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**INDIANS IN
BRITISH GUIANA, 1919-1929:**

A STUDY IN EFFORT AND ACHIEVEMENT

by
CLEMENT TOOLSIE SHIWCHARAN

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

From the 1830s to 1917, despair in India drove a small minority into indentureship overseas. These were probably men and women of considerable initiative and extraordinary courage. Their achievements in British Guiana suggest this. Men, women, and children toiled relentlessly on the sugar plantations, while exploiting every conceivable niche to supplement meagre wages. They built a stable family life. They adapted rice and cattle to the plantation environment, thus adumbrating the character of future Indian villages; but they also resisted the injustices of the system.

Indians founded villages throughout coastal Guiana, from the late nineteenth-century. In spite of endemic malaria, a hazardous environment requiring elaborate drainage and irrigation, poor sanitation, an undercurrent of Black envy, and the remorseless hostility of the plantocracy and the State to Indian enterprise in rice and cattle, they progressed. Indians adapted their rich material and religious culture, recreating aspects of their ancestral villages. At the hub of their tradition was the family: although most migrated alone, a modified joint-family structure evolved. Their thrift, industry, judicious delegation of family labour, and an exemplary commitment to their families, sustained them in activities which others considered unremunerative.

The practice of Hinduism and Islam was costly; it encouraged saving. Cultural security strengthened their self-confidence and sustained effort; it bred a sense of purpose. By the 1920s, rice, cattle, commerce, etc., had spawned an Indian middle class. These set standards for the community: they established an entrepreneurial tradition; their professional achievements undermined Indian indifference to education; some promoted intellectual curiosity; and facilitated Indian participation in organised cricket, the most eloquent manifestation of arrival. The middle class expanded conceptions of attainable goals. But Indian adaptation was shaped profoundly by a resurgence of pride in the achievements of ancient India and the rise of Gandhi. A separate Indian community, differing significantly in their basic assumptions from those of the Blacks, developed in British Guiana. The implications for race relations were already ominous in the 1920s.

CHAPTER 1

THE INDIAN BACKGROUND AND THE ADAPTATION OF THE INDENTURED LABOURERS IN BRITISH GUIANA

In the 1850s and 1860s indentured immigration first stopped the headlong economic decline of British Guiana and Trinidad and then brought them to substantial prosperity by 1870 as sugar production began to grow in direct proportion to immigration.

K.O. Laurence, *Immigration into the West Indies in the 19th Century* (Aylesbury, Bucks.: Ginn and Co., 1971), p.66.

..... the steady diminution of the feeling against emigration is caused by the return of old emigrants to their homes. People are at last beginning to find out that a Hindu going to British Guiana is not forced to become a Christian ... Coolies come back more and more, and come back, too, with money, and not uncommonly they return with their wives and families

Annual General Report of the Patna Division, [Bihar], 1883-1884, p.27, quoted in Brij V. Lal, *Girmitiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians* (Canberra: The Journal of Pacific History, 1983), p.52.

..... we have no evidence that emigrating Hindus agonised over the religious consequences of the ocean voyage. Maybe that was subsumed under a prior agony — over the decision to go — but once here in Trinidad, the Hindus had no doubts either about their right or their ability to assert a Hindu existence. It was as if crossing the seas was a constant factor in the religious equation; it applied to all the emigrants and was therefore neutralised their countrymen in India might think they had stepped beyond the pale but among their fellows here nothing had changed. The ritual specialists, like the priests who restored ritual purity would perform their allotted tasks. The sanctioned places of pilgrimage might now be inaccessible, but new ones would arise to take their places; and the tropical climate would ensure that the religious vegetation would flourish and thrive. The little world was shaken, but could be made significantly familiar.

Kusha Haraksingh, 'The Hindu Experience in Trinidad', in *Indians in the Caribbean*, I.J. Bahadur Singh, (ed.), (London: Oriental University Press, 1987), p.173.

Let anyone compare the immigrant when he first lands in Demerara with the same man a year or two afterwards. At first he is a poor, cringing creature, bowing to the earth before every white man he meets; apologetic for his very existence. You meet the same man in two years' time, strong, clean, erect, passing with an indifferent stare the man has found out that he is someone; that he has a value and a position of his own because he is free from debt and makes money. All these things combine to make him hold up his head and give a spring to his step. But I will go further than this, and say that the condition of the immigrant can be compared favourably with the position of the agricultural labourer in the southern counties of England.

Henry Kirke, *Twenty-five Years in British Guiana* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co., 1898), p.342.

The recorded stories of some of these indentured migrants to Fiji indicate a variety of personal, social and economic reasons that led young Indians to accept the enticements of recruiting agents and leave family and caste and village to go to an unknown island far across the sea. But we can be sure of one common factor: this move was such a radical one for anyone brought up in an Indian communal setting that they must all have been of unusual individuality and initiative. And conditions on board ships and on plantations in Fiji broke them further from the security and restrictions of caste and communal life. High caste and

low, and Hindu and Muslim, all had to eat together, work together, and sleep in thinly partitioned tiny rooms in large labour compounds. And the harsh conditions, long hours of heavy agricultural labour, beatings, abuse of women, and often barely adequate food, meant that they survived by individual resource and determination, or not at all.

Jim Wilson, 'Imprint of Indian Thought and Culture in Fiji' in *Imprints of Indian Thought and Culture Abroad* (Triplicane, Madras: Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan, 1980), pp.218-219.

I

The Origin of the Indians in British Guiana and Some Comparisons with the Indian Immigrants to Fiji

Between 1838 and 1917, 238,909 Indian indentured labourers arrived in British Guiana to work on the sugar plantations, primarily on five-year contracts. This scheme originated at the end of slavery, as many ex-slaves, having bought their own land, became partially independent of plantation labour; they equated it with slavery, and worked irregularly. In 1842, in the counties of Demerara and Essequibo, they went on strike when the planters reduced wages unilaterally. There was division in the ranks of the latter; and the ex-slaves forced the planters to retract. The Black labourers were conscious of their superior bargaining position, and were beginning, in a rudimentary way, to function as a rural proletariat.¹

The importation of indentured labourers, initially Portuguese from Madeira, and ex-slaves from the smaller West Indian islands, was designed to counter this, to devise a system in which a slave-like control of the labour force could be reproduced. The net was spread widely, as the planters, facing ruin, struggled frantically to keep out the sea and contain the recrudescing bush on the flat, swampy coastland of British Guiana. Africans, liberated from the slavers stubbornly plying the South Atlantic and Kroos from Liberia, were also recruited; so also were Chinese, and a sprinkling of Maltese, English, Irish, and 70 Black Americans. These were transitory and experimental;² the coolies from India were the only enduring solution (see Table 1.1). The first batch of Indians arrived on 5 May 1838.

Table 1.1		
Immigrants introduced into British Guiana mainly under indenture, 1834-1917		
<i>Source and Period of Migration</i>		<i>Number</i>
India	(1838-1917)	238,909
Madeira	(1835-81)	32,216
Africa	(1834-67)	14,060
China	(1852-84)	13,533
Europe	(1834-45)	381
Other	(1835-67)	1,868
TOTAL		300,967

SOURCE: G.W. Roberts and J. Byrne, 'Summary Statistics on Indenture and Associated Migration Affecting the West Indies', *Population Studies*, Vol. 20, Pt. 1, (1966), p. 127.

The Indian indentured labourers taken to British Guiana, formed part of a larger scheme, which involved the export of Indian labour to several plantation colonies in the Tropics; it absorbed approximately 1,250,000 labourers between 1834 and 1917. Mauritius was the largest importer; and when indentureship ended, Indians comprised 70 per cent of the population of that island. In no other colony did they form 50 per cent: in British Guiana, Trinidad and Fiji, the Indian population ranged between 43 and 30 per cent when the system was terminated in 1920. Natal (South Africa) received about 152,000 Indian indentureds; while St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Grenada, and St. Kitts got about 10,360. Jamaica imported about 36,412. The French colonies — Guadeloupe, Martinique, and French Guiana — as well as Dutch Guiana (Suriname), were also recipients of Indian indentured labourers. The West Indies as a whole got 519,438 (see Table 1.2).

<i>Colony (Country)</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Indian Immigrants</i>	<i>Indian Population (est.) 1980</i>
Mauritius	1834 — 1912	453,309	623,000
BRITISH GUIANA	1838 — 1917	238,909	424,400
Trinidad	1845 — 1917	143,939	421,000
Jamaica	1845 — 1915	36,412	50,300
Grenada	1856 — 1885	3,200	3,900
St. Lucia	1858 — 1895	4,354	3,700
Natal (South Africa)	1860 — 1911	152,184	750,000
St. Kitts	1860 — 1861	300	—
St. Vincent	1860 — 1880	2,472	5,000
Reunion	1861 — 1883	26,507	?
Dutch Guiana (Suriname)	1873 — 1916	34,304	124,900
FIJI	1879 — 1916	60,965	300,700
East Africa (Kenya/Uganda)	1895 — 1901	39,771	?
Seychelles	1899 — 1916	6,315	?
Martinique	1854 — 1889	25,509	16,450
Guadeloupe	1854 — 1885	42,326	23,165 (in 1967)
French Guiana	?	19,296	?

SOURCES: Brij V. Lal, *Girmūiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians* (Canberra: The Journal of Pacific History, 1983), p.13; the 1980 figures are taken from Steven A. Vertovec, 'Hinduism and Social Change in Village Trinidad', D. Phil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1987, Table 1.1.

Of the 238,909 Indian labourers who went to British Guiana, about 193,154 or 81 per cent arrived between 1851 and 1900; 75,808 or 31.7 per cent were repatriated between 1843 and 1955, under a state-aided system. Only 9,668 or 12.7 per cent of the repatriates left after 1917, the year when the last indentured labourers left India (see Table 1.3)

<p style="text-align: center;">Table 1.3 Indian indentured immigrants introduced into British Guiana, 1838-1917, and repatriates to India, 1843-1955</p>		
<i>Period/year</i>	<i>Immigrants introduced</i>	<i>Immigrants repatriated</i>
1838 — 1850	12,770	482
1851 — 1860	26,187	3,883
1861 — 1870	38,090	2,581
1871 — 1880	51,729	8,889
1881 — 1890	40,971	16,749
1891 — 1900	36,177	17,070
1901 — 1910	23,177	13,509
1911 — 1917	9,216	2,977
1919	—	889
1920	—	2,468
1921	—	473
1923	—	211
1924	—	379
1925	—	492
1926	—	779
1927	—	570
1928	—	654
1929	—	520
1932	—	333
1936	—	479
1938	—	865
1949	—	311
1955	—	245
TOTAL	238,909	75,808

SOURCES: G.W. Roberts and J. Byrne, *op. cit.*, [1966], pp.129, 132; Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in Guyana*, (London: The Author, 1970 [1950]), p.222.

Raymond T. Smith (1959), K.L. Gillion (1956; 1962), and Brij V. Lal (1983) are pioneering studies on the origins of the Indian indentureds.³ Lal's work, based on his massive doctoral thesis of 1979, is a substantial scholarly achievement. It grew out of a quantitative analysis of the emigration passes of the 45,439 Calcutta-embarked North Indians, who went to Fiji between 1879 and 1916. Gillion's study is a preliminary assessment of a sample of the same data; while Smith's paper is based on a sample of 9,393 embarkation slips of Indian indentureds, who went to British Guiana between 1865 and 1917.⁴ The similarity of their findings is remarkable, and corroborates Lal's observation with regard to the applicability of his results for Fiji, to the West Indian colonies, especially British Guiana and Trinidad. He argues:

.... much of what has been said ... also applies to those other Indian labour importing islands, 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, surplus emigrants were transported to another's.⁵

What is the corroborative evidence on the origins of the Guianese and Fijian immigrants? As Table 1.4 indicates, about 85.6 per cent of the immigrants to British Guiana originated in the same region — eastern United Provinces (contemporary Uttar Pradesh [U.P.]) and western Bihar. Eastern U.P. alone contributed 70.3 per cent. Smith estimates that only 4.4 per cent of the immigrants were South Indians, primarily Tamils. They embarked at Madras, and were known in the colony as Madrasis. Lal, however, states that the Madrasis comprised about 6.3 per cent of all Indian immigrants to British Guiana: 15,065 went there; 76 per cent arrived between 1845 and 1870, during the earlier phase of the indentured system. This is also true of the other West Indian colonies, 67 per cent of the Madrasis having arrived before the 1870s.⁶ In Fiji, South Indian immigration did not commence until the beginning of this ^{century} ; but Madrasis comprised 23.8 per cent of all immigrants.

Lal attributes the paucity of Madrasis in the West Indies to their lack of enthusiasm for that remote region: they were already participating actively in an established immigration scheme of a different character, the *kangani* system; this was the basis of recruitment for Ceylon, Burma, and Malaya. Lal also states that a popular perception among West Indian planters that Madrasis were inefficient labourers, with reprehensible social customs, contributed to less vigorous recruiting in South India.⁷ Laurence argues that their recruitment for the West Indies was pursued only when sufficient North Indians could not be obtained; they had acquired a 'bad reputation' for desertion, and an apparently high susceptibility to sickness.⁸ While the harsher experiences of Madrasis during the earlier years of indentureship would have darkened their vision of West Indian plantations, it is more likely that a generally negative perception of them by the planters, is a more compelling argument in accounting for their marginal role in indentureship, in British Guiana and Trinidad. As Table 1.6 shows, 67.9 per cent of the indentured labourers to Natal (South Africa) were Madrasis. South Africa certainly did not have a better reputation for humaneness than the West Indies; neither did Fiji.

