the UP in 1911, there were 1,759 Hindu widows per 10,000 females. Of these, eight were below the age of 10 years; 15 between 10 to 15 years; 425 between 15 and 40

and the overwhelming majority, 1,311, in the age category of over 40. Among the Muslims a similar pattern obtained: of the 1,453 widows per 10,000 females, 1,145 were over 40 years old.<sup>37</sup> Since there were very few indentured emigrants, either males or females, over 40 who went to Fiji, it is clear that the majority of widows must have remained in India. It has to be remembered that old widows are not necessarily a social or economic liability on the extended family. Indeed, they tend to become the centre of the household, and their advice is sought by the younger members of the family on many matters, ranging from the performance of rituals to economic transactions.

It is the younger widows whose plight is often distressing, and it is from among them that Fiji's widowed female migrants may have come. Their position in Hindu society is an anomalous one. Before marriage, a woman lives under the care and protection of her parents; after marriage, her fate is inextricably bound up with that of her husband and his extended family. She never really has an independent existence of her own. The *Ramcharitramanas* of Tulsidas, which is the basic religious text of Sanatani (orthodox) Hindus, gives a clear picture of the ideal of Hindu womanhood. When Lord Rama refuses to take Sita, his wife, along with him into 14 years' exile, Sita says

My Lord, the mother, father and son,  
 Receive their lots by merit won;  
 The brother and the sister find  
 The portions to their deeds assigned.  
 The wife alone what'er await,  
 Must share on earth her husband's fate;  
 So now the King's command which sends  
 Thee to the wild, to me exceeds.  
 The wife can find no refuge, none,  
 In father, mother, self or son:  
 Both here, and when they vanish hence,  
 Her husband is her sole defence. 38



Hindu society provides no ascribed roles for women who were forced by circumstances to eke out a living on their own. If the widow continued to live with her husband's family, writes Altekar, she 'worked as a drudge; if she lived separately, she was given a pittance for her maintenance.'<sup>39</sup> In ancient times, the widow had to cut her hair short and was required to give up all her jewellery and ornaments to live in perpetual mourning. Her very presence was considered unlucky (this is true even today); consequently she was not invited to join any festive occasion. Even worse, her share in the family property was taken over by her male relatives for whom she was little more than an 'easy sexual prey.'<sup>40</sup> The following song vividly captures a widow's feeling of being ostracised by all:

If I carry a plantain leaf and  
 go to my son's house  
 They refuse to feed me because  
 it is a happy event.  
 If I take a measure of rice  
 and go to the Palani Mountain to worship,  
 The priest tells me that prayer  
 will do me no good.  
 If I take two measures of rice  
 to Churli Mountain to worship God  
 The priest tells me prayer  
 will do me no good. 41

The plight of widows depended to a large extent on their caste. The higher castes, being more puritanical and orthodox, observed strict rules regarding widows. In pre-British India, high caste widows mounted the funeral pyre with their husband's body, for society decreed that they did not have an existence independent of their husbands. How extensive was the practice of *sutticide* — a widow dying on the funeral pyre with her husband — is in doubt, but in any event it was made illegal by Lord Bentick in 1829. The higher castes also disapproved of and even prohibited the practice of widow remarriage.<sup>42</sup>

The lower castes showed less rigid attitudes towards widows. *Sutticide* was never prevalent among the lower castes but perhaps even more importantly, widow remarriage was permitted under certain conditions. It was the normal practice among certain lower castes to allow the widow to marry the younger brother of her deceased husband. Alternatively, she could marry a widower, a practice sanctioned among Ahirs, Bahelias, Bansphors, Chamars, Dharkars, Korwas, and Mallahs.<sup>43</sup> In the latter case, the new relationship could, theoretically, work out amicably; but in the former, it frequently tended to produce tension and conflict, resulting from the husband's divided attention. The following proverbs and sayings from Bengal<sup>44</sup> — and they would equally aptly describe the situation in other parts of India — show that a 'co-wife's' life could be quite a trying one:

---

When I was alone, I was loved by all as a goddess,  
 (Now that) the co-wife has come, I have become  
 as neglected as a dog of the dustbin.

---

My day rolls on somehow unnoticed,  
 But my nights are unbearable because of the co-wife.

---

A co-wife may be compared to a cobra;  
 So if she offers sugar to another co-wife,  
 That should be left aside.

---

I am ready to sacrifice my husband to *Yama*<sup>a</sup>  
 But I cannot permit him (to have) a co-wife.

<sup>a</sup> God of death.

Besides widows and co-wives, there are other women who also occupy an undefined, problematic position in Indian society. Among them are those who are considered to be 'barren'. Maternity is important in all societies, and especially so in peasant societies where children provide the additional labour force to work the farm. In traditional Hindu society, the birth of a male child was of special significance, for only a son could perform the necessary rites after the father's death. Childlessness, the birth of only girls, or the death of all the children, were grounds on which a husband could repudiate his wife. Freida Hauswirth, quoting Manu, has written: 'Since childlessness was considered to be the fruit of evil Karma accumulated in the previous existence, a barren wife might be repudiated in her eighth year, it being always taken for granted that the fault lay with her. A mother who had borne girls alone might be replaced in her eleventh year; a mother whose children had all died, in her tenth'.<sup>45</sup>

The extent to which childless women were, in fact, repudiated cannot be determined, but the fact that a childless woman's plight was a sorry one cannot be doubted. An indication of this is provided in the following folksong. It shows a childless woman, roaming the forests longing for death because —

My mother-in-law calls me a barren women.  
 My sister-in-law calls me a wanton woman.  
 O Lord! With whom I am married:  
 Even he drives me away from home.

On her way, she meets a tigress and a serpent but they refuse to fulfill the woman's wish for death for the fear that they, too, might become barren. Eventually she reaches her mother's house:

Oh mother! give me shelter so that I may relate  
 some of my troubles.

But the mother refuses:

O daughter! by keeping you my daughter-in-law  
will also become barren.

Finally, like Sita,

Discarded from all places, the woman prays to (goddess)  
Earth:  
O kind mother! split up so I may take shelter. 46

What proportion of the indentured female population such women of anomalous and uncertain status constituted is difficult to say, though probably not much. It is more likely that many of them were a fair cross-section of the female population, escaping from domestic troubles and other hardships. The life of a young bride could, in certain circumstances, be a very dreary one, especially if she was unfortunate in having unsympathetic in-laws. One cause of ill-treatment of brides could be inadequate dowry. In recent years, this problem has been highlighted by the Indian press and many gruesome incidents of bride burning and murder have come to light. But the institution of dowry is very old and it is certain that in the past, too, the life of a bride whose parents did not pay enough dowry could be made miserable. The following Tamil folksong depicts this well:

Father-in-law

Your father paid three hundred as dowry.  
He boasted that he was a rich landlord,  
and promised that he would present a gold ring.  
My son has wept for the last three days  
asking for the ring.

Daughter-in-law

Don't taunt me with what was paid for dowry.  
You need not invite my parents for the bridal feast.  
I am the daughter of poor parents,  
Accept me as I am a poor girl, father-in-law.

## The husband

Your inside is crooked,  
 Your back is bent,  
 You unlucky hunchback  
 Is it for all this I shall love you-my peahen? 47

If it was not ill-treatment on account of inadequate dowry, it could be simple drudgery and frustration from which the young wife might seek respite. In the folksong below, the feelings of one such disillusioned woman is described:

I have toiled day and night  
 from the moment I entered your house.  
 The skin of my body has dried  
 and happiness has become but a dream.  
 Your elder brother is so keen on fashions  
 and his wife is the *malkin* (boss) of the house.  
 Your body aches from ploughing the fields  
 and yet we remain so poor.  
 I shall go away to my father's house  
 and look after my brother's children.  
 I shall build myself a little hut  
 but will not see your door again. 48

Domestic quarrelling could well be another reason for a woman's sad plight from which she might contemplate escape:

Alas, I will have to run away with another man,  
 For my beloved has turned his mind away from me.  
 How eagerly, as I cook rice and dal, do I pour the ghee.  
 But as soon as we sit for dinner, you start quarrelling  
 And my heart is weary of you.  
 I put hot fire in the basket,  
 Carefully I make the bed.  
 But as soon as we lie down to rest, you start quarrelling  
 and my heart is weary of you. 49

It is also possible that many of the emigrant women were those whose husbands had emigrated and had failed to return. Many of the males who went to the colonies did not come back, but even those employed in Calcutta and Assam seem to have broken with their wives. The agony of separation and loneliness is described in the two songs below:

O my lord! My childhood friends have all become mothers,  
 and I remain childless.  
 Again and again I pleaded with you not to go East.  
 For there live women who will win your heart.  
 For twelve years you haven't written a word:  
 How shall I spend the days of *chait*? 50

---

Happy is that woman's lot  
 Whose husband is at home.  
 Wretched is my fate  
 Whose husband has gone away.  
 Absence with its flame  
 Tortures me each day ...51

In the husband's absence, the wife's problems of loneliness and isolation could be aggravated, with no relatives taking much interest with her welfare and happiness. An illustration of this is provided in the following song:

The sun is cruel and bright,  
 A lot of work still to be done.  
 People have returned to their homes  
 No call for meals has come for me.  
 Here, here in these lonely fields,  
 I, the unfortunate, alone work.  
 My lord being in a distant land,  
 Who will tell me 'Thy lord has come'  
 'The day of thy happiness has dawned.'