The greater number of Madrasis in Fiji notwithstanding, 86 per cent of the North Indian immigrants to that colony originated in the eastern districts of the United Provinces and the western districts of Bihar. As in British Guiana, an overwhelming majority — 75.5 per cent — were from eastern U.P. (see Table 1.5). Steven Vertovec estimates that 88 per cent of the immigrants to Trinidad between

1875 and 1917 also originated in the United Provinces and Bihar, with the former area contributing 75 per cent.⁹

Table 1.4	
Regions of origin of a sample of immigrants from India to British Guiana, 1865-1917	
<i>Regions of Origin</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh)	70.3
Bihar	15.3
Orissa	0.6
Bengal	1.4
Central Provinces and Berar	0.9
Central Indian States	1.1
Rajputana [Rajasthan]	3.1
Punjab	1.0
Madras	4.4 [6.3], Lal, <i>op.cit.</i> , p.44

SOURCE: Raymond T. Smith, 'Some Social Characteristics of Indian Immigrants to British Guiana', *Population Studies*, Vol. 13, Pt. 1, (1959), p. 36

Table 1.5	
Regions of origin of Fiji's North Indian immigrants 1879-1916	
<i>Regions of Origin</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
United Provinces [Uttar Pradesh]	75.5
Bihar	10.5
Central Provinces	6.2
Punjab	1.8
Rajasthan	1.6
Overseas Colonies	1.4
Nepal	0.9
Bengal	0.3

SOURCE: Brij V. Lal. *op. cit.*, [1983], p.50

Table 1.6		
South Indian ['Madrasi'] immigrants to the main sugar colonies		
<i>Colony</i>	<i>Number of South Indians</i>	<i>Per centage of Total Immigrants</i>
Mauritius	144,342	31.9
Natal (South Africa)	103,261	67.9
BRITISH GUIANA	15,065	6.3
FIJI	14,536	23.8
British West Indies	12,975	5.0

SOURCE: Brij V. Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], p.44

About 85 per cent of the Indian immigrants to British Guiana originated in roughly the same culture area, the Bhojpuri Hindi-speaking districts of the eastern United Provinces (U.P.) and western Bihar. This led to the emergence, fairly quickly, of a homogeneous Indian culture: district peculiarities merged into a North Indian variant; thus rendering the process of adaptation infinitely less traumatic than in Mauritius, Fiji, and Natal. In Mauritius and Fiji, the non-Hindi-speaking section of the Indian population was about 30 and 24 per cent respectively. This accounts for the persistence of regional/ethnic differences among Indians in these places. A greater degree of cultural unity had already taken shape in Trinidad and British Guiana, during the latter part of indentureship. Kushi Haraksingh remarks on the dominance of the Bhojpur tradition among Indians in Trinidad; his assessment needs no revision for British Guiana. He writes:

The culture of the Indians in Trinidad was to some extent a blend of various local practices and beliefs brought from India, but before long the Bhojpur tradition became dominant. This was derived from a cultural area in north-east India which was characterised in language by the Hindi dialect Bhojpuri and in religion by the great epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana especially the latter¹⁰

Nine districts in eastern U.P., and a neighbouring district, Shahabad, in Bihar, accounted for 43.6 per cent of all Indian immigrants to British Guiana. These ten districts contributed 51 per cent of the 85.6 per cent of the immigrants who were from the U.P. and Bihar. It is noteworthy that nine of the ten principal districts which provided North Indian indentureds to British Guiana and Fiji are identical. The order of numerical importance differs, but this does not alter the picture (see Table 1.7). The only difference is that because of the greater number of Madrasis in Fiji, the contribution of each district as a proportion of total immigration there, is reduced. In British Guiana, the five principal districts of recruitment were: Basti, Azamgahr, Ghazipur, Gonda, and Fyzabad; Basti, Gonda, Fyzabad, and Azamgahr were also among the five principal districts which contributed North Indian immigrants to Fiji.

Another factor which eased the trauma of adaptation and cultural reconstruction on the plantations in British Guiana was the high proportion of Hindus among the immigrants: they comprised 83.6 per cent; Muslims were 16.3 per cent. Hindu-Muslim representation in British Guiana and Fiji did not differ much from their respective proportion in the population of the United Provinces. In 1891, in a population of 46,905,085 in the U.P., Hindus numbered 40,379,907 (86 per cent); there were 6,346,629 Muslims (13.5 per cent). In 1901, the population of the U.P. was 47,691,782: Hindus were 40,691,818 (85.3 per cent); Muslims were 6,731,034 (14.1 per cent) (see Table 1.8).

Table 1.7 Districts which were the principal sources of North Indian immigrants to British Guiana and Fiji		
<i>Districts in Eastern U.P.</i>	<i>Contribution as a percentage of all immigrants to British Guiana (a)</i>	<i>Contribution as a percentage of all immigrants to Fiji (b)</i>
Basti	8.7	10.7
Azamgahr	6.2	2.8
Ghazipur	5.7	1.9
Gonda	5.9	6.0
Fyzabad	4.1	3.8
Allahabad	3.1	2.0
Gorakhpur	3.1	2.8
Jaunpur	2.7	1.9
Shahabad(Western Bihar)	2.4	2.3
Lucknow	2.3	?
Sultanpur	?	3.8

SOURCES: (a) Smith, *op. cit.*, [1959], p.36
(b) Calculated from Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], p. 56

Table 1.8 Hindu-Muslim representation in the populations of the U.P., British Guiana, and Fiji					
<i>Place</i>		<i>Percentage of Hindus</i>	<i>Percentage of Muslims</i>	<i>Christians</i>	<i>Miscellaneous Groups</i>
United Provinces (1901)	(a)	85.3	14.1	—	—
British Guiana (sample of labourers, 1865-1917)	(b)	83.6	16.3	0.1	—
Fiji (North Indian immigrants, 1879-1916)	(c)	80.4	15.1	0.05	4.3

SOURCES: (a) *Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1908*, p.173
(b) Smith, *op. cit.*, [1959], p.38
(c) Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], pp.69-70

In British Guiana, as well as in Fiji, contrary to popular opinion, an overwhelming majority of the immigrants were not from the lower castes and the outcastes. Smith estimates that the Brahmans and other high castes comprised 13.6 per cent in British Guiana; middling agricultural castes were 30.1 per cent; artisan castes were 8.7 per cent; while the low castes and outcastes were no more than 31.1 per cent. Muslims, as noted earlier, were 16.3 per cent of the immigrants.¹¹

When concession is made for slight discrepancies in the categorising of castes, Lal's findings on the broad caste composition of the Fiji immigrants are largely corroborative of Smith's. He says that Brahmans and other high castes were about 14 per cent. Agricultural and artisan castes are combined

in his study, yielding 39 per cent. (When these two categories are combined for British Guiana, they form 38.8 per cent). Low castes and outcastes contributed 28 per cent; while Muslims were 15 per cent.¹²

The findings of both Smith and Lal also show a remarkable similarity in the representation of the principal castes among the immigrants to British Guiana and Fiji. There is also a broad correlation between the principal castes in these colonies and their representation in the population of the United Provinces, with the exception of Brahmans, who were more highly represented in the latter (see Table 1.9). What this suggests is that people from a cross-section of the principal castes in the United Provinces migrated as indentured labourers, and not only the untouchables and other low castes.

<i>Caste</i>	<i>Per centage of total population in</i>			<i>Principal occupations in</i>
	<i>British Guiana (a)</i>	<i>Fiji (b)</i>	<i>U.P. (1901) (b)</i>	<i>U.P. (1911) (c)</i>
Chamar	12.9	13.4	12.4	cultivators/field-labourers
Ahir	9.7	9.2	8.0	cultivators
Kshatriya and allied castes (Rajput)	9.2	10.0	7.0	landlords/cultivators
Kurmi	5.6	5.1	4.1	cultivators
Kori	3.6	4.3	2.1	field labourers/weavers
Koeri	3.6	1.6	?	cultivators
Pasi	2.2	2.4	2.6	cultivators/field-labourers
Brahman	2.0	3.7	8.0	landlords/cultivators
Muslims	16.3	15.1	13.5	do.

SOURCES: (a) Smith, *op. cit.*, [1959], p. 38
(b) Lal, *op. cit.* [1983], p.70
(c) *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73

The main castes in order of numerical importance in British Guiana were: Chamar, ^{Ahir,} Kshatriya (Chatri), Kurmi, Kori, Koeri, Pasi, and Brahman. What is of considerable importance is that all the principal castes among the immigrants to the colony — the Brahmans as well — gave cultivating as their primary occupation, at the 1911 Census in the United Provinces. Among the Chamars and Pasis (outcaste and low caste), cultivating was combined with agricultural labour. They were all people, who, in one way or another, made a living from agriculture.

<i>Castes</i>	<i>Traditional occupation</i>	<i>Percentage whose traditional occupation was principal means of livelihood</i>	<i>Percentage cultivators</i>	<i>Percentage field-labourers, general labourers etc.</i>
1. Ahir	pastorals, cattle-owners, breeders, dealers in milk/milk produce	9.2	73.6	11.0
2. Brahman	priesthood	7.9	73.6	0.2
3. Chamar	leather-workers	3.8	39.1	45.5
4. Kurmi	cultivators	84.3	-	8.3
5. Koeri	cultivators	87.9	-	6.7
6. Pasi	tari makers/watchmen	0.5	63.3	23.4
7. Rajput (Kshatriya)	military, land owners	48.2	40.4	2.6
8. Kumhar	potters	43.3	40.9	6.7
9. Teli	oil pressers	43.6	42.3	4.3
10. Kahar	palanquin bearers	34.9	41.1	5.9
11. Kewat	boatmen, fishermen	1.0	73.0	16.6
12. Julaha	weavers	50.5	23.5	6.3

SOURCE: Abstracted from Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], pp.72-73

As Table 1.10 shows, the ancient notion of caste as an instrument of mobilising labour and ascribing hereditary occupations to hierarchically structured groups, was already severely undermined. The system was falling apart; as people sought occupational change in the face of diminishing opportunities in their traditional jobs. For many, the traditional jobs had disappeared. A classic example was provided by the Ahirs, the traditional cattle-rearers, who contributed 9.7 per cent of the immigrants to British Guiana. In 1911, in the United Provinces, only 9.2 per cent of them were returned as earning a livelihood from their ancestral occupation; 73.6 per cent were cultivators. Among the Brahmans, a mere 7.9 per cent gave priesthood as their principal occupation; 73.6 per cent also were cultivators. For some of the lower castes, the situation was even more desperate. The Pasis, the traditional tappers and tari makers, had totally lost their old trade. In 1911, a mere 0.5 per cent were doing their caste jobs; 63.3 per cent were cultivators. The Chamars also, the old leather-workers, had virtually abandoned their ancient, infamous trade: 39.1 per cent were returned as cultivators, while 35.9 per cent and 9.6 per cent were field labourers and general labourers respectively. All these non-cultivating castes were thrown onto the land as native crafts and trades collapsed, and traditional competences became superfluous. This was exacerbated after the imposition of direct British rule, following the Mutiny.

It is significant that the Kurmis and the Koeris, the premier cultivators of the eastern districts of the United Provinces, who comprised about 9 per cent of the immigrants to British Guiana, indicated

little occupational mobility: 84.3 per cent and 87.9 per cent respectively, were still engaged in agriculture. The Kurmis, Koeris and Ahirs had earned a formidable reputation as agriculturalists, although the best lands were monopolised by Brahmans, Rajputs, and Kayasths, the elite castes.