52

Or, worse still, she could be subjected to cruel taunts of the in-laws, especially if the husband did not send any money from abroad:

My beloved has gone *pardesh* leaving behind only  
 misery for me.  
 My mother-in-law and sister-in-law taunt me: 'Whose  
 earnings will you live on now?'  
 (She replies) Dasrath is my father-in-law, Laksman my  
 brother-in-law.  
 I shall live on their earnings  
 On their words (to protect me) my father agreed to wed me.  
 They (mother-in-law and sister-in-law) ran towards me and  
 gave me a broom.  
 I (now) put on the dress of a maidservant and sweep the leaves.  
 My beloved, returning after twelve years, stood in the garden:  
 Whose daughter are you, and whose daughter-in-law?  
 Which cruel man's wife are you - that you sweep the compound?  
 (She replies) I toil for my beloved one is gone *pardesh*,

My mother-in-law and sister-in-law taunt me.  
 (The husband says) O unfortunate woman: return to your  
 father's house and (so) protect your family's prestige. 53

Unable or unwilling any longer to accept fatalistically their dreary life, these women, along with widows, young wives and others suffering from domestic trouble, may have broken away from their homes forever, or were tossed out by their families, and began a lonely search for sustenance. Many, as we have seen, had even left their districts and were registered for emigration elsewhere. The recruiter's consoling voice and promise of easy life and lucrative employment in the colonies sealed their fate: they emigrated. Perhaps also, there were others, especially of the lower castes, who had never married, working as *kamins* for their *jajmans*. Supported and sustained during times of prosperity and when their services were needed most, they were forced to leave during times of scarcity or drought, or because they had invited the wrath of someone. With few alternatives left in the world, they, too, eventually came into the recruiter's net and emigrated.

The women who emigrated to Fiji came, as we have seen, from a wide spectrum of UP society. There were among them women of the higher, middling and low castes and of other groups, thus effectively counteracting stereotypes about their primarily low origins. Many accompanied their husbands on the long journey and some brought with them their children. But the majority came as 'single' women, not accompanied by any relative. In the Indian context it is presumed that females do not emigrate on their own. Hence it has been assumed that those who did leave as individuals

must have either been victims of the recruiter's deception or women who were of 'miscellaneous' origins or of ill-repute. The practice of deception cannot, of course, be denied but the extent of its influence should be seen in proper perspective, especially since a large number of women had already been uprooted before they were recruited. The question of the 'moral' character of women cannot, and never will, be answered with any certainty. Here we have pointed out some of the many reasons which may have induced women to leave their homes for the distant colonies. The fact that the women were prepared to part with a life of drudgery and unhappiness for the largely unknown would seem to suggest that many of them may have been individuals of remarkable independence, enterprise and self-respect. These were certainly the values they nurtured and lived by in the colonies.



NOTES

- 1 K.L. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants* (Melbourne, 1962, rptd.1973), p.182.
- 2 Brief sketches of these two women are provided in Totaram Sanadhya, *Fiji Dwip me mere ikkis varsh* (My Twenty One Years in the Fiji Islands). (Varanasi, 4th edn,1973), pp.13-14.
- 3 H.P. (Emigration) A Pros 1-5, April 1870, NAI.
- 4 Ibid. Extracts from a letter from the Trinidad Agency, 22 April 1865. See also D.W.D. Comins, *Note on Emigration from the East Indies to British Guiana* (Calcutta, 1893), p.37.
- 5 J. Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration from India* (Calcutta, 1874), p.2.
- 6 Ibid., p.12.
- 7 Ibid., p.29.
- 8 Ibid., p.35.
- 9 This and other facts on the subject are derived from Geoghegan, pp.51-2, hence further references would be redundant. Further discussions based mainly on Geoghegan are found in S.B. Mookherji, *The Indenture System in Mauritius, 1837-1915* (Calcutta, 1962), and Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in British Guiana* (London, 1950).
- 10 Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, p.56 fn. 32. During 1927-30, the percentage of females to males coming as 'free' Indian migrants to Fiji was 6.13. In the United States in 1930, there were 1059.3 Indian males to 100 Indian females.
- 11 Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration*, pp.72-80.

- 12 Derived from Geoghegan's yearly breakdowns. Yearly breakdowns are also provided in H.P. (Emigration) Proceedings, but the figures are not available for all the years. There are, it may be noted, some discrepancies between the two sets of figures but these are not significant.
- 13 This Table is constructed on the basis of figures provided in the *PRs* for the years listed. For yearly breakdowns for British Guiana see Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in British Guiana*, p.208. There, between 1869 and 1916, there were only two years when the proportion of females to 100 males fell below 40: in 1911 when it was 39 and in 1914 when it was 34.
- 14 Derived from my analysis of the Emigration Passes. For 285 emigrants, sex data was unavailable.
- 15 See Table III. The definition of 'adulthood' varied over the years. Before 1900, it would seem from entries in official reports that anyone over 10 was considered to be an adult. Towards the end of indentured emigration the definition seems to have changed. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, p.52 notes that an unaccompanied emigrant had to be at least 16 years of age; the implication here is that those below that age were minors who were to be accompanied by a relative or a guardian.
- 16 See Chandra Jayawardena, 'Social Contours of an Indian Labour Force During The Indenture Period in Fiji', in Vijay Mishra (ed.), *Rama's Banishment. A Centenary Tribute to the Fiji Indians, 1879-1979*, (Auckland, 1979), p.46. Professor Jayawardena writes: 'This requirement was not often complied with because the recruiters in India found it impracticable and governments did not insist'. Professor Jayawardena is wrong also when he says that the authorities imposed a quota of 40 per cent of women on every shipload: it was 40 women to 100 men, that is, women formed 28.57 per cent of the total emigrating population on any ship.
- 17 See vol.II, Appendix XI, pp.195-7.

- 18 *Fiji Royal Gazette*, 23 March 1878; *PR*, 1879.
- 19 Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, p.56.
- 20 Derived from my analysis of the Emigration Passes.
- 21 William Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh* (Calcutta, 1896), vol.I, pp. czcv-vi, quoted in Jayawardena, *op.cit.*, p.48.
- 22 For fuller discussion see Chapter 8. Figures derived from vol.II, Appendix XVII, pp.479-81.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 See vol.II, Appendix XII, pp.198-216. The castes included in the various categories are the same as those in Chapter 6, pp. 207-8.
- 25 The source of figures on female population of the selected castes in the UP in 1911 is: *Census of India*, vol.XV, Part II (1911), Imperial Table XIII. For caste by sex figures, see vol.II, Appendix XII, pp.198-216. For the number of females emigrating as wives and/or mothers, see vol.II, Appendix XXIII, pp.543-54.
- 26 Oral evidence; C.F. Andrews and W.W. Pearson, *Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji. An Independent Enquiry*, (Perth, 1918); Comins, *Note on Emigration form the East Indies to British Guiana*, p.37.
- 27 See vol.II, Appendix XIII, pp.217-42. Female and male figures are listed separately. District of Registration figures can be obtained by reading the Table column-wise.
- 28 *Ibid.* For number of people registered from a particular district, read the Table row-wise.
- 29 See vol.II, Appendix XIV, pp.243-389.

- 30 See vol.II, Appendices XIV, pp.243-389; XV. pp.390-440; XVI, pp.441-78. To illustrate with an example how the figures were derived, let us take the case of Chamar females coming from Basti district.

The total number of Chamar females coming from Basti. = 630  
(See Appendix XIV, pp.282-4).

Number of Chamar females from Basti registered outside the district of origin. The figure is derived by subtracting 346 - number registered in Basti - from 630. = 284  
(See Appendix XIV, pp.282-4).

Total number of Chamar women coming as wives and/or 'single' mothers from Basti is 290 minus 8 'Others'. = 282  
(See Appendix XV, p.396).

Number of wives and/or 'single' mothers registered outside Basti is 282 minus 159 (165 minus 6 'Others'). = 123  
(See Appendix XVI, p.449).

Number of single Chamar females registered outside is 284 minus 123 = 161

Therefore, of all Chamar females coming from Basti registered outside their district of origin, 161 or 56.7 per cent were 'single' females.

- 31 Ved Prakash Vatuk, 'Protest Songs of East Indians in British Guiana', *Journal of American Folklore*, vol.LXXVII (1964), p.224.
- 32 Mr Vijay Mishra of Murdoch University, Western Australia, provided this song.
- 33 *Fiji Sun*, Gimit Centenary Issue, 15 May 1979.
- 34 E.P. A Pros. 12-15, August 1883, NAI.
- 35 Miscellaneous (Emigration) File 22/16, n.d., Regional Record Office, Varanasi.
- 36 Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, p.57.

- 37 *Census of India*, vol.XV, Part I (1911), p.239.
- 38 Pandhari Nath Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, (Bombay, 3rd ed. 1958), p.263. See also K.M. Kapadia, *Marriage and Family in India*, (Bombay, 1955), p.134.
- 39 A.S. Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, (Benares, 1956), p.164.
- 40 Freida Hauswirth, *Purdah: The Status of Indian Women*, (London, 1932), p.77. For similar views, see Mildreth Worth Pinkham, *Women in the Sacred Scriptures of Hinduism*, (New York, 1967); Jatindra Bimal Chaudhri, *Position of Women in the Vedic Rituals*, (Calcutta, 2nd ed. 1956); R.M. Das, *Women in Manu and His Seven Commentators*, (Varanasi, 1962).
- 41 N. Vanamamalai, 'Women in Tamil Folklore' in Sankar Sen Gupta (ed.), *Women in Indian Folklore*, (Calcutta, 1969), p.15.
- 42 For general discussion see Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, and other works cited in fn.40.
- 43 *Census of India*, vol.XV, Part I, (1911), p.213.
- 44 Pradyot Kumar Maity, 'Co-Wives in Bengali Folklore' in Gupta (ed.), *Women in Indian Folklore*, pp.295-305.
- 45 Hauswirth, *Purdah*, p.32.
- 46 Uday Narain Tiwari, *The Origin and Development of Bhojpuri* (Calcutta, 1960), p.213.
- 47 Vanamamalai, 'Women in Tamil Folklore', p.7.
- 48 Collected during my field trip in Basti district, Uttar Pradesh, April 1979.

- 49 Verrier Elwin and S. Hivale, *Songs of the Forest. The Folk Poetry of the Gonds*, (London, 1935), p.67.
- 50 Collected during field-work in Basti district, Uttar Pradesh, April 1979.
- 51 Verrier Elwin, *Folksongs of Chattisgarh*, (London, 1946), p.435.
- 52 D.N. Majumdar (ed.), *Snowballs of Garhwal*, (Lucknow, 1946), p.29.
- 53 Collected during my field-work in Bahraich district, Uttar Pradesh, February 1979.

## CHAPTER 8

## FAMILIES IN INDENTURED EMIGRATION

Indentured emigration was both by necessity as well as choice largely an individualised phenomenon. This is not surprising. The Emigration Agents and their recruiters persistently and vigorously complained about the difficulty of finding family groups to emigrate. Given the prevailing belief that emigration was unnatural to the Hindu tradition, and that deception in recruitment was rife, it was deemed to be an inexpedient and ultimately fruitless enterprise to recruit families. On the other hand, colonial planter expressed unequivocal preference for young, enterprising and unencumbered individuals for labourers, although later, with large numbers of the ex-indentured immigrants seeking repatriation, some colonies — such as British Guiana — did encourage family migration.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, despite this, many indentured families did emigrate to Fiji and to other Indian labour importing colonies. If it is assumed that many of the indentured emigrants had sought the palliative of emigration merely as a temporary device, hoping one day to return to their villages to enjoy in old age the fruits of their arduous labours abroad, it may be suggested that those who had left their homes with their families had perhaps desired a permanent break with their past, a past in which they saw little hope of sustenance in the future.

Little is known about these families. The otherwise valuable Protector of Emigrants' *Annual Reports* make no reference at all to this aspect of indentured emigration, and whatever little that is known

is largely derived from heresay or scattered, impressionistic evidence. Hence, it is not surprising to find that many myths abound, usually of an unflattering nature, about these families. Perhaps the most common of these portrays them as 'depot families', hastily formed in the large cities at the behest of the recruiter to avoid costly, time-consuming investigation into the background of unattached females by over-zealous, even unsympathetic, registration officials. A corollary of the belief about depot families is that they were frequently of mixed castes and mixed districts of origin. This picture does not hold up to a rigorous analysis of the data in the Emigration Passes. Indeed, a detailed discussion of the structure and pattern of family emigration starkly underlines the difference between the myths and realities of indentured emigration, between what is generally accepted to have happened and what, in fact, did happen. There were few mixed caste indentured families. Most of the families had emigrated as family units from the villages. And while many were mobile and registered outside their districts of origin, relatively few were registered in the large cities or centres of pilgrimages. In short, we suggest that there were few depot families.

Obviously, the question of family and kinship organisation and mobility is a very complex one — as recent (mostly) sociological researches have endeavoured to show.<sup>2</sup> More research needs to be done before a comprehensive explanation can be offered as to why and how families emigrate. But our task at hand, determined largely by the constraints of data, is more limited: it is to delineate the structure and process of indentured family emigration to Fiji, as they emerge from an analysis of the Emigration Passes. It has to be emphasised that the discussion of family emigration below applies only to those who



went out as indentured labourers. There were, of course, others, such as emigrants who had returned to India to take their families with them to the colonies. Some, such as Ganga Ram Singh, reindentured with their families, thus saving the cost of the fare; they are included in the figures below.<sup>3</sup> But others returning with their families embarked on the ships as passengers and were listed separately in the Passes. They are not included in the analysis. There were a few men, such as Birja Mahaseb,<sup>4</sup> who reindentured themselves but took their wives and children as passengers, a practice which could create hardships and even prolonged separation on the plantations. They have been included in the 'Other' category.

Altogether 7,185 adults indicated on their Emigration Passes that they were married and accompanied by their spouses. Of these, 3,526 were males (11.2 per cent of the total male population) and 3,659 females (26.7 per cent of all female population).<sup>5</sup> This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that there were some men — such as Hulas, a 24 year old Kori from Sultanpur district,<sup>6</sup> — or Boadhie Majhee, a Mushar from Monghyr district in Bihar<sup>7</sup> — who were accompanied by more than one wife. This practice of polygamy was prevalent mostly in the lower castes and tribal groups. There were few women who were married to more than one man. There were men and women, there were others whose marital status was unknown but who were accompanied by their child(ren) or other relatives. In all, 4,627 indentured families emigrated to Fiji from North India. The following Table provides a breakdown of the different types of families emigrating.

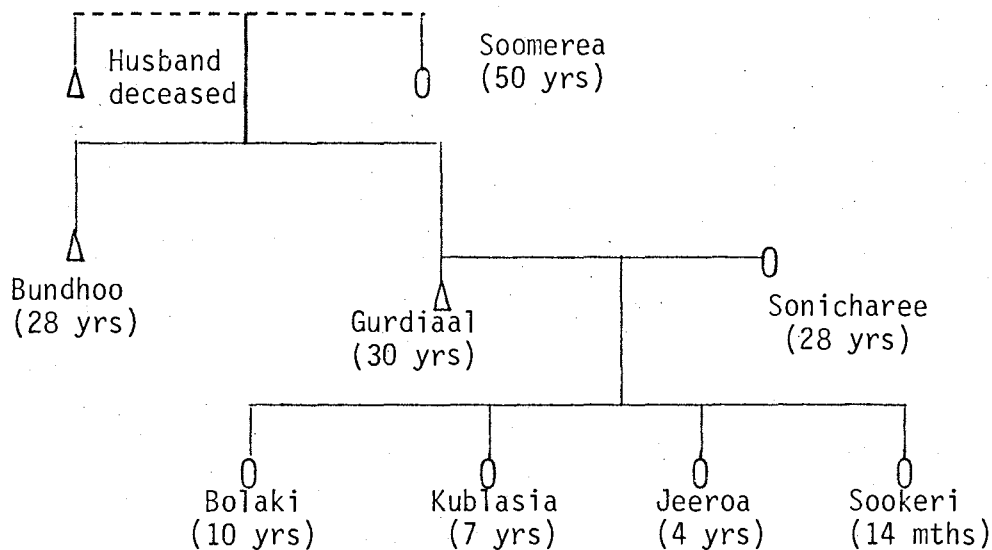
TABLE I<sup>8</sup>Types of Families in Indentured Emigration

<i>Family Type</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Husband and wife only (HW)	3,175	68.6
Mother, father, child(ren) (MFC)	642	13.9
Mother, child(ren) (MC)	524	11.3
Father, child(ren) (FC)	61	1.3
Other	225	4.9
Total	4,627	100.0

It must be noted that these categories were not devised by the registration officials but by me. My basic aim was to present the data on families in as clear and simple a form as possible and hence I did not resort to the more theoretically specific constructs developed by social anthropologists. Nevertheless, the above categories do correspond to some of the well-known theoretical models of the family. Thus, HW families could be seen as 'conjugal' families, MFCs as nuclear families and FCs and MCs as single-parent ones. It is evident that on the whole most of the emigrant families were not of the joint family type which seems to be the most prevalent form in rural India. But there were some joint families emigrating of which the following type, represented in the diagram below, was the most common:

## DIAGRAM I

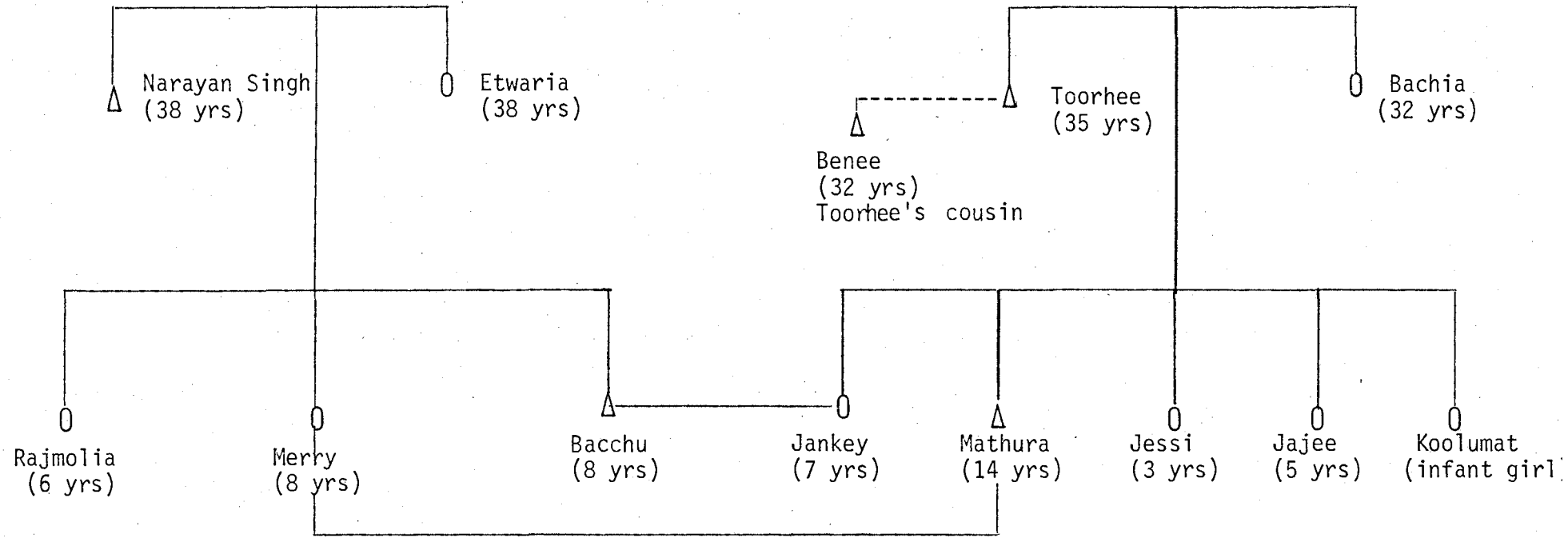
Soomerea's Family aboard the *Syria*, 1889<sup>9</sup>



There could be many variations on the above structure. For instance, instead of the widowed mother, a maternal or paternal uncle might accompany the family, or there could be an unattached cousin in the family. But the above pattern remained prominent. It is interesting to note that joint family emigration was particularly prevalent among the tribal groups and low caste Hindus such as Mushars, and it took place mainly in the first decade of indentured emigration. There was a surprisingly large number of joint families on the ill-fated immigrant ship, the *Syria*, which was wrecked in Fiji waters in 1884,<sup>10</sup> and most of them were from the Bihar districts of Gaya, Monghyr and Shahabad. These joint families have been included in the 'Other' category. There were also small numbers of emigrants accompanied by their siblings, extended relations and in-laws, and they too have been placed among the 'Other' groups. An excellent, though very rare, example of such families is provided in the diagram on the next page.

DIAGRAM II

An Example of Joint (Depot) Family aboard the *Bruce*, 1886

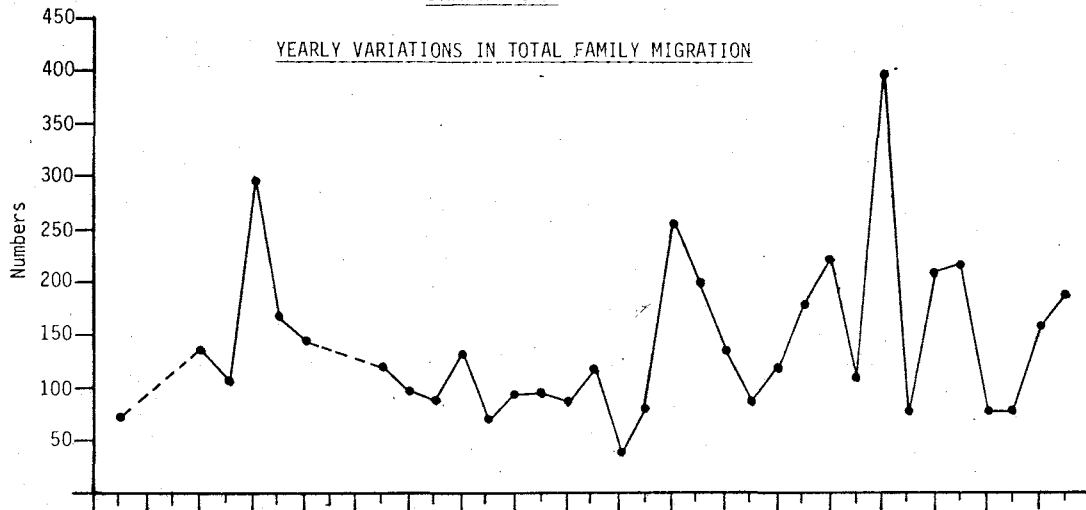


This family registered for emigration at Calcutta on 11 March 1886 and left for Fiji on board the *Bruce* the same year. Besides being a good example of joint family emigration, it is also a classic example of a depot family of mixed caste and mixed district of origin. Narayan Singh, a Thakur,<sup>11</sup> was married to Etwaria, an Ahir. The caste of their three children was given as Ahir. But all of them gave Sultanpur (Pargana Jessowlee, Thana Musafirkhana, Village Goinou) as their place of origin. We do not know their district of registration. On the other hand, Toorhee and his family were Koiris from Gaya (Pargana Sahebganj, Thana Hoolasganj, Village Koirme Behar). It is likely that both these families met for the first time in the depot in Calcutta. Perhaps realising that as emigrants to Fiji they shared a common destiny, they decided to forge closer bonds by arranging a marriage between two of their children. Thus we have a nuclear family of an Ahir from Sultanpur and a Koiri from Gaya. It may be mentioned in passing that Bacchu and Jankey were the youngest married couple ever to emigrate to Fiji during the 37 years of indentured emigration.

Most of the emigrant families were small. As Table I has shown over two-thirds were HW families. Besides these, there were another 404 families with two members each;<sup>12</sup> 694 with three members each, and 225 with four members each. These together accounted for 97.2 per cent of the total families emigrating. Of the remaining, 81 had five members, 26 six members, 14 seven members, 5 eight members and the remaining three families with, 10, 11 and 13 members each. In total, then, 10,873 or 23.9 per cent of all the emigrants came in families.

There were marked variations in the volume of family emigration over the years,<sup>13</sup> and these are illustrated in Graph IA. The reasons for the fluctuations are not always clear though economic conditions in the districts of recruitment, the activities of the recruiters and government policy (see below) could to some extent explain them. The largest number of families — 2,697 or 58.3 per cent of all families — emigrated after the turn of the century, which was also the period of most emigration to Fiji. 1908, a year of famine and scarcity in many parts of the UP, contributed the largest number of families. The decade after 1890 was a time when fewest families emigrated — 898 or 19.4 per cent of the total. The same period, it will be noted, provided 24.1 per cent of the total emigrants. In the previous decade (1879-1889) the seven years of actual emigration show an interesting trend. Altogether they contributed 22.3 per cent of all the families, a figure that is higher than that of the total percentage of all emigrants for the same period — 17.1 per cent. Each of the seven years without exception contributed proportionately more to family emigration than they did to total emigration in the three years. 1884 was one of the largest years of family emigration, supplying 298 families or 6.4 per cent of the total number. This is not surprising: it was a year of severe economic hardship in many parts of Bihar (see Chapter 4), when a large number of families (and emigrants) came from there. Figures on the type of families emigrating in different years also reveal interesting patterns. Detailed yearly trends are provided in Graph IB. A summary is provided in Table II:

GRAPH I-A



GRAPH I-B

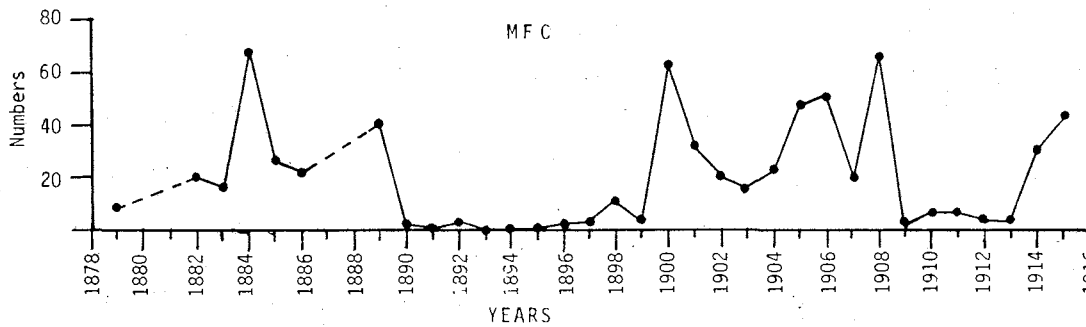
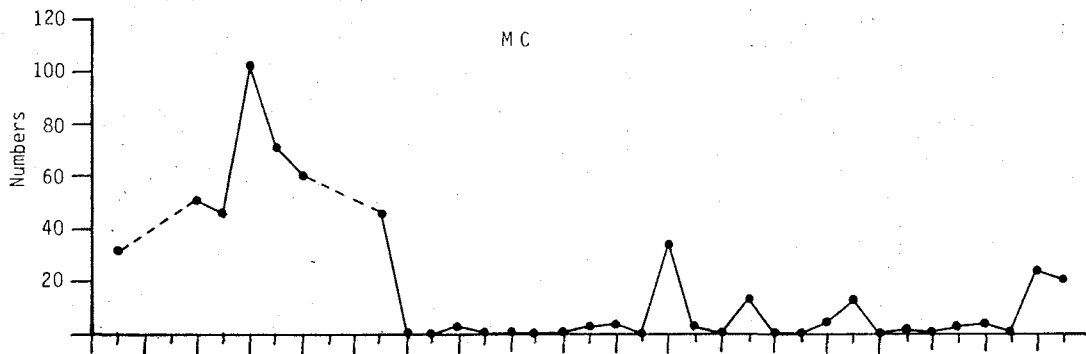
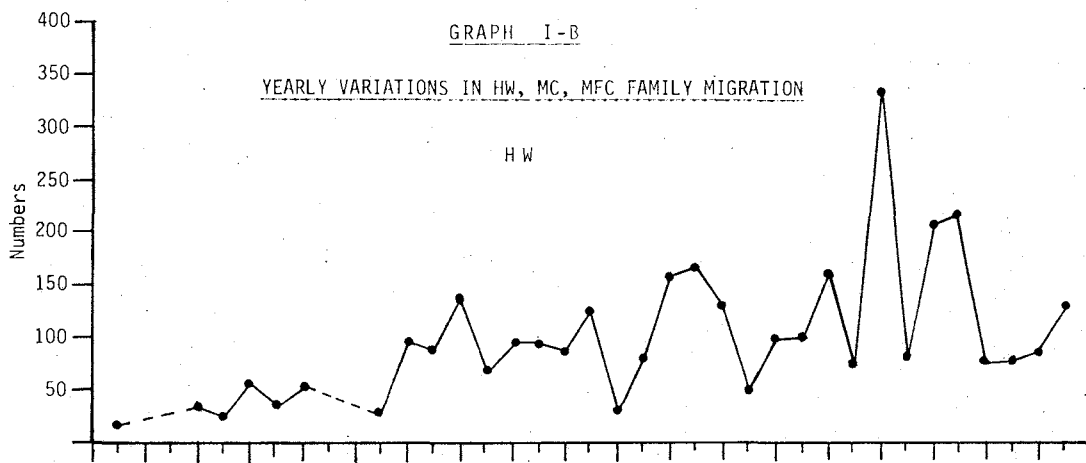


TABLE II<sup>14</sup>Emigration of Family Type by Year

<i>Family Type</i>	1879 — 1889		1890 — 1899		1900 — 1915	
HW	240	7.6	859	27.1	2,076	65.4
MFC	203	31.6	21	3.3	418	65.1
FC	44	80.2	0	-	12	19.7
MC	407	77.7	7	1.3	110	20.4
Other	133	59.1	11	4.9	81	36.0

It is clear that for HW and MFC families, the greatest period of emigration was after the turn of the century, whereas for FC, MC and 'Other' families, it was the seven years during 1879-89. The reason for the differences in the patterns of emigration among different family types as well as for the relative paucity of family emigration in the 1890s lay, to some extent, with the attitude of the Fiji government. The planters in Fiji expressed concern at the emigration of a large number of 'uneconomic' families, pointing particularly to the MC families.<sup>15</sup> In 1879, for example, MC families constituted 44 per cent of the total family emigration for that year, in 1882 39 per cent, in 1884 and 1885 44 per cent and in 1886 42 per cent. They therefore complained to the government about the unnecessary expenditure involved in sustaining such economically unproductive families, and requested an immediate curtailment of large-scale family emigration. The government heeded this call and accordingly instructed its Emigration Agent in Calcutta in 1889 to recruit more single emigrants. Its efforts were very successful, as the figures clearly show. For example, in 1908, which was the peak year of



indentured emigration to Fiji, and when a famine severely affected many parts of the UP, one would have expected a large number of MC family emigration; in fact, there were no MC families emigrating that year. The attitude of the Fiji government was surprising, for on the one hand, it clearly desired permanent settlement of the migrants in Fiji and on the other, it favoured the curtailment of a process which might have facilitated its aims. Other colonies differed.<sup>16</sup> Mauritius had always encouraged family emigration, while in the 1890s, British Guiana, too, was providing additional inducements to attract more families, though the encouragement of permanent settlement was done partly to reduce the expenditure on the repatriation of time-expired emigrants.

Most of the families had emigrated as family *units* from their districts, indeed villages, of origin.<sup>17</sup> Only 298 families (6.4 per cent) had mixed districts of origin.<sup>18</sup> Of these, 180 (60.4 per cent) were HW families, 94 (31.5 per cent) MFCs, 2 (0.7 per cent) FCs, 14 (4.7 per cent) MCs, and 8 (2.7 per cent) 'Others'. This trend is understandable, for it was more likely (and easier) for single men and women from different districts to form temporary liaisons in the depots, which would later become perfectly legitimate and legally recognised. Over two-thirds of the mixed district of origin families came after the turn of the century.<sup>19</sup>

The largest number of families, not surprisingly, came from districts which were also the centres of recruitment for Fiji. Thus, 918 families (19.8 per cent of the total) came from Basti, 403 families (8.7 per cent) from Gonda, 242 (5.2 per cent) from Fyzabad, 209 (4.5 per cent) from Azamgarh, 159 (3.4 per cent) from Gorakhpur

and 147 (3.2 per cent) from Sultanpur. In Bihar, Shahabad and Gaya provided the largest number of families.<sup>20</sup> Some districts contributed more to family emigration than they did, proportionately, to total emigration. This was particularly the case with large emigration districts such as Basti. One reason for this pattern could be the fact that emigration in such districts was a well-known and established process as a result of which emigrants were not averse to leaving with their families. It may also have been the case that emigrants from these districts, having decided to stay in the colonies permanently, were writing to their wives and children to emigrate. At least one official noted that some colonial emigrants were remitting money to their families in India 'to pay up their liabilities for which they would otherwise have been detained by creditors'<sup>21</sup> and emigrate to join them.

However, there were important differences in the structure of family emigration among the different districts.<sup>22</sup> These were particularly marked between the districts of Bihar and those of the UP. The UP districts showed a marked prominence of HW family emigration over other types. In Basti, for example, of the 918 families emigrating, 81.6 per cent were HW, 12.5 per cent MFCs, and 2.7 per cent MCs. In Gonda, there was a similar pattern: of the 403 families originating there, 82.4 per cent were HWs. In Bihar, while HW families were important, the most striking feature was the emigration of MC families. Thus in Shahabad district, MCs contributed 19.4 per cent of the district's total of 144 families; in Saran and Patna, they provided over 34 per cent of the families and in Gaya and Monghyr, over 25 per cent. Why the difference? One reason may be the

timing of indentured emigration from the different districts. The Bihar districts were, as we have seen before, important centres of recruitment for Fiji in the early years of indentured emigration, when no restrictions were placed on any type of family emigration. Hence a large number of MCs emigrated. It is possible that were no restrictions were placed on the recruitment of these families, more would have emigrated from the UP districts. Another reason is, of necessity, a purely speculative one, given that there is *no* record of family emigration in the files and published reports. The prominence of MC families from Bihar may be related to the long history of both colonial and inland emigration from that province. Perhaps after years of patient waiting for their husbands' return, the emigrants' wives and their children, who had long been supported on a meagre joint family budget with the hopeful expectation that the men would return one day with wealth acquired abroad, were discarded as unnecessary burdens and shunted to the periphery, and in extreme cases, evicted from the household to fend for themselves (see Folksongs in Chapter 7). The prospects held out by the recruiters may have attracted such desperate, even despised, families in search of a reunion. Perhaps in some cases, as we suggested above, the emigrants in the colonies, having decided to settle there, arranged for the emigration of their wives and children. But the true story is lost to history.