In 1901, in Basti, the district which was the single largest source of immigrants to British Guiana and Fiji, Brahmans comprised 12.6 per cent of the Hindu population, and owned 19.3 per cent of the cultivated area. They held more land than any other caste; but were considered 'inferior agriculturalists, owing to their prejudice against handling a plough'¹³ Most of their labour was provided by Chamars, Pasis, and Kewats. The incompetence of the Brahmans contrasted with the methodical agricultural practices of the Kurmis, Koeris, and Ahirs, who held 24 per cent of the cultivated area of Basti. This was described as being of the 'greatest importance in the economic condition of the district.'¹⁴ The Ahirs held 8.2 per cent of the cultivated land in the district, and were considered cultivators 'of a high order'. But in Basti, as in most districts of the eastern U.P., the crown for agricultural excellence was reserved for the Kurmis. They held 11.9 per cent of the cultivated area in the district; and their women were considered equally industrious — they also being accomplished cultivators.¹⁵

William Crooke, an official/scholar, who worked in the U.P. between 1871 and 1896, described the Kurmis as the 'most industrious and hard-working agricultural tribe in the Province'. And he quoted a seemingly trite statement, (which had become a proverb), to underline the capacity for hard work among Kurmi women:

*Bhali jāt Kurmin, Khurpi hāth,
Khet nirāwe apan pi ke sāth*
(A good lot is the Kurmi woman; she takes her
spud and weeds the field with her lord).¹⁶

But Crooke was not less complimentary of the Koeris. He saw them as 'a thriving, industrious, well-conducted class', who were also excellent farmers, with a special aptitude for growing opium, tobacco, and garden vegetables.¹⁷

In Basti, the Chamars, the untouchables, were 17.9 per cent of the Hindu population. They constituted a high proportion of the agricultural and general labourers of the district; but were, contrary to popular perception, also cultivators 'of some capacity and great industry'. However, they owned virtually no land: they were tenants,¹⁸ like many of the Ahirs, Kurmis, and Koeris, renting from the

Rajputs, who like the Brahmans and high caste, Kayasths, were reported to be 'inferior agriculturalists'. The Ahir, Kurmi, and Koeri small cultivator was renowned for his thrift, as 'the customs of his race compel him to marry and beget children; and if he has daughters he must spend on their marriage a sum out of all proportion to their means the burden of debt presses heavily'.¹⁹ The problem of indebtedness bit deeper as many traditionally non-agricultural castes were thrown onto the land.

In the district of Gonda, which provided about 6 per cent of the immigrants to British Guiana, the Brahmans were both landowners and tenants. But, as tenants, they retained their ancient privileges; their rent being much lower than that of the lower castes. As in Basti, the Brahmans were considered 'notoriously poor cultivators', who tended to farm their large land holdings 'carelessly'. Here also, most of the labour was provided by Chamars and Pasis: Brahmans considered the handling of a plough, or touching manure, degrading to their status.²⁰ And agricultural labour was very cheap. In 1901, in the United Provinces, only 400,000 of the estimated 2.6 million agricultural labourers were permanently employed. In the eastern districts, because of population pressure, their daily wages were 1¹/₄ to 2¹/₄ annas, compared with 2 to 3 annas in the less congested western districts.²¹

In Gonda, the Brahmans had monopolised the local grain trade and money-lending business. (It was this which had led to the rise of the celebrated Pande family). This also did not conduce to excellence in agricultural husbandry among the Brahmans; and the Gonda Gazetteer of 1905 noted:

In most cases the Brahman is far less skilled in the science of husbandry than the Ahir or Kurmi, and pays but little regard to the adaptability of certain soils to certain staples, the capability of soils under certain conditions, and the rotation of crops.²²

Crooke, a very acute observer of the people of the United Provinces, underscored the excellent husbandry of the small cultivator, especially the 'minute methods' of the Kurmis. He quoted a Dr Voelcker, who had made a study of agriculture in the eastern districts, in the late 19th century. Voelcker observed:

..... nowhere would one find better instances of keeping land scrupulously free of weeds, of ingenuity in device of water-raising appliances, of knowledge of soils and their capabilities, as well as of the exact time to sow and to reap, as one would in Indian agriculture, and this not at its best alone, but at its ordinary level. It is wonderful, too, how much is known of rotation, the system of mixed crops, and of fallowing. I have never seen a more perfect picture of careful cultivation, worked with hard labour, perseverance and fertility of resource²³

In spite of the 'slovenly, indifferent husbandry' of the Brahmans, their aversion to handling the plough, and the touching of manure, agriculture was 'the most respectable' occupation in the United Provinces: no caste, whatever its status, lost 'dignity' by adopting it.²⁴ In Gonda, as in Basti, the Ahirs (mainly from the Gwalbans sub-division) were considered 'careful and laborious husbandmen', though they owned no land and rented from the Rajputs. The Kurmis were, as usual, the best cultivators; their husbandry being of a 'high order', and very meticulous. The Koris, the traditional weavers, who formed about 3.6 per cent of the Guianese immigrants, were greatly affected by the wide use of imported fabric. Some were still engaged in their ancestral work; but many had become agricultural labourers, often *sawaks* or 'practically the slaves of their employers'.²⁵ Along with the Chamars, the Pasis, and the Kewats, they provided the bulk of the labour for the Brahman, Rajput, and Kayasth landowners in Gonda.

In Ghazipur District, the home of 5.7 per cent of the immigrants to British Guiana, the Gwalbans Ahir, the traditional graziers and cow herds, formed 'the backbone of the cultivating community'; and were generally 'hard-working and successful' farmers.²⁶ Here also, they owned little land; most were tenants. Although they owned only 2,383 acres, they were responsible for 14.3 per cent of the cultivated area.²⁷ In this district, the place of the Kurmi as the best cultivator was taken by the Koeris. They also were primarily tenants; but although they owned only 3,285 acres, they were responsible for 10.2 per cent of the cultivated area, in 1906. The Koeris cultivated the best lands in the villages intensively; they produced several of the more valuable staples. Consequently, they were able to pay the high rents.²⁸ The Chamars in Ghazipur also rented land, and were responsible for 7.2 per cent of the cultivated area. But, as in every district of the eastern U.P., they were the main agricultural labourers for the Rajputs and Brahmans.²⁹ In Ghazipur, they also worked for the Bhuinhars, another Kshatriya caste, which owned 23 per cent of the land. The Rajputs, Muslims, and Brahmans owned 31, 17, and 11 per cent of the land respectively, in this district, in 1906.³⁰

The Ahirs, Koeris, and Kurmis were also the best agriculturalists in Azamgahr District, the home of 6.2 per cent of the immigrants to British Guiana. Here also, they were tenants primarily. The Ahirs in this district believed that their ancestors were once the ruling race, holding the same status as the Rajputs and other Kshatriya castes.

What emerges is that agriculture was playing an increasingly dominant role in the lives of most

castes. The Kurmis, Koeris, and Ahirs were the premier cultivators in the principal districts from which the indentured labourers to British Guiana and Fiji originated. They were a land-hungry people, whose meticulous husbandry suggested a certain reverence for the soil. They rented from the Rajputs and Brahmans, the main landowners. The Kurmis, Koeris, and Ahirs were crucial to the economy of the eastern U.P. In addition to their efficient husbandry, they were noted for their industry and thrift. They were infinitely better farmers than the Brahmans, Rajputs, and other high caste peoples, who were imprisoned by an archaic notion of the polluting nature of manure and dirt, and the ignobility of using a plough: vanity feeding on a decaying past and a spurious dignity, an enemy of effort and achievement.

However, the peasant of the eastern U.P. ingeniously devised and performed several subsidiary occupations simultaneously, in an effort to counter his land-hunger and chronic poverty. The Hindu joint-family was an important instrument in the pursuit of subsistence. This is how Blunt observed this process:

A subsidiary occupation is a matter of great economic importance for it makes, especially amongst agriculturalists, all the difference between poverty and comparative ease There are, in fact, many peasants who have other sources of income: dairy work, selling grass or fuel, basket weaving, the making of rope, gur (coarse sugar), and tobacco, the ginning, spinning and weaving of cotton etc the economic unit amongst the Hindus is not the individual but the joint-family, one or more of its members are often in separate employment and earning an income of their own, of which they usually remit a part to the common pool of the family.³¹

The deep sense of communal responsibility among the peasant folk of the U.P. fed a respect for money, and a hunger to own land. It encouraged thrift and industry; it sustained effort. The Kurmi in Basti, as Blunt recorded, were an epitome of this frugality and rigid circumspection:

..... he is even more canny in money matters than the Jat Most money-lenders amongst the tenantry are Kurmis. It is reported from one registration office in the Basti district, where the Kurmis are particularly strong in number, that of the total sum which passes from lender to borrower in a certain tahsil, the Kurmi contributes a full half. Generally, his own indebtedness is small, and he has money to put by at the end of the year. His ambition is always the acquisition of additional land The Kurmi is always planting whether his crop lives or dies.³²

But subsistence was becoming difficult to earn. In the latter half of the 19th century, several non-agricultural castes, as noted earlier, were forced onto the land; many of the caste occupations became obsolete. This process had been going on for some time; but the imposition of British rule in the United Provinces, after the 1857 Mutiny, quickened it, as foreign products penetrated the village economy. The Koris and Julahas, the traditional weavers, were gravely undermined by the

cotton products of Manchester. The Telis, or oil makers were becoming redundant, with the importation of kerosene oil. The Chamars, the largest caste in the United Provinces, had become virtually extinct as an occupational group. So did the Pasis and the Kewats.

In 1891, in the United Provinces, although the traditional agricultural castes comprised about 17 million members, nearly 35 million were dependent, wholly or partly, on the land. While there were 4³/₄ million Brahmans, there were only 156,000 priests; while there were 713,000 Kumhars or potters, only 466,000 earned a living from this trade.³³ As Lal points out for the United Provinces as a whole:

..... less than 10 per cent of Ahirs, Brahmans, Chamars, Kewats and Pasis practised their traditional occupation. The rest had taken to other occupations, principally agriculture. Over 70 per cent of Ahirs, Brahmans, and Kewats derived their livelihood from cultivating land. In the case of Chamars, while cultivation was important, many also derived sustenance as labourers they provided 55 per cent of the field labourers, 28 per cent of the industrial artisans, and 50 per cent of the general labouring population.³⁴

Many of the old non-agricultural caste skills were largely superfluous; the old cohesion, the ancient certainties, however stultifying, could not be sustained. The overworked soil of these ancient districts in the eastern U.P. could not accommodate the avalanche of subsistence-seekers. Things were, indeed, falling apart.

II

Why Did North Indians Migrate?

The life of the peasant is one of ceaseless, monotonous toil, among the lower ranks squalid and hopeless, a constant struggle to win from adverse fate the very scantiest means of keeping body and soul together. It is an existence which has no room for the higher aims and ambitions on the other hand, it enforces an unwearied industry and temperance of life

William Crooke, *The North-Western Provinces of India: Their History, Ethnology, and Administration* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1972 [1897]), pp.231-232

For a class of agricultural labourers existing under such economic exploitation, it required little persuasion on the part of professional recruiters to enlist them for the colonies The only certain mode of escape was flight. Colonial emigration implied liberty from a life of continuous economic exploitation. The euphoric promises of unscrupulous recruiters seemed too tempting to resist. Socio-economic oppression, therefore, seemed to provide the main stimulus to emigration among the lower castes.

Basdeo Mangru, *Benevolent Neutrality: Indian Government Policy and Labour Migration to British Guiana, 1854-1884* (London: Hansib, 1987), p.61

Mangru (1987)³⁵ is a significant achievement in Indo-Caribbean historiography. For the first time, the background of the indentured labourers is treated comprehensively: the social and economic

circumstances of the people of the eastern United Provinces and western Bihar are uncharted; the system of recruitment is scrutinised. It stands at the same level of excellence as Lal (1983). Both underline the abysmal economic conditions in the region of recruitment, the 'push' factors behind Indian immigration. However, Mangru's work tends to give prominence to the chronic web of deception, spun by the *arkatis* (the recruiters of popular infamy), as a factor in overseas migration. And he stresses the tendency to immobility of the North Indians from whom the indentureds were recruited. He argues:

While some classes of Indian society were migratory, those recruited for the colonies, particularly from North India, generally lacked that spirit of enterprise and adventure. They were excessively attached to the locality of their birth, and cling tenaciously to what their birthright gives them, a 'joint' property in the land inherited from their fathers. As a result they seldom left their villages except during seasons of economic distress.³⁶

He adds that 'those who had experienced poverty all their lives tended to resign themselves to their fate and to disbelieve the recruiter's promise of better times'; the 'pull' of the village was 'social and cultural rather than economic'.³⁷ However, the chronically depressed economic situation drove many cultivators into the clutches of the money-lenders, with whom debts were contracted in order to procure seeds. With slim collateral, debts tended to exert a stranglehold on the poor farmer; and when he could not honour his payments to the money-lender, he deserted the village and became vulnerable to the recruiter's trap.³⁸ The primacy of deception is also underlined in Mangru's discussion of the recruitment of women, the quota having been set at 40 per 100 men after 1868. Mangru concludes that the immigrants were impoverished villagers in search of employment to supplement inadequate incomes from agriculture; they were vulnerable. He writes:

They were quick to respond, often without question, when remunerative employment was offered and this ready acceptance endowed recruiters with a strong psychological hold over them. Women in particular were vulnerable and liable to be deceived.³⁹

This question of deception permeates Mangru's analysis; and it tends to detract from the compelling economic arguments he advances as the principal reason for migration. It also tends to diminish the character of the immigrants, who are viewed as generally lacking 'that spirit of adventure and enterprise';⁴⁰ as being 'ignorant of life beyond the confines of the village',⁴¹ pawns of the recruiters, who preyed on their 'ignorance and simplicity'.⁴² This is unfortunate, and probably unintended.