By now it is or should be a familiar story that a large percentage of Fiji's indentured emigrants were registered outside their districts of origin. The figures on the mobility pattern of the families reinforce the picture and, in doing so, serve to question the view which sees Indian families as essentially highly immobile, tradition-bound social units. In the case of Azamgarh, 96.7 per cent

of the families coming from that district were registered outside, from Sultanpur 89.1 per cent, Gonda 75.7 per cent, and Jaunpur 69.5 per cent. In the larger centres, the figures were lower: in Fyzabad 37.6 per cent and in Gorakhpur 46.5 per cent.<sup>23</sup> Once again, it was the local cities and registration centres which accounted for the largest registrations as the following Table shows:

TABLE III<sup>24</sup>

Districts of Registration by Family Types

Name	% of Total Family Registration	HW %	MFC %	FC %	MC %	Other %
Fyzabad	15.1	577 (82.4)	86 (12.3)	4 (0.6)	19 (2.7)	14 (2.0)
Basti	9.5	348 (79.3)	67 (15.3)	1 (0.2)	9 (2.1)	14 (3.2)
Gorakhpur	6.4	249 (83.6)	31 (10.4)	2 (0.7)	11 (3.7)	5 (1.7)
Kanpur	4.5	174 (83.3)	19 (9.1)	0 -	10 (4.8)	6 (2.9)
Ghazipur	3.7	142 (83.0)	14 (8.2)	1 (0.6)	8 (4.7)	6 (3.5)
Benares	3.7	142 (82.1)	14 (8.1)	0 -	14 (8.1)	3 (1.7)
Alipur	3.4	134 (84.8)	17 (10.8)	0 -	4 (2.5)	3 (1.9)
Gonda	3.2	127 (85.2)	19 (12.8)	0 -	2 (1.3)	1 (0.7)

The emigrants registered at the various centres came from neighbouring districts.<sup>25</sup> Thus at Fyzabad, Basti and Gonda provided 32.6 per cent and 22.7 per cent of the registrations respectively. At Gorakhpur, 53 per cent of the registrations were provided by Basti, while at Benares, Jaunpur and Azamgarh featured prominently. Looking at it another way, it can be seen<sup>26</sup> that 228 or 24.8 per cent of all Basti families were registered at Fyzabad and another 158 or 17.2 per cent at Gorakhpur. Calcutta and Alipur registered only 55 or 6 per

cent of Basti families. In the case of Gonda, 159 or 39.5 per cent of all its families were registered at Fyzabad, with 19 or 4.7 per cent of them being registered at Calcutta and Alipur. A few other features about spatial mobility, noted earlier in the study, are supported by figures on family emigration. There is very little movement between poor and rural districts. Thus, in Gonda, only 18 or 2 per cent of Basti families were registered, while in Basti, the number of Gonda families registered numbered a mere 34 or 8.4 per cent of Gonda total. The movement clearly is from poor rural districts to larger, perhaps economically better placed, districts; the opposite, it may be noted, is not the case. And, finally, there is quite striking absence of emigration between the eastern and western parts of the UP.

Were there any significant differences in the patterns of registration for the different family types? Taking an overall view of the main districts, it seems that the FC families tended to get registered mainly in their districts of origin; altogether only a third were registered outside. In the case of HW and MFC families 62 per cent were registered outside, but in the case of MCs, a surprising three-quarters had left their homes before they were registered for emigration. This perhaps indicates that the pressure to emigrate was more severe on them than on the others.

What of the families with mixed districts of origin and registration? As we have seen already, there were 298 families who had originated in different districts.<sup>27</sup> Of these, 229 had common districts of registration; that is having emigrated as individuals from their homes in different districts, the emigrants formed liaisons in the depots before embarking the ships at Calcutta. A large number

of such unions were formed in the district depots, although Alipur accounted for 8.1 per cent of them. The reasons for this are not surprising. Alone and vulnerable, the prospective male and female emigrants may have decided to get married — no doubt encouraged by the recruiter — and provide each other company and support. Oral evidence suggests that on the voyage to Fiji, too, such marriages sometimes took place though, of course, it was on the plantations that they occurred in significant numbers. The remaining 69 families of mixed districts of origin also had mixed districts of registration. Of these, 41 were HW families and 27 MFCs with one 'Other'. These, in all likelihood, were genuine cases of depot families. Then there were 152 families which had mixed districts of registration but of these, 83 also had a common district of origin. What exactly happened here is unclear, though two scenarios are possible. An obvious one is that two people from the same district had left at different times, were registered at different places, and formed family unions either on the journey to, or in the depots in Calcutta. The other possibility is that the husband had already emigrated for employment outside his district and was registered at the local depot. Deciding to take his family with him, he returned to his village, and registered his wife and children in their district of origin from where they then emigrated. Given the fact that considerable spatial mobility was under way in eastern UP, this interpretation is not as strange or forced as it may seem at first glance.

The families came from all strata of UP society and from the different castes. The following Table provides a breakdown of family emigration among the different groups:

TABLE IV<sup>28</sup>Caste/Social Background of the Indentured Families

<i>Name</i>	<i>Total No. of Families %</i>	<i>HW %</i>	<i>MFC %</i>	<i>FC %</i>	<i>MC %</i>	<i>Other %</i>
Ahir	317 (6.9)	248 (78.2)	29 (9.1)	3 (0.9)	28 ( 8.8)	9 (2.8)
Brahman	145 (3.1)	84 (57.9)	13 (9.0)	1 (0.7)	33 (22.8)	14 (9.7)
Chamar	823(17.8)	595 (72.3)	121(14.7)	5 (0.6)	71 ( 8.6)	31 (3.8)
Khatri	123 (2.7)	98 (79.7)	9 (7.3)	1 (0.8)	6 ( 4.9)	9 (7.3)
Kori	223 (4.8)	174 (78.0)	34(15.2)	1 (0.4)	10 ( 4.5)	4 (1.8)
Kurmi	211 (4.6)	162 (76.8)	28(13.3)	3 (1.4)	9 ( 4.3)	9 (4.3)
Muslim	577(12.5)	406 (70.4)	68(11.8)	4 (0.7)	73 (12.7)	26 (4.5)
Rajputs/ Thakurs	298( 6.4)	212 (71.1)	29 (9.4)	3 (1.0)	42 (14.1)	12 (4.0)
Pasi	100 (2.2)	70 (70.0)	12(12.0)	0 -	13 (13.0)	5 (5.0)

Clearly, a large number of families came from those groups which also furnished the largest number of emigrants. In most cases, the contribution of the various groups to total emigration was comparable to their contribution to family emigration. Thus, Brahmans furnished 3.4 per cent of all emigrants and 3.1 per cent of all the families; the Khatri, 2.6 per cent and 2.7 per cent, and Muslims 12.0 per cent and 12.5 per cent. But there were some exceptions. In the case of Chamars, while they contributed 13.4 per cent of all the emigrants, they provided 17.8 per cent of all the families. This is not surprising. Given their social status and economic position, it is likely that the Chamars, more so than most groups, were used to the idea of emigrating with their families for the purposes of employment in other areas. The Thakurs and Rajputs showed the opposite trend. Together they provided 8.95 per cent of the total emigrants but 6.4 per cent of the

families. The reasons for this would seem to lie, to some extent, in their superior economic position which would have obviated the need for families to emigrate.

It is also evident from the Table that, with obvious variations apart, HW families constituted the largest component of family emigration for all the castes as well as for Muslims. The Brahmans once again present a perplexing spectacle for in their case, while HW families still constitute the predominant group, what is most striking is the extent of the contribution of the MCs — 22.8 per cent of their total family emigration. The reasons for this are unclear. If it is assumed that those Brahman mothers who accompanied their children were widows, it is likely that their position at home must have been a particularly difficult one, remembering that Brahmans, more than the other castes, opposed widow remarriage, and observed religious practices which on the whole did not ascribe any particular role to them. Circumscribed in their activities and bereft of any status, perhaps these widows took to the road and were recruited by the agents for Fiji. It is likely also that it was the Brahmans who went on pilgrimages more often and, lost and confused on the way, met a recruiter who held promises of reunion, but who instead took them to the local depot for registration.

In the case of most castes, families had emigrated as family *units* from their districts of origin, and relatively few of them were of mixed districts of origin.<sup>29</sup> Altogether, there were as we mentioned earlier, 298 families of mixed districts of origin; of these the largest numbers came from those castes which also provided the largest number of families. Thus 34 of them were Chamar families, 20 Muslims, 16 Kurmis,



13 Koris, 11 Ahirs and 10 Kahars. In the case of all the castes, HW families accounted for the largest proportion of the mixed district of origin families. Mixed caste families were surprisingly few: 251 altogether or 5.4 per cent of all the families.<sup>30</sup> Of these, 147 (58.6 per cent) were HW families, 73 (29.1 per cent) MFCs, 3 (1.2 per cent) FCs, 18 (7.2 per cent) MCs, and 10 (4.0 per cent) 'Others'. Most of them originated from those districts which furnished most of the families. It is surprising that 150<sup>31</sup> of them came from the same districts while the rest were from other areas. It is even more surprising that only 65 of the mixed caste - mixed districts of origin families had mixed districts of registration.<sup>32</sup> It is quite clear from the above figures that there were many mixed caste families with common districts of origin and common districts of registration. It is possible that these were families who had left their homes on account of social ostracism for in rural Indian society especially, mixed caste marriages even today are a rare phenomenon strongly disapproved of. Perhaps in the case of HW families, men and women of different castes, keen to get married but knowing that their marriage would not easily be accepted by their kinsmen, decided to break away from their homes, encouraged no doubt by the recruiter who then registered them. It is also, of course, probable that many such families were formed in the depot upcountry.

This chapter has described the structure and pattern of indentured family emigration. It is clear that the claim that the great majority of the families originated in the depots is greatly exaggerated. As we have seen, the overwhelming majority of the families

had emigrated as composite social units from their villages: there were relatively few mixed castes, and mixed district of origin families. Such unions were formed later, to a small extent on the voyages but predominantly on the plantations when the indentured labourers decided to stay back in Fiji rather than return to India. It is also clear that the families in the UP were not the immobile social units they were, or are, thought to be. The fact that so many of them were registered outside their districts of origin, suggests that considerable spatial mobility was already under way. Indirectly, it also calls into question the conventional notions about the influence of the recruiters in inducing people to emigrate. Finally, while the extent and nature of family emigration under indenture raises some pertinent questions about the entire process of indentured emigration, it also holds significant implications for the evolution of Indian society in Fiji. Most of the families, we know from oral evidence, survived as social units the ordeals of the long journey and the drudgery of plantations. Along with visiting religious leaders from India and some other free emigrants, they must have acted as important agents in the preservation and transmission of whatever cultural values that did survive in the new environment. They must have acted as important bulwarks against the total and precipitous disintegration of Indian society on the plantations. But these are questions beyond the scope of this study.

NOTES

- 1 See E.P. A Pros 12-15, August 1883, and E.P. A Pros 43-57, September 1882, NAI.
- 2 See, among other studies, Giri Raj Gupta (ed.), *Family and Social Change in Modern India* (New Delhi, 1976); George Kurien (ed.), *Family in India: A Regional View* (The Hague, 1974); M.S. Gore, *The Traditional Indian Family in Comparative Family System* (Boston, 1965); *ibid.*, *Urbanization and Family Change* (Bombay, 1968); K.M. Kapadia, *Marriage and Family in India* (Bombay, 1966).
- 3 He and his family went to Fiji on the *Fazilka I* on 28 March 1901. Source: Fiji Immigration Passes.
- 4 Emigrated to Fiji on the *Rhone I*, 15 May 1890.
- 5 Derived from my analysis of the Emigration Passes.
- 6 Emigrated to Fiji on the *Rhine*, 30 August 1900. Hulas was from Sultanpur (Thana Jaisingpur, Muhallah Sahutpur).
- 7 Emigrated to Fiji on the *Syria*, 14 May 1884. Bôdhie Manjhee was from Monghyr (Pargana Kharakpur, Village Kathour).
- 8 See vol.II, Appendix XVII, pp.479-81.
- 9 Derived from Fiji Emigration Passes.
- 10 A detailed description of this episode is provided in my 'The Wreck of the *Syria*, 1884', in Subramani (ed.) *The Indo-Fijian Experience* (St. Lucia, 1979), pp.26-40.
- 11 Caste data derived from the Emigration Passes.

- 12 See vol.II, Appendix XVII, pp.479-81. The figure of 404 is derived by subtracting 3,175 (HW families) from 3,579 (all families with two members only).
- 13 See vol.II, Appendix XVIII, pp.482-5.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 K.L. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants. A History to the end of Indenture in 1920* (Melbourne, rptd.1973), p.57.
- 16 See E.P. A Pros 12-15, August 1883, and E.P. A Pros 43-57, September 1882, NAI.
- 17 In the analysis of Fiji Emigration Passes, I did not include villages of the emigrants. However, I can categorically state that in all the cases, the same district of origin also meant the same village. Hence, most of the families had emigrated as family units from their villages.
- 18 See vol.II, Appendix XIX, pp.486-99.
- 19 See vol.II, Appendix XX, pp.500-02.
- 20 The main districts are shown in vol.II, Appendix XIX, pp.486-99.
- 21 E.P. A Pros 43-57, September 1882, NAI.
- 22 See vol.II, Appendix XIX, pp.486-99.
- 23 See vol.II, Appendix XXI, pp.503-35.
- 24 See vol.II, Appendix XXII, pp.536-42.
- 25 See vol.II, Appendices XXI, pp.503-35 and XXII, pp.536-42. The percentage for Basti, for example, is derived by dividing 228 — the number of Basti families registered at Fyzabad (see Appendix XXI, p.507) — by 700 — total number of families registered at Fyzabad (see Appendix XXII, p.537), and multiplying by 100.

- 26 See vol.II, Appendix XXI, pp.503-35.
- 27 Ibid., pp.532-35.
- 28 See vol.II, Appendix XXIII, pp.543-54.
- 29 See vol.II, Appendix XXIV, pp.555-616.
- 30 Ibid., pp.612-16.
- 31 See vol.II, Appendix XXIV, pp.555-616. This figure is obtained by subtracting the number of mixed caste families with mixed district of origin (101) from the total number of mixed caste families (251).
- 32 See vol.II, Appendices XXV, pp.617-20 and XXVI, pp.621-4.

## CHAPTER 9

## CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to provide a detailed analysis of the structural background of Fiji's North Indian indentured migrants. The picture which has emerged suggests that the process of indentured emigration was much more complex and varied than has generally been realised. The conventional supposition that migration is an 'unnatural' phenomenon, an aberration, in rural North Indian society is not borne out by the evidence produced in this study. And the emigrants do not always appear as helpless victims of external forces, as pawns in the hands of unscrupulous recruiters. It would seem that they were not merely passive 'reactors', but 'actors' in their own right, responding variously to circumstances affecting them in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The important role that deception played in inducing emigration cannot be denied, especially as recruitment was carried out on a commercial basis and involved poor and illiterate peasants. The real question, however, is one of perspective. Seen in the context of the nineteenth century and of what was happening in other types of labour migration from other countries, it has to be admitted that, tragic as the cases of deception in Indian emigration were, there was nothing really remarkable about them. The history of Chinese labour emigration is full of even more painful cases of fraud and misrepresentation, as it was not governed for long periods of time by the same sort of comprehensive protective legislation which covered its Indian counterpart.<sup>1</sup>

And the great trans-Atlantic migration in the nineteenth century is replete with examples of moving tragedies which equalled, if not surpassed, those of Indian emigration. Lest the drift of my emphasis here be misunderstood, it should be stressed that the reference to other types of labour migration is not intended to justify, explain or rationalise the unhappy events and occurrences in Indian indentured emigration. It is merely to suggest that an awareness of other similar experiences elsewhere should put into perspective the role of deception in Indian indenture.

It has to be remembered, too, that things changed throughout the long period of indentured emigration. Although it has not been considered here in any systematic way as it falls outside the scope of this study and also because the relevant data is not available, it is possible that in the early years, indenture did approximate slavery in terms of the recruitment of labour. But from the very start, the Government of India enacted legislative measures to protect the emigrants' rights. This it did despite its declared preference for non-involvement in emigration matters and contrary to the prevailing ideology of *laissez faire*.

Critics would argue that these were not enough. They would point to the recurrent and frequently sensational cases of abuses — kidnapping, forcible restraint — as evidence of the evils of the system. Their sympathy for the plight of the downtrodden and oppressed is admirable, and they have exercised deep and pervasive influence on public imagination and on scholarly thinking. However, the serious student must sift fact from fiction, disentangle truth from mythology; he must balance impressionistic evidence against objective data. And when this is done, it becomes apparent that the contemporary critics, who

provide the ammunition for their modern counterparts, suffered from the exaggeration of enthusiasm. From the cases of abuse that came to their notice, they extrapolated an argument that the whole system was a failure and riddled with corruption. The attitude of one contemporary critic, Saiyid Shams-Ul-Huda, is typical: 'It is not necessary to ascertain to what extent these abuses prevail. A few cases like those I have noticed are sufficient to damn the whole system'.<sup>2</sup> The evidence presented in this study has shown that the system of indentured emigration in India was not a total failure. It worked and it did so much better than its critics were (or are) prepared to acknowledge.

The emphasis on deception detracts attention from those 'push' factors which in the late nineteenth century were increasingly creating the conditions for emigration. It has been seen that the indentured emigrants came from all strata of Indian society, including a very significant number of higher and middling castes, a finding which conclusively disproves conventional assertions about their invariably low origins. However, all castes and groups, irrespective of their place in the social hierarchy, were deriving their livelihood largely from the land, whether as proprietors, petty cultivators, tenants, landless labourers, or simply as *sewaks* of their masters. Their position in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was on the decline, in large measure due to new forces of change unleashed as a consequence of British penetration of Indian society. New notions of land tenure based on Western ideas of property and ownership, replacement of rent in kind by cash rents, excessive revenue demands by the British, transfer and sale of property for the payment of land revenue and other reasons, subdivision and fragmentation of landholdings, deepening indebtedness,



all took their toll and wrought significant transformation in agrarian relations. All suffered, though not equally. It was the small cultivating classes, tenants and labourers, usually without adequate surplus to see them through hard times, who bore the brunt of the vicissitudes of fortune. It was from among them that the majority of the emigrants came.