The evidence in the previous section of this chapter suggests that several of the middling and lower castes, including the Chamars, demonstrated remarkable occupational flexibility, considerable

competence in farm husbandry, and an adroitness in delegating the labour of the joint-family, in order to exploit various niches in the environment simultaneously. Industry and thrift were wide-spread. Many also aspired to a degree of social mobility. Crooke observed this among the Chamars of Kanpur, where, he noted: '..... many of them have amassed considerable wealth, and have even begun to seclude their women, which is the first object of a man who has attained a fairly respectable social standing'.⁴³ Such indicators of social mobility tend not to be lost on people within particular caste groups; they could be contagious; and even if there are few possibilities for advancement, they are lodged in the collective memory. These also tend to undermine resistance to migration.⁴⁴ Many had no land to inherit from their fathers; and from the latter part of the 19th century, a considerably number in eastern U.P. and western Bihar, even those from the lowest castes, were already on the move.

In 1909, the Ghazipur District Gazetteer noted the common practice of migration within India as a means of alleviating the poverty of the district. It reported:

As in the case of Azamgahr and the other districts of the Benares division, immense numbers of people leave their homes every year to find employment in or near Calcutta and in the various centres of industry in Bengal and Assam, while many weavers and others resort to the mills of Bombay. The extent of this migration is astonishing and its economic influence is of the highest importance since the labourers earn high wages and remit or bring back with them large sums of money to their homes The tendency to migrate is no new thing but the movement has grown in importance and extent in the last few years.⁴⁵

(Azamgahr and Ghazipur Districts were the second and third most important sources of immigrants to British Guiana).

Anand A. Yang notes how people in Saran District, in Bihar — another source of immigrants to British Guiana — viewed migration within India. He quotes a contemporary source:

..... any inhabitant of Chan Chaura village who migrated was 'looked upon with respect, no matter how junior he may be, simply because he is an earning member of the family. These migrants consider themselves above the category of their brethren'.⁴⁶

Even in the latter half of the 19th century, the horizons of many had certainly expanded beyond the confines of their ancestral village, beyond the restrictive, static, certainties of their caste.

What, then, was the state of the human condition in the eastern districts of the United Provinces which prompted a traditionally immobile people to migrate? By the 1870s, these districts, from

which 70 per cent of the immigrants to British Guiana originated, had a density of over 500 persons per square mile. By 1891, most districts had reached over 600: Fyzabad, Azamgahr, and Jaunpur had densities of 702, 790, and 816 respectively. In Gorakhpur, Basti, and Gonda the increase in density had also assumed frightening proportions. The gravity of the condition in the eastern districts is crystallised when their densities are compared with the stable, even declining, densities in the less-impooverished western districts between 1872 and 1921 (see Table 1.11).

<i>District</i>	<i>Mean density per sq. mile</i>						<i>Per cent of net variation</i>
	<i>1872</i>	<i>1881</i>	<i>1891</i>	<i>1901</i>	<i>1911</i>	<i>1921</i>	<i>1872-1921</i>
EASTERN U.P.							
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
Azamgahr	602	733	790	700	675	691	14.8
Fyzabad	591	624	702	707	666	677	14.6
WESTERN U.P.							
Sharanpur	414	458	469	490	462	440	6.3
Kanpur	483	498	510	531	482	485	0.4
Aligahr	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

SOURCE: Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], p.61

This problem was exacerbated by the decline, or virtual disappearance, of several traditional non-agricultural jobs: the pressure on the land increased. Moreover, the concentration of land in the hands of the higher castes meant that a high proportion of cultivators were tenants at will; many became landless labourers.

In Basti, in the late-1880s, for example, Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Bhuinhars, Baniyas, Gosains, and Kayasths — all upper castes — owned 79.8 per cent of the land. In Sultanpur and Azamgahr, these castes owned 83.2 per cent and 67 per cent of the land respectively. The best cultivators, the Kurmis, Koeris, and Ahirs, were tenants primarily: in Azamgahr, in 1879, Ahirs owned 7,601 acres or 0.6 per

cent of the land; in 1906 they owned 10,637 acres or 0.8 per cent of the land in the district.⁴⁷ In 1906, in Ghazipur, the Rajputs, Bhuinhars, Brahmans, and Muslims owned 82 per cent of the land. The premier cultivators of the district, the Koeris and Ahirs, owned a mere 3,285 and 2,383 acres respectively.⁴⁸ As late as 1919, the upper castes in Basti still controlled two-thirds of the land.⁴⁹

As early as the 1850s, in Azamgahr and Jaunpur, each small cultivator had less than two-thirds of an acre; only in three districts in the United Provinces did the small cultivator have as much as 2 acres.⁵⁰ By the 1890s, the peasant in Azamgahr had to subsist on about half an acre.⁵¹ Crooke described the condition of the landless labourers from the menial castes, the Chamars, the Pasis, and the Kewats, for example, as one 'of abject poverty, hardly raised above the point of starvation'.⁵² In Domariaganj tahsil in Basti, the ploughmen were still serfs as late as 1899; some were slaves: 'In consideration for advance of cash the *sawaki* bound himself, his wife and children, to work for their master till the money was repaid. Such a contingency was never contemplated, and a man and his wife could usually be bought outright for 50 or 60 rupees'.⁵³

The imposition of direct British rule, with the introduction of the *zamindari* system of revenue collection, and the commercialisation of agriculture after the 1857 Mutiny, undermined the traditional patron-client relationship between landlords and tenants. With landlords becoming solely responsible for revenue payments, tenants were victims of their chicanery, as rents in kind were replaced by monetary transactions. Traditional social and religious obligations, on the part of the landlords, tended to evaporate.⁵⁴ They resorted frequently to the courts to secure payment of rents: many peasants were evicted; they flooded the pool of landless labourers. The small cultivators from the middling and lower castes suffered most; but Brahmans, Rajputs, and other high castes also, often suffered the same fate. Many peasants were pushed into the jaws of the *mahajans*, the money-lenders.⁵⁵

By the late-19th century, money lending had become a popular form of investment; interest charges were extortionate; and even the 'most saintly Hindu lent money'.⁵⁶ The peasant was never far from the yawning trap-door or permanent indebtedness. The tendency, even among lower caste Hindus, to spend extravagantly on weddings and religious ceremonies, compounded the problem. Blunt estimated that between a third and 50 per cent of the debts were a result of the tyranny of custom,

and its myriad financial exactions. This was devastating for the younger generation: law and custom dictated that the debts of parents, or the joint-family, be inherited. Blunt observed:

The legal obligation is due to the nature of the joint-family; the ancestor in contracting the debt, has acted as an agent of the heir, and the heir is consequently liable. The religious obligation arises from the fact that failure to repay a debt is a sin, and it is the heir's duty to deliver his ancestors from the consequences of that sin⁵⁷

The unscrupulous *mahajan* even had God on his side.

But the new agricultural policies after 1857 also had serious ecological consequences, which exacerbated the condition of all castes. Jayawardena outlines the results thus:

..... overcropping land that had already been intensively cultivated for a thousand years, interrupting the natural flows of water without an informed care for its consequences, and denuding the invaluable forests The zamindari system was even more severe in the eastern Uttar Pradesh — Bihar region than in the west Deforestation and the expansion of cultivation were also more extensive, which probably accounts for the greater number of emigrants from the Ahir caste, for the grazing lands diminished. The commercialisation of the area also made it more receptive to English goods, throwing out of work weavers (Kori), leather-workers (Chamar) and other craft castes at a time when the new tenancy laws gradually squeezed them out of cultivation.⁵⁸

Land-hunger, indebtedness, unemployment, a fickle weather pattern — drought one year, flood another — rendered large sections of the population chronically impoverished. Diseases were rife: famine and death stalked the eastern districts of the U.P. Wasted bodies were a haven for evocatively medieval visitations of plague and cholera; famines also struck with Malthusian efficiency. Between 1891 and 1921, in India, the loss of population directly or indirectly from epidemics and other calamities such as famine, was 65 million, or 42.5 per cent of the natural growth of 153 million.⁵⁹ Eastern U.P. was a prolific contributor.

In Gonda, an important source of immigrants to British Guiana and Fiji, cholera was endemic after 1875; and violent epidemics were common. Between 1872 and 1881, this disease accounted for 11.5 per cent of the total mortality of this district. There were bad outbreaks in 1873, 1876, 1877, 1878, 1881, 1886, and 1888 — 10,000 died in the latter year. In 1893, 16,000 died from cholera. Small-pox visitations also, were a recurring feature in Gonda: in 1876 and 1880, there were epidemics 'of great intensity'. Famine struck in 1874, 1877, and 1897.⁶⁰

Cholera was endemic to Basti also; but as the District Gazetteer of 1907 reported:

Not infrequently it assumes a violent epidemic form, and carries off large numbers of people, especially among the poorer classes when it has once got hold upon the district, it is very difficult to check, owing to the height of the water-level and the consequent difficulty of preserving the wells from contamination⁶¹

Mortality was especially high in the 1880s: over 10,000 died during the cholera epidemic in Basti in 1887. In the 1890s, mortality was even higher, reaching nearly 11 per cent. More than 39,000 died in 1891, 1892, and 1894. Cholera epidemics also struck the district in 1905 and 1906, the latter year being the worst on record.⁶²

Plague, equally devastating, often accompanied these horrendous visitations of cholera. In Ghazipur District, the third most important source of immigrants to British Guiana, the death rate reached 39.09 per thousand, between 1901 and 1906, as a result of 'the terrible ravages of plague'. When plague or cholera did not kill, it weakened the body sufficiently, thus making it susceptible to deceptively lesser evils, fever and malaria. In 1905, in Ghazipur, plague and fever pushed the death rate to 65.3 per thousand.⁶³ Ira Klein's description of plague in North India, in the 19th century, calls up a picture of medieval darkness, a veritable black death. He writes:

It was a disease of dark, dirty and crowded places, spread by rats and fleas which flourished in northern India's teeming, manure-ridden towns and villages. Ruined houses and huts used as privies, where defecatory matter reached piles several feet high, villages and towns of many cesspools and woeful drainage, ill-kept public and private latrines, the ebb and flow of undernourished and susceptible townsmen and villagers — all these conditions helped raise plague mortality to as high as 20 per thousand in certain ill-fated districts like Ghazipur.⁶⁴

In the late-19th century, the eastern districts of the United Provinces were indeed an area of darkness. But many people were able to summon the will to beat back the darkness, to resist despair. Internal migration, whether seasonal or permanent, as well as overseas migration, were a way out of this general hopelessness. Those who had the courage to migrate were in a minority; they were the most enterprising.

Bengal and Assam were the principal areas of migration for the people of eastern U.P. By 1900, they had monopolised the jobs in the jute mills and factories of Bengal. In 1901, there were 39,725 U.P. immigrants in Howrah; 46,291 in the 24 Parganas; 90,337 in Calcutta. The five principal districts from which they originated were Benares (14,292), Azamgahr (12,279), Ghazipur (10,656), Jaunpur (9,216), and Allahabad (6,045). Of the 36,891 in Mymensingh, another Bengal district, 12,849 were from Azamgahr; 12,476 from Ballia.⁶⁵ In 1911, a quarter of the U.P. immigrants in Bengal were women; by 1921, a third in Calcutta were women.⁶⁶

In Calcutta, Howrah, and other industrial areas of Bengal, these people showed immense occupational flexibility, even a degree of ingenuity. Brahmans took to conducting pilgrims; became clerks and peons, even cooks; occasionally they became coolies and day labourers. Rajputs were mainly constables, door-keepers, jail wardens, peons, and railway porters. Ahirs were labourers, domestic servants, and shopkeepers; while Kurmis, Kahars, and Dusadhs became labourers and mill-hands.⁶⁷

On the tea plantations of Assam, in 1901, out of 108,900 immigrants, 42,772 originated in Ghazipur; 20,604 in Azamgahr; 8,677 in Jaunpur; and 7,645 in Ballia.⁶⁸ Many of these were women: 40 per cent in 1901.⁶⁹ The indentured labourers who went to British Guiana, the other sugar colonies as well, were a part of this general migration of people from the eastern U.P., who were trying to break away from the degrading sameness, the futility, in which they were immersed.

Grierson, who made a study, in 1883, of overseas migration from the United Provinces, observed that landlords and money-lenders encouraged seasonal internal migration because it opened possibilities for the payment of interest, or the effacement of debts. But they were totally opposed to overseas migration, even permanent internal migration, because 'every coolie who emigrates is looked upon as so much property lost'.⁷⁰ The *arkatis*, the recruiters of overseas immigrants, were the greatest enemy of the landlords and money-lenders. The latter painted a picture of the recruiter as a demon; they also concocted tales of bizarre savagery in the *tapas*, the overseas colonies. Many believed them; others saw the landlord/money-lender as the greater evil. They fled overseas. They were the most courageous, possibly the most enterprising ones.

For those who were deeply indebted, or whose families were perennially indebted, overseas migration offered escape from this bondage, which blighted effort and strangled initiative. This probably accounts for the comparatively high incidence of middling agricultural and artisan castes among immigrants to British Guiana (about 39 per cent). But for the landless labourers as well — the Chamars, Pasis, Kewats, and Koris — overseas migration offered flight from their semi-slavery. (The Gonda Gazetteer recorded in 1905 that many of the Kori agricultural labourers were *sāwaks* or 'practically the slaves of their employers').⁷¹

The immigrants were invariably youthful: 85.6 per cent of all male immigrants to British Guiana were between 10 and 30; 54.6 per cent between 20 and 30.⁷² These were some of the people who

would have wanted to escape the deadend of family indebtedness; their best years were not squandered yet. These were the people on the move.