Many peasants in distress continued to cling on to their ancestral homes in the hope that things would improve one day. But many others, seeing no respite from the vicious cycle of degradation and privation, sought the alternative of emigration, quite possibly initially as a temporary measure. The opening up of rail and road communication speeded mobility and thousands moved to Calcutta, the Assam Tea Gardens and many other places which offered prospects of livelihood. The extent to which mobility was under way is illustrated from the data from the Emigration Passes. It shows that a very significant proportion of Fiji's North Indian indentured migrants had already broken away from their homes before they were registered for emigration to Fiji. But large numbers of them were not registered in large cities or centres of pilgrimages such as Allahabad, Benares, Lucknow, Mathura or Calcutta. The most important registration centres were local cities such as Fyzabad, Gorakhpur and others. Perhaps these were the initial stopping places on longer journeys to other places in search of employment.

In one respect at least, Indian indentured emigration differed from other forms of contract labour emigration from India itself as well as from other countries. This was the insistence on the part of the Government of India after the 1870s that a minimum of 40 females should accompany 100 males on any ship, with the provision that the deficiency

in the fulfillment of the quota in one shipment could be made good in a subsequent one. How it arrived at this figure is not entirely clear, though the intention seems to have been to reduce 'immorality' on the plantations and to enable the migrants to develop a more stable family life. The recruiters persistently complained of the difficulty of meeting the quota; however, the fact remains that the Government of India did not relent and that in the case of Fiji (and many other colonies), the requisite numbers were always shipped. A large number of the women emigrated as unattached, unaccompanied individuals. Much has been assumed about their moral and social character, and much of it is of an unflattering character. The truth or otherwise of the assumptions is difficult to determine. However, data from the Emigration Passes clearly shows that the indentured women came from all strata of UP society and not from the lower castes only. Folk data suggests that the position of widows, childless women, young brides and co-wives, and wives of emigrants who did not return at all, could be an extremely trying one, and it is possible that many of the female emigrants may have come from among them. To them prospects of independence and easy wealth held out by the recruiters must have been particularly attractive.

Besides 'single' emigrants, there were others who emigrated in families. One of the most pervasive myths is that a majority of these indentured families were formed in the depots as unions of convenience, encouraged by the recruiters anxious to avoid time-consuming, costly investigations into the background of unattached women. But the data from the Emigration Passes provides a contrary picture. It shows that, in fact, there were few 'depot' families of mixed castes and mixed districts of origin and that many of the families had emigrated as family units from their villages of origin. It may be suggested that many of those who

left in families must have desired a more permanent break from their past than those who had moved out as individuals. In view of the foregoing, the contention that emigration was a rare phenomenon in rural North Indian society does not seem tenable.

In this study we have concentrated on the origins and background of Fiji's North Indian indentured migrants. But it should be emphasised that in large measure, our findings also apply to those other Indian labour importing colonies in the West Indies especially, which drew their supplies from North India. All the British colonies operated under the same or very similar regulations and many of them shared the same facilities in Calcutta. Sometimes the same Emigration Agent officiated for several colonies simultaneously and even the sub-depots and recruiters were shared. Indeed, occasionally, when one colony's requisitions were filled, extra emigrants were transferred to another's. The indentured emigrants coming from similar social and regional backgrounds have evolved very divergent social structures in the different colonies. The differences present a fascinating problem to the prospective comparative historian of overseas Indians. He will, no doubt, find many reasons for them, including the timing of emigration from India, the particular structural conditions present in the different countries and their policies and attitudes to assimilation and accommodation, and not least, the frequency and intensity of contact with the motherland.

The data derived from the analysis of the Emigration Passes which has been chiefly used here also has some relevance for the historian of labour migration within India itself. Historical study of this phenomenon in the subcontinent is still, by and large, an undeveloped

field despite some notable attempts in recent years.<sup>3</sup> One problem frankly acknowledged in most studies that are available, is the absence of comprehensive data on the social (caste) characteristics of the migrants. The Birth-Place statistics in the Indian censuses since 1881 deal more with questions of the magnitude and direction of migration than with the social origins of the migrants; while scattered, impressionistic, snap-shot pictures in some official reports are both inadequate and unreliable.

We would suggest that the data on the social origins of Fiji's North Indian indentured migrants can be used to fill these lacunae. This can be done because the type of people who were recruited for Fiji were essentially the same as those who went to other areas in India in search of employment. Indeed, sometimes it was a matter of chance, accident, fate or what you will, that the UP peasant ended up in Fiji rather than in Calcutta or the Assam Tea Gardens. Although it was illegal, the recruits occasionally changed hands between colonial and inland recruiters, depending on the fulfillment of the different quotas as well as the amount of money involved in the transaction. Knowledge of the social origins of the migrants may also throw some light on the problems of labour mobilisation and the development of working class consciousness in certain industrial centres of India such as Calcutta.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, a very important part of the answer will lie in the structure of the different industries and the attitude and power of the management. An important factor, too, may be the extremely heterogeneous nature of the migrant population which could aggravate the difficulties of mobilising the labour force and of creating a common consciousness.

Somewhat fortuitously, a study of North Indian indentured emigration throws some light on the much maligned character of the *poorbea* peasant of the UP. In popular imagination as well as in some scholarly literature, he is frequently portrayed as an immobile, lethargic individual averse to taking advantage of opportunities offered elsewhere. Gilbert Etienne has written: 'In the west [UP], when they talk of a *Purbi* (literally someone from the east, an inhabitant of the middle or lower Ganges) they automatically add the adjective *dhila* meaning rather unenterprising. One cannot but agree with the epithet. We are a long way from the robust northern castes.'<sup>5</sup> Indeed, sometimes the reasons for the economic backwardness of the eastern region are laid squarely on the shoulders of the hapless *poorbea*. What has indirectly been suggested in this study paints a contrary picture — that of the *poorbea* firmly grasping the opportunity to move out of his ancestral home to try and improve his lot. Evidence of enterprise on his part will be greatly enhanced by any considerations of his and his descendants' achievements in the colonies. Clearly the reasons for the continuing poverty of the eastern region of the UP should be sought not in the character of its people but rather in the deep structural impediments which afflict that region.

'Every historian is a borrower', Professor Manning Clark reminds us. And he goes on to say that 'his work is a long quotation from the works of others.'<sup>6</sup> The great extent to which I have drawn on the work of others will have been evident from the preceding pages. Indeed, as we noted at the outset of this study, this exercise would not have been

possible without the path-breaking researches of other scholars despite the fact that the interpretations offered here differ, sometimes substantially, from theirs. But the historian is a borrower in yet another sense. Unlike the sociologist or the anthropologist, he relies heavily on documentary sources: private papers, reports, memoranda, newspapers, etc. Here, the extent of my borrowing has been somewhat more limited than is often the case. This is because the kinds of questions with which this study has concerned itself could not have been answered with conventional primary sources. Hence, we turned to the Emigration Passes which were processed using the computer.

Quantitative data has formed the core of this study. But we have used it only to gain an understanding of the structural aspects of the emigration process in India. To understand the reasons why the emigrants left their homeland, we resorted to government reports and other such sources. And when these were unavailable or proved inadequate, we used folksongs and oral data. In doing so, we have questioned the validity of the dichotomy and polarisation between 'quantitative' history and 'humanist' history. As this study has attempted to show, computerised data and folksongs do not necessarily compete with but rather complement each other.

'History has always had many mansions', Lawrence Stone has written.<sup>7</sup> To survive and prosper in an age of rapid technological developments and growing emphasis on interdisciplinary studies throughout the world, it will need the support and co-operation of (and between) the card-carrying, machine-minded quantitative historian and his humanist colleague working with yellowed, crumbling documents in the dusty rooms of ancient archives.

NOTES

- 1 A succinct account is provided in Persia Crawford Campbell, *Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries Within the British Empire* (London, rptd.1971)
- 2 E.P. A Pros 9-21, (month unstated) 1913, NAI.
- 3 See Ranajit Das Gupta, 'Factory Labour in Eastern India: Sources of Supply, 1855-1946. Some Preliminary Findings', *IESHR*, vol.XIII, no.3 (1976), pp.277-329; Baniprasanna Misra, 'Factory Labour During the Early Years of Industrialisation: An Appraisal in the Light of the Indian Factory Commission, 1890', *IESHR*, vol.XII, no.3 (1975), pp.203-27; P.S. Gupta, 'Notes on the origin and structuring of the industrial labour force in India — 1880 to 1920' in R.S. Sharma (ed.) *Indian Society: Historical Probing*s. (New Delhi, 1974), pp.414-34.
- 4 My colleague, Mr Dipesh Chakrabarty, is presently investigating these problems in the context of Calcutta jute mills.
- 5 Gilbert Etienne, *Indian Agriculture: the Art of the Possible* (Berkeley, 1968), p.156.
- 6 Manning Clark, 'Writing History in Australia', in John A.Moses (ed.), *Historical Discipline and Culture in Australasia* (St. Lucia, 1979), p.71.
- 7 Lawrence Stone, 'The Revival of the Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History', *Past and Present*, no.85 (November, 1979), p.4.

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