Lal observes that 'a very large number' of migrants were registered outside of their district of origin, usually a neighbouring district. He attributes this to a great spatial mobility, fed by the poverty in the eastern districts of the U.P.⁷³ The 1901 Census of India reported that of the 101,482 immigrants enumerated in the Shahabad, Saran, and Champaran Districts of western Bihar, 94,000 belonged to the contiguous districts in eastern U.P. — Gorakhpur, Ballia, Ghazipur, Benares, and Mirzapur.⁷⁴ There was, indeed, a good deal of spatial mobility in the region itself. Mangru, however, interprets the high incidence of immigrants who were registered in places neighbouring their home districts as another manifestation of duplicity. He argues that 'whereas cases of abduction were likely to be exposed in the emigrant's own district, they would probably remain undetected in another'.⁷⁵ But if it is accepted that many were fleeing from landlords, money-lenders, husbands, wives, or mothers-in-law, or from some caste or family obligation, or some crime or misdemeanour, then the migrants themselves would have sought registration away from their home districts in order to evade effective scrutiny. The argument that many were escaping from landlords or money-lenders is indeed plausible: in 1868-69, for instance, between 66 and 90 per cent of the cultivators in Lucknow were indebted; 60 to 80 per cent in Sitapur.⁷⁶ It was probably higher in the poorer eastern districts.

When famines struck, many would not have cared where they were sent; they were not even candidates for deception. Mangru states that during the famine in the U.P. in 1860, over 1 million wandered over neighbouring districts in search of food and employment. Many villagers were forced to eat mango seeds; women with infants were deserted by their husbands; children by their parents. The Demerara (British Guiana) depot was 'unusually full'; many were rejected.⁷⁷ The eastern districts experienced several famines, food shortages, and many plague, cholera, and small-pox epidemics. The starvelings got a bath, food, and clothing at the depot. These certainly would not have agonised over their destination. The right to a return passage would have dispelled lingering doubts, and dampened last-minute agony.

However, some were aware of the benefits of overseas migration. Major Pitcher, who studied overseas migration from the United Provinces, recorded an interesting encounter with some new recruits, in Lucknow, on 21 March 1882. He noted:

A large number of cases collected for Fiji. There are in this depot nine fine young men from one village in Gonda, who told me that seven men had emigrated from the same village some few years back, of whom three men and one woman had returned bringing so much money that the speakers were tempted to try their luck also. The three men alluded to had soon again emigrated, disgusted by the cupidity of their fellow villagers.

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

Of the original seven, it was reported that three had permanently settled in Demerara. It struck me that the men before me thought Fiji close to Demerara, so I explained the position.⁷⁸

Crooke noted that only 90,000 persons left the United Provinces between 1881 and 1891, and that this trickle could not relieve the 'congestion'. He observed, however, that indentureship did bring compensation for some family members, as 'The Hindu, like the Irishman in the States, is very loyal to his kinsfolk at home, and many a struggling peasant in Oudh and the eastern districts is helped to pay his rent or appease the money-lender by a remittance from abroad'.⁷⁹ Throughout the 1920s, as the annual reports of the Immigration Agent General reveal, some Indians in British Guiana sent money to relatives in India.

The indentureship system lasted over seventy years; many were repatriated during this time; some of the repatriates remigrated. Some knowledge of even remote places like Demerara entered local lore, ignorance of geography notwithstanding. For the untouchable Chamars, ground down by the bigotry and ancient despair of the eastern districts, the urge to go overseas was probably strong: in British Guiana they formed about 13 per cent of the Hindu immigrants; in Fiji as well. The social stigma against them meant that they could not enter Hindu temples, nor could they use wells that the higher castes used. The stigma ran deeper, as Crooke observed:

He is considered impure because he eats beef, pork and fowls, all abomination to the orthodox Hindu He keeps herds of pigs, and the Chamrauti or Chamar quarter in a Hindu village is generally a synonym for a place abounding in all kinds of abominable filth, where a clean-living Hindu seldom, unless from urgent necessity, cares to intrude This repugnance to him is increased by his eating the leavings of almost any caste except Dhobis and Doms, and by the pollution which attaches to his wife (Chamarin), who acts as midwife and cuts the umbilical cord.⁸⁰

But many Chamars were taking advantage of the 'freedom' that industrial employment in Bengal and Assam offered. Migration brought some relief from the interminable poverty; it also spawned a greater self-confidence; and this was reflected in a perceptible assertiveness among some untouchables, as early as the 1880s. In the western district of Etah, Crooke recorded:

Old Thakur landlords have often complained bitterly to me of the insolence of this class, the fact being that they are no longer inclined to submit to bullying and drudgery.⁸¹

The Collector of Meerut District also remarked on 'the growing independence' of the Chamars, who 'are now beginning to assert themselves to a marked degree'. The movement to refuse traditional duties was started by those who had worked in Delhi, and had received support from the American Presbyterians.⁸² The Chamars from eastern U.P., who had worked in Calcutta and Assam, would also have acquired a healthy, therapeutic 'insolence'. But effort and achievement were vitiated by a stubborn stigma attached to low birth, in localities where caste identity could not be concealed. This was impossible in the villages.⁸³

However, enterprise and initiative were present even among the lowest castes. Among a small minority, a conscious decision was made to leave, whether temporarily or permanently: they were some of the most enterprising; they came from all castes. It is an error to see the immigrants as mere victims of economic degradation, inevitable dupes of the recruiters.

III

Indentured Women: Dupes Or Rebels?

The women who boarded emigrant ships comprised young widows and married or single women who had severed all ties of relationship at home, had lost caste or had become prostitutes. During famines women of high social status opted to emigrate rather than face starvation.

Mangru, *op. cit.*, [1987], p.97

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 must have been individuals of remarkable independence, enterprise and self-respect. These were certainly the values they nurtured and lived by in the colonies.

Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], p.114

In 1857, the mandatory proportion of Indian indentured women required to be recruited was 35 to 100 men. This was increased to 50 in 1858; reduced to 25 after 1860, following an agreement on this quota for French recruitment to Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana, and subsequent demands for parity by the British. In 1868, it was again increased to 50; but from 1870 to the end of indentureship in 1917, the mandatory quota of women labourers remained at 40 to 100 men.⁸⁴

The proportion of women recruited for British Guiana tended to fluctuate with, and adhere to, the mandatory quota; none existed prior to 1857. Between 1845 and 1870, an average of 32 women

were recruited for every 100 men: 16,983 women and 53,323 men were indentured to British Guiana during this period. Nath notes that between 1870 and 1917, 'a minimum of 40 was prescribed and the rule was observed, except on two occasions — in 1911 when the proportion was 39 and in 1914 when it was 34. The highest figure reached was 50 in 1900'⁸⁵ (see Table 1.12).

1838 — 3	1881 — 40	1911 — 39
1845 — 18	1888 — 41	1914 — 34
1846 — 25	1889 — 40	
1847 — 19	1891 — 46	
1848 — 25	1893 — 41	
1851 — 25	1894 — 40	
1857 — 57	1895 — 43	
1863 — 24	1896 — 49	
1864 — 24	1900 — 50	

SOURCES: Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], p.101; Nath, *op. cit.* [1970], p.144

Smith estimates that 43 women were recruited for every 100 men between 1865 and 1917; and that about 30 per cent of them were aged between 10 and 20 years, while 52.6 per cent were between 20 and 30. About 82 per cent of the women were between 10 and 30; 85.6 per cent of the male immigrants were in the same age-group.⁸⁶ Premium was placed on the recruitment of young, able-bodied people. Both Gillion's and Lal's findings on the sex ratio and the age structure of the immigrants to Fiji corroborate Smith's estimates for British Guiana. Gillion states that women indentureds to Fiji were in the ratio of 43 to 100 men,⁸⁷ precisely what Smith estimated for British Guiana. Lal states that 86.8 per cent of the adult male immigrants to Fiji were single; while, surprisingly, 63.9 per cent of the adult females were reported to be single. Of the 36.1 per cent of the women who were reported to be married, 73.1 per cent were accompanied by their husbands only.⁸⁸ In view of the remarkable similarity of the statistical evidence from both colonies, as noted earlier, it is reasonable to assume that a high proportion of the women who went to British Guiana were registered as 'single'.

This high incidence of 'single' women among the indentureds was extraordinary; it suggests

something fictitious, an element of deception. Female child marriage was the norm in India; men tended to marry later. The 1891 Census Report of the United Provinces noted the prevalence of this practice:

Between ten and fourteen nearly nine-tenths of the female population pass into the marriage state; but considerably more than half of the males remain unmarried. Between fifteen and nineteen there are fifteen married females to one unmarried, whilst at the end of the period only 60 per cent of the males have been married. By twenty-four practically the whole of the female population has been married, almost the whole of those unmarried at this and later ages being women whose avocations preclude marriage, or whose physical or mental health forbids it. Of men, considerably more than a fourth are unmarried up to twenty-four, whilst an appreciable but diminishing number remain unmarried through all the subsequent age periods.⁸⁹

How, then, does one account for the high proportion of 'single' women among the immigrants? What was the character of these people? Knowledge of these women is woefully sparse; a popular mythology of their 'fallen' status has hardened into an unexamined dogma; scholarly opinion is in its infancy, often hovering around robust speculations.

Tinker states that 'Many of the female recruits were abandoned wives or widows'; and he quotes Grierson, who observed that 'Many of the women enter the depot in a garment of filthy rags'; and Pitcher, who noted that many arrived 'in a state bordering on nudity'.⁹⁰ Tinker underlines kidnapping, deception, and the psychological domination of the *arkatis* as important elements in the recruiting of women.

Gillion says that the 'single' women were 'mostly widows (who were ill-treated at home), runaway or deserted wives, and girls who had left their homes in disgrace, or who belonged to an emigrating family. There were few professional prostitutes for these had no incentive to emigrate'.⁹¹

Mangru argues that female immigrants comprised young widows, and married or single women who had severed all ties with their homes, had lost caste, or had become prostitutes. He attributes the migration of some high-caste women to recurring famines, when they 'opted' to emigrate rather than face starvation.⁹² He also, quotes a contemporary source, who reported that migrating women were 'not only anxious to avoid their homes and conceal their antecedents, but were also at the same time the least likely to be accepted back into their families'.⁹³

Reddock, following McNeill and Chimman Lal, states that two-thirds of the women who migrated

to Trinidad were 'single'. (Brij V. Lal says that about 64 per cent of the women who went to Fiji were 'single'). The 'majority', Reddock argues, were widows escaping from the 'stigma of impurity', and 'miserable lives' in the homes of their in-laws. Some were child widows; others were fleeing unhappy marriages; or were women who had been deserted by their husbands. Some were 'pregnant and unmarried or prostitutes'. Reddock agrees that while there were 'many' cases of kidnapping, enticement, and deception, 'a large proportion of women did make a conscious decision to seek a new life elsewhere'.⁹⁴ She concludes:

The Indian women who came out to the Caribbean far from being docile, dependent, subordinate characters, were instead women who, because of social and economic circumstances had been forced to become independent and take control over their own lives and were prepared to do so in their new lives.⁹⁵

Hoeft says that the 'most numerous' group of women 'found willing' to migrate were widows whose lives had become 'unbearable', after the death of their husbands. Some were prostitutes — adulterous women abandoned by their husbands. She notes, however, that in the Indian context, women who did not stay at home were deemed 'prostitutes, indecent, and immoral'. Other women migrants were victims of repression by their mothers-in-law. Hoeft argues that their migration was prompted by the recruiter's 'deceptively positive' picture of conditions in the colonies, and by the possibility of return in the short-run.⁹⁶

Emmer states that 50 per cent of the women who migrated to Suriname were married — presumably that they were accompanied by their husbands. 'For those not married emigration meant more personal freedom and an escape from a culture which was hostile to women', he adds. He also argues that 'prostitute' was applied indiscriminately to any woman who had sex with one or more men, committed adultery, or did not settle down in an arranged child marriage. Some women wanted a divorce to remarry: migration provided an opportunity to elope with a lover.⁹⁷ Like Reddock, he questions the proposition that most women were victims of kidnapping, fraud, and deception. Emmer asserts that they used the indenture system 'to escape hunger and misery and to seek more personal freedom'.⁹⁸ He says: 'the intending indentured emigrant made a deliberate choice to go overseas'.⁹⁹ And he contends that the system of recruitment offered opportunities for those who had changed their minds, or had been deceived, to withdraw:

During this whole process, between the first contact with the recruiter and the last step on Indian soil before embarkation, many intending emigrants were rejected, changed their mind, or simply disappeared. The number of drop-outs made up about 15% of the recruits between their first registration and their entry into a Calcutta depot, while the number of

intending emigrants was reduced by about the same percentage during their stay in Calcutta.¹⁰⁰

Lal believes that fraud and even kidnapping did occur 'in isolated cases'; but that these were 'exaggerated'. Women did have solid, personal reasons for wanting to migrate; and, consequently, made a conscious decision to leave, to escape painful, empty domestic lives, economic hardships, the social stigma of early widowhood, the odium which descended upon those who had brought inadequate dowry, and the 'general dreariness of rural Indian life'. He adds: '..... a very large proportion of the women had already left their homes before they met the recruiters'¹⁰¹

Lal states that 'most' indentured labourers hoped to return after they had earned enough money; but that some women probably wanted a 'permanent break from a condition that seemed to offer more problems, but few possibilities'.¹⁰² However, contrary to popular perception, his findings suggest that there were 'few' widows who migrated. He is inclined to accept that most were, indeed, 'single', since the declaration of widowhood would have entailed less scrutiny from the authorities.¹⁰³ In view of the rarity of single women in India, he suggests that these could have been 'step wives, "co-wives", childless women', who, along with young widows, comprised the bulk of the 'single' women.¹⁰⁴

Lal seems to be groping for an explanation here; he presents no evidence of the acquiring of 'step wives' or 'co-wives' in the United Provinces. It is more plausible that, as Gillion argues, 'a majority of female emigrants' had already adopted (or wanted to adopt) independent lives, because they had been deserted by husbands, or were escaping bad husbands, or tyrannical in-laws.¹⁰⁵ Such women would have instinctively registered as 'single', especially if they had no children. It was a major psychological step on the road to a new life. For such women, the urge to erase the sordid, dark past would have been compelling.

All of these scholars agree that an element of deception was employed in the recruiting of women; but they differ on how wide-spread it was. Tinker, Mangru, Gillion, and Hoefte tend to place greater significance on it than Reddock, Emmer, and Lal. All concur that abysmal socio-economic conditions fed female migration, and made women vulnerable to the blandishments of the *arkatis*. In view of the paucity of evidence on this emotive question of deception, it may never be resolved. But what is more potentially rewarding is a deeper understanding of those socio-economic forces in the eastern

U.P. in particular, which made migration necessary, and many of the unsavoury aspects of indentureship possible; and which also profoundly shaped the character of the overseas Indians. This is the problem posed in Lal's work. It is one of the most refreshing developments in the historiography of the overseas Indians.

The migration of women is inextricably linked with the migration of men. As indebtedness increased, families were thrown off the land — already by 1873, 60,000 were evicted annually in the U.P.

Vertovec argues:

The requirement to pay rents in cash put enormous pressure on peasants. Many had to change their patterns of cultivation to grow cash crops. Often they were also forced by necessity to sell their crops at low prices simply to obtain rent money. The grain dealer (who often doubled as money-lender) would sell the produce back to the peasants, later in the year, at higher prices and usually on credit, causing the peasants to go deeper and deeper into debt.¹⁰⁶

Younger men, in particular, went to Bengal and Assam; their remittances were crucial to the survival of the family back home.¹⁰⁷ Some abandoned their districts and their families in order to escape the debt bondage. Conflicts within the joint-family increased with increasing destitution. Young women, especially those who did not bear a son, or did not conceive, were treated cruelly. But the deserted woman's lot was probably worse. Lal quotes a folk song from Basti, which dramatises the 'agony of separation and loneliness':

All my friends have become mothers,
and I remain lonely and childless
Again and again I plead with you
not to go East [Bengal and Assam]
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?¹⁰⁸

There were probably many women in this condition of emotional and material want, a great temptation to men in the village. Some must have succumbed to a sexual advance. Knowledge of this brought instant excommunication from the joint-family. Young widows also, did not have a future in the village. Blunt described their fate thus:

It is laid down in the law-books that no woman may marry more than once, for marriage is a sacrament and the effects of it, in the case of a woman, are indelible — though a man may marry as often as he pleases Widows become family drudges and must content themselves with one meal of coarse food a day; those of them who are married as babies and widowed in childhood are treated worse than their elders, for it is held that to suffer so dire a fate as infant widowhood, they must have committed a dire offence in a former life.¹⁰⁹

These were probable some of the women who migrated. They were young; it was their hope to get a new husband. To state that they were 'single', was wise.

The famines and epidemics exacerbated their condition. The practice of going 'east' offered hope to many women. As Lal observes:

Migration was not a new or unknown phenomenon for Indian women; thousands had left their homes before they met the recruiters and were shipped to Fiji and other colonies; had moved to other parts of India (Calcutta jute mills, Assam tea gardens, Bihar coalmines, Bombay textile mills) in search of employment, either on their own or in company of their male relatives. The journey to Fiji was part of the larger process of migration.¹¹⁰

As was noted earlier, in 1901, 40 per cent of the migrant labourers in Assam were women; in 1911, a quarter of the U.P. immigrants in Bengal were women; this had increased to a third by 1921. A high proportion of these women were from the lower and middling castes. They were no strangers to hard work in the field. In fact, women's labour was crucial to the survival of the family; and they were often competent in a wide range of work. This is how Crooke saw their role:

Among a large section of the cultivating tribes the women freely assist the men in field labour; in fact, the effectiveness of husbandry may be to a large extent measured by the degree to which this is the case. You will constantly see the wife of the Kurmi or Jat sowing the seed grain as her husband ploughs, weeding or assisting in irrigation by distributing the water from one little patch to another, if she does not take a more active share in the work by helping to empty the well bucket or raising the water lift.¹¹¹

The woman's work also embraced a variety of household chores, apart from taking care of her children. Crooke also elaborated on these:

..... she milks the cow, feeds the calves, picks pottage herbs in the fields, collects firewood, or makes the cow-dung into cakes for fuel. She has to grind the wheat or barley, which is the chief food of the household, husk the rice and millet, and do all the cooking, besides taking her share in field work, and scaring the parrots and monkeys from the ripening crops. If she has any leisure she can devote it to ginning cotton or spinning thread If she misconducts herself, she has to endure hard language and sometimes blows.¹¹²

She more than earned her keep: her competences were numerous; and her capacity for hard work was astounding. But her life was often made unbearable under the harsh regime of a cruel mother-in-law. The young daughter-in-law was often seen as potentially subversive of the ethos of the joint family. There was an unquenchable apprehension that she would use her powers, especially sexual, to divert her husband from his duties to the family. She had to be kept in check; her status was that of a daughter-in-law, not a wife. Sudhir Kakar has written eloquently on this subject. He

discusses it in the context of the contemporary Indian family; it also applies to the joint-family in 19th century U.P. He argues:

In the social hierarchy of her new family, the bride usually occupies one of the lowest rungs. Obedience and compliance with the wishes of the elder women of the family, especially those of her mother-in-law, are expected as a matter of course Unflinchingly and without complaint, the new daughter-in-law is required to perform some of the heaviest household chores, which may mean getting up at dawn and working till late at night. Any mistakes or omissions on her part are liable to incur sarcastic references to her abilities, her looks or her upbringing in her mother's home the new bride constitutes a very real threat to the unity of the extended family. She represents a potentially pernicious influence which, given family priorities, calls for drastic measures of exorcism.¹¹³

For young women whose husbands had died, or had deserted them, or were under the heels of their mothers, life was hell. It was worse for childless women. Crooke described them as 'A labour-saving machine'. By the 1880s, many such women had broken away; there was considerable movement into neighbouring districts, where agricultural labour was available. Movement to the 'cast' was a common practice.

Lal states that only 41 per cent of the women from Basti who went to Fiji were registered in their home district; only 33.5 per cent from Gonda; while 'the overwhelming majority' from Azamgahr and Sultanpur were registered outside.¹¹⁴ This suggests either that the *arkatis* took them away from their home districts because he had kidnapped them, or that they went voluntarily with him in order to avoid detection by their husbands or other family members. There were probably cases of both. But the evidence also suggests that many women had already left their homes and were seeking a fresh start. They were young; most under 30, many under 20 years old.

Many must have made a deliberate, considered decision to escape the sordid sameness, the tyranny of custom, and the social and material degradation in an impoverished caste-ridden society. They must have known that there could be no return for any woman who manifested such independence. For them, going 'east' made no difference if it involved going west. Whatever the trauma, these indentured women adapted to the plantation societies without discarding many positive features of their old culture; and made a major contribution to the struggle for a better life, and the many achievements won in the 1920s, after the abolition of indentureship.

In British Guiana, they helped to perpetuate the Hindu and Muslim religious traditions; their culinary and agricultural skills and their capacity for hard work; their love for home and family. They often

helped to restrain their sons and husbands from the excesses of plantation life. These women must have been possessed by extraordinary 'independence, enterprise, and self-respect'.¹¹⁵

IV

Brahmanism And The Adaptation Of Hinduism In British Guiana

The work of a Christian Missionary to the heathen Hindus, whether in India or British Guiana, or elsewhere, is indeed most trying, discouraging and difficult. He labours hard, he exerts an influence for good, he makes some favourable impressions by faithful and plain preaching upon his hearer's mind, he hears expression of approbation in regard to the doctrines of the Christian religion, and yet in ninety-eight cases out of a hundred he is doomed to disappointment

From the beginning to the end of our preaching they are on the look-out for objections it is almost impossible to convince the hearers of the folly of their idolatry, castes, and superstitions, and to impress their hearts with the truths of Christianity. Their minds are full of errors and their mouths are quick to utter anything which is against the doctrines of Christianity in support of their own system of religion In preaching to the Coolies, whether on sugar estates, in the yards, villages, or in town, publicly, in large numbers, or privately in their houses, we meet with endless objections brought before us again and again

H.V.P. Bronkhurst, *British Guyana (sic) and its Labouring Population* (London: T. Woolmer, 1883), pp. 293-295.

Although Brahmans' ritual purity no longer acted as the source of their central position in the religion, their specialised knowledge still functioned to safeguard this role Brahmans remained the ritual practitioners (*purohits*) and advisers (*gurus*) to individual families — thus maintaining dominance over the essential foundations of Hindu orthopraxy

Steven A. Vertovec, 'Hinduism and Social Change in Village Trinidad', D. Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1987, p.135.

H.V.P. Bronkhurst was a Methodist missionary in British Guiana. Between 1860 and 1895, his job was to convert the 'heathen' Indians to Christianity. He was born in Ceylon of a Dutch father and an Indian mother. He wrote voluminously on many aspects of Guianese life in the 19th century, including the Indians and their religious and philosophical tradition.¹¹⁶ His outlook was rooted in the Eurocentric, Christian world-view of his day, with its assumptions of superiority and infallibility, and the derogation of non-European peoples. But, often, Bronkhurst expressed ambivalence, even admiration, for the Indians. However, his message fell on stony ground: he could not wean them away from Hinduism and Islam. His successors were only marginally more successful. In 1911, 12,411 or 9.5 per cent of the Indians were registered as Christians; in 1921, 10,959 (8.7 per cent); and in 1931, 9,045 (6.9 per cent) were Christians. In the latter year, 2,150 Indians indicated no religious affiliation. These were probably some of the nominal Christians, who, in a tactical move

to gain a teaching job in the denominational schools, went through the motions of conversion (see Table 1.13).

<i>Year</i>	<i>Indian population</i>	<i>Hindus</i>	<i>Other Hindus (Arya Samajists)</i>	<i>Muslims</i>	<i>Christians</i>	<i>Parsis</i>	<i>Not Stated</i>
1911	126,517	95,478 (75.4%)	?	18,217 (15.9%)	12,411 (9.5%)	708	-
1921	124,938	95,325 (76.2%)	?	18,410 (14.7%)	10,959 (8.7%)	244	-
1931	130,540	96,342 (73.8%)	(0.8%)	21,789 (16.6%)	9,045 (6.9%)	?	2,150

SOURCES: *Census Reports of British Guiana, 1911, 1921, 1931*

The Indians of British Guiana held firmly to their ancestral religions; and between 1911 and 1931, Hindus and Muslims comprised about 90 per cent of the Indian population. Jayawardena argues that conversion to Christianity was higher among urban Indians and Madrasis than among North Indians in the rural areas.¹¹⁷ (North Indians comprised about 94 per cent of the immigrants to British Guiana). How does one explain the resilience of Hindus (Muslims were even more implacable) in the face of the stubborn evangelism of Christian missionaries?

Paradoxically, the character of indentureship, and the presence of the proselytisers themselves, conditioned and accelerated the adaptation of the old religions to the new environment. For the first time, a racial, comprehensive Indian identity, stripped of its caste obsessions, and transcending, to a remarkable degree, the ancient Hindu-Muslim divide, was being shaped. As early as the 1880s, Bronkhurst observed:

The Hindu-Guyanians, though they may descend from people of different languages and castes are *one* in the colony, where caste is ignored Caste distinctions still prevails in the Colony, but its influence is very slight on the minds of the bulk of the Coolie population.¹¹⁸

Every stage of the indentureship system — the sojourn at the up-country sub-depot; the wait at the Calcutta depot prior to embarkation; the journey by sea, lasting several weeks, as all faced the unknown; the semi-communal life in the plantation barracks; the capitalist ethos of the sugar plantations — was subversive of the retention of the caste system. The notion of ritual pollution, restriction on commensality, caste as the basis of occupational specialisation and the division of labour (this was already undermined in the eastern U.P. and western Bihar in the 19th century), caste endogamy — the core of the old system — could not be reproduced on the plantations.¹¹⁹ A sturdy,

egalitarian, secular concept developed among the *jahajis* and *jahajins*, ship-brothers and ship-sisters. Jayawardena refers to this notion of brotherhood/sisterhood as *mati* ideology, a likely reference to 'mates', ship mates. He elaborates:

The formal structure of labour relations emphasises the independence of each labourer, but there is an 'informal structure' which maintains group cohesion. The organising principle here is the equality of social status and prestige among all labourers expressed in the notion of *mati* [it] may be defined as a relationship between persons of relatively equal social status which should be characterised by amity, respect, and considerations for the interest and prestige of each.¹²⁰

The concept of a *mati* (mates) did not merely describe an empirical fact. It symbolised a new beginning; and it embodied the idea that new relationships, new attitudes, were required in the new environment. It was pragmatic: it kept the notion of extended kinship alive; it fostered a spirit of mutual obligations among those who had come in the same ship. This deep link among *jahajis* was an important instrument of adaptation, among a people who had migrated primarily as individuals.¹²¹

Vertovec's comments on this relationship in Trinidad applies to British Guiana as well. He states:

A deep friendship was forged between diverse individuals (even between Hindus and Muslims) on the voyage to the new country..... Such friends would seek to serve their indenture on the same estates, and to settle near each other after their contracts had expired. Thereafter they came to treat each other's families as *nata* or fictive kin, with whom marriage was frowned upon (many of these fictive relationships continue to exist between families in Trinidad today). Strong emotional bonds of this sort acted as important foundations for the creation of shared social and cultural institutions.¹²²

The paucity of women also accelerated the erosion of lingering notions of caste superiority. Hypergamy was common: upper caste men married women of middling, or low caste origins. Other criteria became important: facial features, lighter complexion (this was highly prized), an ample rear, etc. Even Brahmans, who comprised about two per cent of the immigrants to British Guiana, procured wives from the lower castes.¹²³ They also, were adjusting to the new circumstances. But the community as a whole was not merely adapting; it was, in the process, purging itself of many of the stultifying excrescences of the old Indian order. This did not diminish their pride in, and commitment to, many positive aspects of their tradition. Their refurbished religion, their adapted *dharma*, gave them strength, self-confidence, and a sense of self-worth; it was a sustainer of effort and the will to achieve. Indentureship, with all its unsavoury features, was creating a new Indian personality. As Subramani, the Indo-Fijian literary critic, sees it:

Indentureship has been described by historians as a past of hardships and degradation. It was that and something more, for while indenture enslaved the Indian labourer temporarily, it also, paradoxically, released him from an old, static order. Indeed it was the first stage in the transformation of the feudal Indian into an individual.¹²⁵

The custodians of that old order, the Brahmans, also, were being reshaped on the plantations. And it is to their credit that they continued, even in the harsher, earlier years of indentureship, to attend to the spiritual needs of their people. It is difficult to see how religious functions, life-cycle rites, and the elaborate, accompanying rituals could have been performed without the Brahman *pandits*. In India, they had a monopoly on the interpretation of the scriptures; they, alone, possessed knowledge on correct ritual practices, auspicious days for the performing of particular tasks, the naming of children, astrological information, and so on. Religious continuity was totally dependent on their efforts. One of the reasons why Hinduism atrophied in Jamaica and the Windward Islands, (minor areas of indentureship), was the paucity of Brahman priests.¹²⁶ In British Guiana, Brahmans retained a position of privilege, while notions of caste disappeared, not because of ritual purity, but because of their monopoly of priestcraft.¹²⁷

And Brahman priests, confronted with the aggressive proselytising of the Christian missionaries, visited sugar estates and Indian villages, performing *kathas*, wedding ceremonies, and other life-cycle functions.¹²⁸ They were also the *gurus* to individual families: they were counsellors on a range of secular matters. A measure of their success is evident in Bronkhurst's lament that they exerted a 'pernicious and powerful influence over the people'; and that they tried 'their utmost to oppose and set aside the teaching and preaching of the Christian Missionaries'.¹²⁹

The plantation environment elicited a greater flexibility from the Brahmans. A rigid orthodoxy on their part would have been counter-productive. And the challenge from the Christian evangelists brought out a more activist approach to Hinduism in them. Perhaps the most enduring example of Brahman flexibility in British Guiana, was their embracing those of the lowest castes — the Chamars, the Dusadhs, the Doms, and the Bhangis — and admitting them into the mainstream of Hinduism, the *Sanatan Dharma*. And lower caste Hindus responded with enthusiasm, as Jayawardena observes: 'Since it was a "higher class cult" it was an attraction to the low castes who had traditionally belonged to cults and sects with distinctive gods and rites because they had been excluded The redefinition of Hinduism as one religion common to all Indians led to the acceptance of *Sanatan Dharma* by the smaller groups'.¹³⁰

This was the master-stroke of the Brahmans; it broke the back of the Christian missionaries. The lowest castes, their principal target, could now have access to Brahman *pandits*, in their homes. The

Brahmans began to eat the Chamar's cooked food. This was the ultimate symbol of the arrival of the lower castes. They were absorbed by the *Sanatanists*; a sturdy pillar of the caste system was removed.

This process was aided by the absence of a centralised body within Hinduism. There were also no weighty, immutable dogmas, no doctrines of universal application. There was room for a measure of eclecticism; there was room for flexibility.¹³² A direct, intimate contact developed between the Brahman priest and the most humble labourer in his thatched hut, or his barrack-room on the plantation. This, initially, was the principal nexus for the practice of Hinduism. It was personal; it was intimate and informal; it was human. No *mandirs* (temples) were necessary: neighbours, friends, and *jahajis* (ship mates) attended the *kathas* (often called *jhandis*), officiated by the Brahman priest, in the home. This facilitated religious continuity among the indentured labourers in British Guiana, before Hindu temples were constructed. As late as 1955, the anthropologist, Elliott Skinner, noted the marginal role of the temple in the practice of Hinduism in a Guianese village:

..... the Hindus do not go at all to the nearest temple, though it is only two miles away. Despite the absence of temples, the presence of the Hindus is revealed by red and white flags flying from bamboo poles. These flags are erected during a ceremony called *jhandi* at which a family gives thanks for some special favour they have received through prayers
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.....

The adaptation of Hinduism on the plantations of British Guiana was also helped by the prominence of the Vaishnavite *bhakti* tradition. Derived from North India, it emphasises three cardinal principles: egalitarianism over particularistic caste ethics; individualism, which, Vertovec says, had especial appeal in plantation society: 'No longer did they need to approach the Gods through the medium of some correspondingly pure human; the relaxation of the caste system and its associated notions of purity/impurity allowed individual Hindus to stand in a more involved, more personal relationship with their deities'. The *bhakti* tradition also fosters communal feeling by its embracing of communal worship. It facilitates the reading of the *Ramayana* by laymen, and the collective singing of *bhajans* (hymns of praise) by the congregation; it also accommodates the 'expositions of the *Bhagavata Purana* by pandits'.¹³⁴

Vaishnavism made Hinduism amenable to adaptation to a less rigid environment; it also made it more accessible to, and manipulable by, an immigrant community. In British Guiana, *Sanatan Dharma* adapted itself to the spiritual, as well as the secular, needs of the people. It lessened the pain

of separation; it eased the trauma of adaptation. Its egalitarian and individualistic premises were a spur to effort and achievement. Moreover, the more elastic link between the Brahmans (as *gurus*), and his 'parishoners' — they were astute enough to adopt missionary methods¹³⁵ — fortified the indentureds in their daily struggles on and off the plantations. The Brahmans' task was infinitely easier: they worked among their own people; conversion was not their business.

Hinduism retained its appeal because it was not practised in a rigid, wooden manner. It was not austere; nor was it, in British Guiana, overly philosophical. The colour of the ritual, the infectious rhythm of the music, the active participation of the people, the accessibility of the Gods, in their homes, broke the monotony of plantation labour. The *murtis*, the so-called idols of Christian infamy, brought the Gods into the abode of the labourer.¹³⁶

The communal singing of *bhajans* (hymns) and *dhoons*, the chanting of *mantras*, the spontaneously joyful celebration of the spring festival of *Holi* (*Phagwah*), and the harvest festival of *Diwali*, among others, enriched the lives of the Hindus.¹³⁷ And the fact that the flora associated with worship in India — the mango, the *tulsi* plant, *pān*, the bamboo, the banana, and *neem*, etc. — were available in the colony, lent authenticity to the present, and a sense of continuity and communion with the past. A vital aspect of the soul of the U.P. village was adapted to the coastland of British Guiana. A sense of community was taking shape. The 'cornerstone' of this new Hinduism was the vernacular version of the *Ramayana* by Tulsidas (ca. 1532-1623).¹³⁸

V

The Legacy Of The *Ramayana*

The Aeneid of Virgil extends to about 12,000 lines, the Iliad of Homer to double that number; but the Ramayana of Valmiki rolls on to 100,000; while the Mahabharata of Vyasa quadruples that sum! The four Vedas, when collected, form eleven huge octavo volumes, while the Puranas extend to about 2 million lines!

Dr Duff, quoted in H.V.P. Bronkhorst, *Among the Hindus and Creoles of British Guyana* (London: T. Woolmer, 1888), p.98.

Whenever we direct our attention to Hindu literature, the notion of infinity presents itself; and sure the longest life would not suffice for a single perusal of words that rise and swell, protuberant like the Himalayas, above the bulkiest compositions of every land beyond the confines of India!

Sir William Jones, quoted by Duff, *Ibid.*

..... Hinduism is not a theory formulated today: it is a growth of centuries. The heathen Indian thinks that he would be drawing down upon his head and his family the curse of heaven if he abandoned his ancestral faith for that of a foreign people. For him, brought up

as he is in a grovelling religion, the pure and sublime doctrines of Christianity have no attraction; and he simply looks upon the missionary of the Cross as an agent sent by the English Government to effect his religious subjugation. The Hindo-Guyanians, in like manner as soon as they are born, breathe an atmosphere impregnated with Hindu doctrines. They are reared upon it, and the tissue of their mind is just what one might expect from such nutriment.

Bronkhurst, *op. cit.*, [1888], p.52.

He who sings and hears the great poem continually has attained to the highest state of enjoyment, and will finally be equal to the gods.

Valmiki (compiler) on the *Ramayana*, *Ibid.*, p.96.

By the 1880s, H.V.P. Bronkhurst was in despair: the 'heathen' Hindus were not yielding. The despair showed. Of Hinduism and the Hindus, he wrote: 'It is not true, and cannot be, and therefore their life cannot be right. It is a religion which cannot be improved. It is corrupt to the very core. Its essential principles are founded in error.'¹³⁹ But he conceded that there were many Indians in British Guiana who were 'highly educated'. Among young Hindus he observed that there were some of considerable erudition: 'As soon as you press the claims of Christ upon them they oppose you with arguments which are not to be despised. Too frequently the cleverness and perspicacity of their reasoning, the aptness of their illustration, would put to shame many an intelligent West Indian or an English boy'.¹⁴⁰

Bronkhurst attributed the resilience of the Hindus, and their imperviousness to the 'truth' (Christianity), to a knowledge among themselves that they had 'a civilisation and religion of their own to point back to, long antecedent to the days when our ancestors were savages covered with the skins of beast'. His task required men of considerable strength and much learning. He noted: 'The missionaries have to combat with these men; and to convince them against the idols they worship, men of no mean ability are required'.¹⁴¹ But Bronkhurst could see nothing redeeming in Hinduism, although he conceded that some good things had come out of that tradition. In 1890, he published a geography text-book on British Guiana and the West Indies, in which he said: 'The principal forms of religion in the Colony are CHRISTIANITY, PAGANISM and MUHAMMEDANISM'.¹⁴² Bronkhurst's 'paganism' was, of course, Hinduism.

Professor Edward Shils doubts whether the Jewish tradition could have survived many centuries afterwards, among the people of the diaspora, if the Pentateuch and the Mishnah could only be transmitted orally. He argues that the written word was crucial to its resilience.¹⁴³ Among the Hindus of British Guiana also, the fact that Brahmans brought copies of the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*,

and the *Mahabharata* on board the immigrant ships, added immeasurably to the self-confidence of the Hindus; it conferred a deeper sense of intellectual substance in their resistance to the Christian proselytisers. The printed word facilitated transportation, transmission, and retention. To the unlettered, it was *the* truth; it was also magic. And many illiterate indentured labourers kept a copy of the *Ramayana* or the *Gita* among their *murtis* and the pictures of Hindu deities, in a corner of their homes, where daily obeisance was paid to a pantheon of gods. It was enough that the book should reside among the religious paraphernalia.

The *Ramayana* was written by Valmiki in the third or fourth century B.C. It is set in what is now eastern U.P. and western Bihar. Tulsi Das translated it from Sanskrit into Hindi; and simplified and amended portions of it. He made it accessible to millions in northern India. His version, the *Ramacharitmanasa*, became the Everest of the Hindu classics for the Hindi-speaking people of the United Provinces and Bihar. It was also the premier epic among the Hindus of British Guiana. The story, narrated and sung by the ordinary folk, instructed and entertained; it also enthralled. A detailed narration is attempted here, because, to the popular Hindu imagination on the plantations of British Guiana, Tulsi Das's *Ramayana* was synonymous with Hindu *dharma*.

What is the basic tale in the *Ramayana*?¹⁴⁴ Why did it have such a powerful hold on the mind of the Guianese Hindu? It is said that around 1000 B.C., there lived in Northern India two very cultured Aryan races — the Kosalas of Oudh (centred on Ayodhya, in contemporary eastern U.P.) and the Videhas of northern Bihar. Their kings are learned, benevolent, and just. Rama, the eldest son of Dasaratha, king of the Kosalas, wins the hand of Sita, the beautiful daughter of Janaka, king of the Videhas, by breaking the sturdy bow of Shiva. But after the wedding, as Dasaratha is about to announce Rama's accession to the throne of Ayodhya, his second co-wife, the wicked Kaikeyi, prevails upon the aging king, and, after much agony, he revokes his decision. He also banishes Rama, for fourteen years, to the Dandaka forest in Central India. Kaikeyi's machinations bring Bharata, her son, to the throne. Dasaratha implores his vindictive wife to withdraw her unconscionable demands; but she does not recant.

As Rama prepares to go into banishment, there is great distress in the kingdom; the people agonise; his subjects adore him for his selflessness, bravery, and patriotism. Sita, Rama's devoted wife, refuses to stay in Ayodhya, separated from her 'Lord'. And in a richly-sculptured scene of intense

pathos, Sita tells her mother-in-law, Kausalya, of her decision. (The translation cannot reproduce the poetic nuances or the hauntingly seductive resonances which the original brings to the ears of even one who is illiterate in Hindi):

'I shall do my duty mother', said the wife with wifely pride,
'Like a God to me is Rama, Sita shall not leave his side,

'From the moon will part its lustre ere I part from wedded lord,
'Ere from faithful wife's devotion falter in my deed or word,

'For the stringless lute is silent, idle is the wheel-less car,
And no wife the loveless consort, inauspicious is her star!

'Small the measure of affection which the sire and brother prove,
Measureless to wedded woman is her lord and husband's love'.¹⁴⁵

Impelled by her devotion to Rama, Sita, the epitome of self-abnegation, accompanies him and his younger brother, Lakshman, into exile. But Rama does not lose his magnanimity, his capacity for self-sacrifice. He is not bitter; he bears no malice. He humbly accedes to his father's decree because, as a son, that is his duty. He does not even harbour hatred for the malevolent Kaikeyi. Bharat, her son, does not condone his mother's schemes: he does not wish to usurp the throne. He goes with Rama's mother, Kausalya, to visit Rama, Sita, and Lakshman at the Hill of Chitrakuta; and he beseeches his brother to return to Ayodhya and ascend the throne which is rightfully his. Rama refuses. Such action would be subversive of his father's orders, a negation of his duty. Bharat then persuades Rama to give him his sandals, which he plants at the foot of the throne, symbolising the presence of the legitimate ruler.

The trio in exile crosses the Vindhya hills into southern India, where, on the banks of the Godavari, tragedy again embraces them. Sita is kidnapped by Ravana, the evil king of the Rakshas of Lanka (Ceylon). Conquered by lust for the enchanting queen, he tries to win her heart. Rama and Lakshman wander far, saddened by this evil deed. After much pain and despair, they meet Sugriva, the king of the Vanaars, and his gifted monkey-face chief adviser, Hanuman. They agree to help in the rescue of Sita. Hanuman leaps into the air, crosses the channel between India and Lanka, and contacts Sita, languishing in captivity in the Asoka gardens of the evil Ravana.

Rama, Lakshman, and their allies — the Vanaar soldiers, along with the loyal Hanuman — invade Lanka. In several battles, tilting seemingly decisively one way or the other, scenes are drawn in which Rama is agonisingly close to defeat: on one occasion his death is suggested. An atmosphere

of high drama is sustained brilliantly; one's emotional and moral susceptibilities are constantly drawn out. And Hanuman's loyalty to Rama is unimpeachable. When Lakshman is gravely wounded, Hanuman flies north, to the hill of herbs, in search of curative plants. Pressed for time, he uproots the whole mountain, holding it aloft in his palm, as he flies back to the battle-field in Lanka. Lakshman is saved; and he resumes the battle.

Indra, the King of Gods, lends Rama his own chariot for use in his fight against Ravana. The evil king of the Rakshas is soon killed; and Sita is liberated. But the reunion is painful: Rama is cruelly insensitive; he questions her chastity, and the implications for his throne, were he to take her back after she has been touched by a Raksha.

Sita affirms her chastity, but in order to vindicate herself, she jumps into the fire and is apparently consumed by it. But with Agni, the God of Fire, at her side, she emerges unscathed, and Agni addresses Rama:

Courted oft by royal Ravan in the forest far and lone,
True to wedded troth and virtue Sita thought of thee alone,

Pure is she in thought and action, pure and stainless, true and meek,
I, the witness of all actions, thus my sacred mandate speak!

Rama's doubts are dispelled, his agony assuaged; and he also, proclaims Sita's purity, showing remorse as he embraces her:

'Ravana in his pride and passion conquered not a faithful wife,
For like ray of sun unsullied is a righteous woman's life,

Be the wide world now a witness, — pure and stainless is my dame,
Rama shall not leave his consort till he leaves his righteous fame!'

In his tears the contrite Rama clasped her in a soft embrace,
And the fond forgiving Sita in his bosom hid her face!¹⁴⁶

The darkness lifts; the reconciliation is complete. Rama, Sita, Lakshman, and Hanuman, and their entourage board an air-borne, golden chariot for Ayodhya, where, after fourteen years of exile and pain, Rama ascends his throne, amidst a flood of joy and rampant celebrating. *Ram Raj*, the rule of Rama, begins: it is indeed a Golden Age, for there is happiness, love, honesty, truth, justice, and plenty — a time of good health, when 'Mothers wailed not in their anguish for their babes'. The Golden Age is heaven on earth:

And 'tis told by ancient sages, during Rama's happy reign,
Death untimely, dire diseases, came not to his subject men,

Widows wept not in their sorrow for their lord's untimely lost,
Mothers wailed not in their anguish for their babes by Yama crost,

Robbers, cheats, and gay deceivers tempted not with lying word,
Neighbour loved his righteous neighbour and the people loved their lord!

Trees their ample produce yielded as returning seasons went,
And the earth in grateful gladness never failing harvest lent,

Rains descended in their season, never came the blighting gale,
Rich in crop and rich in pasture was each soft and smiling vale,

Loom and anvil gave their produce and the tilled and fertile soil,
And the nation lived rejoicing in their old ancestral toil.¹⁴⁷

Tulsi Das's *Ramacharitmanasa* concludes at this idyllic point, while Valmiki's original ends with the *Uttara-Kanda* (a supplement), which answers the deep need for pathos in the Indian tradition. It also casts a dark shadow on attitudes to women, in this quintessentially patriarchal, Aryan society, where *pātivratya* (fidelity to husband) is an obsession, clouding out even divine affirmation of Sita's chastity. As R.C. Dutt summarises the *Uttara-Kanda*:

The deep chord of suspicion still hung on the fame of Sita, and the people of Ayodhya made reflections on the conduct of their king, who had taken back into his house a woman who had lived in the palace of Ravana. Rama gave way to the opinion of the people, and he sent away his loving and faithful Sita to live in the forests once more.¹⁴⁸

Sita is pregnant, and she gives birth to two sons in the hermitage of Valmiki, the reputed author of the epic. Several years later, Sita is brought back to the palace at Ayodhya. Rama again asks her to prove her purity, before a large assembly of dignitaries, so that he may get his subjects' approval for her return. But Sita is broken by the cruel, lingering, dark suspicion; she does not submit to another degrading test. She asks the earth, whence she came, to take her back. And the earth yawns and takes her suffering child into her bosom. The *Uttara-Kanda* concludes morosely:

Gods and men proclaim her virtue! But fair Sita is no more,
Lone is Rama's loveless bosom and his days of bliss are o'er!¹⁴⁹

This latter part, which seems to underline the duty of the Kshatriya, the ruler to his people above everything, remains an unsavoury episode; and has caused much discomfort to liberal Hindus. It is often suggested that the *Uttara-Kanda* is an interpolation of unknown authorship. This notwithstanding, it suggests a permanent undercurrent of jealousy, and a basic lack of faith in the honesty of women among the best of men. Professor S.N. Vyas's observation on the perception of women in the age of the *Ramayana* corroborates this assessment. He writes:

..... woman was generally treated as a sort of property, the owner having naturally the authority to do what he liked with her Like property, woman had to be constantly protected and guarded; complete independence was never her right Since continuity of the family line was considered to be the main object of taking a wife, it was a husband's duty to guard his wife carefully; for not well-guarded, she might bring disgrace to the family.¹⁵⁰

And even in the Valmiki *Ramayana*, Vyas argues, there is no room for the woman to exercise her free will: 'The first refuge of a woman is her husband, second the son, third the relations; no fourth she has'.

It is a remarkable achievement by Tulsi Das that his Hindi version of the *Ramayana*, the *Ramacharitmanasa*,¹⁵¹ removes the stubborn taint on Sita's chastity. He adopts a device, taken from the *Adhyatma*, a later Sanskrit version of Valmiki's work, in which Ravana does not kidnap the real Sita: she seeks refuge in the fire; a 'shadow' Sita is abducted by the demon-king of the Rakshas. The reader is not aware of this until the real Sita emerges from the fire, after her 'liberation'. In this way, Tulsi Das sustains a powerful dramatic effect throughout the poem; and one's sympathy for Sita is retained, although it is mediated by fears for her purity. Tulsi's rendition is very successful; it is also humane: it absolves Sita of any taint on her character. An irreproachably pure Sita emerges. It is this inviolable Sita that endures in the Hindu imagination. Sudhir Kakar observes:

For both men and women in Hindu society, the ideal woman is personified by Sita, the quintessence of wifely devotion From earliest childhood, a Hindu has heard Sita's legend recounted on any number of sacral and secular occasions; seen the central episodes enacted in folk plays like the Ram Lila; heard her qualities extolled in devotional songs; and absorbed the ideal feminine identity she incorporates through the many everyday metaphors and similes that are associated with her name. Thus, 'She is as pure as Sita' denotes chastity in a woman, and 'She is a second Sita', the appreciation of a woman's uncomplaining self-sacrifice.¹⁵²

Frank Whaling argues that Tulsi Das's composition absolves Rama also of any corroding and corrupting doubts about Sita's purity. In the end, no moral ambivalences linger because the possibility of defilement does not arise; but the odium for the Rakshas is not diminished. Moreover, by expunging the controversial *Uttara-Kanda* from his *Ramacharitmanasa*, Tulsi Das removes the possibility of implicating Rama in the unconscionable second banishment of Sita. As Whaling says: 'Tulsi's Rama is a more satisfying moral character, and therefore his human aspects are more appealing'.¹⁵³ It is Tulsi's Rama which claimed the hearts of the indentured Indians and their descendants in British Guiana.

Tulsi Das's Rama is a concrete moral entity; it is human, and accessible. At the same time, he elevates Rama to the position of supreme deity: He becomes God. The name 'Rama' itself, independent of Rama as man or God, exerts the power of redemption: all who chant it could be saved.¹⁵⁴ 'Ram! Ram!' was the common expression of greeting among the indentured labourers in British Guiana.

Because of Tulsi's devotion to Rama, Hanuman, his monkey-face, faithful disciple of the Vanaar clan, assumes a towering presence in the *Ramacharitmanasa*. Hanuman epitomises duty, loyalty, devotion.¹⁵⁵ But throughout the work, the human dimension of Rama, the King of Ayodhya, also remains anchored in the human condition, subject to the daily vicissitudes of living. He is a benevolent ruler, and more: His rule, *Ram Raj*, is the Golden Age.¹⁵⁶

For the people of the United Provinces, for the indentureds as well, the story of Rama, while retaining its divine character, could also be claimed as a part of their own, real history.¹⁵⁷ Ayodhya, for example, is in Fyzabad District, the home of many immigrants to British Guiana. Several other places in the *Ramayana* are revered, living places of pilgrimage in the region.¹⁵⁸ Past and present, myth and reality are all intertwined, producing a sustaining, ahistorical sense of inviolable permanence, of sacred cohesion.

In the United Provinces, in the 19th century (as well as today), the story of the *Ramayana* was transmitted to the people in the villages through the *Ram Lila* festival. These were plays, based on the main episodes in the *Ramayana* of the Tulsi Das, performed over several days. Every village had its *Ram Lila*. The actors who played Rama, Sita, Lakshman, Hanuman etc., were young Brahmans. Brockington says that even today, in northern India, these actors are regarded as embodiments of the deities, and are worshipped as such. He adds: 'The whole thing is as much a religious ceremony as a dramatic performance, as well as having a significant role in the transmission of faith in Rama among the illiterate masses'¹⁵⁹

On the plantations and in the villages of British Guiana, the *Ram Lila* was very popular. It certainly helped to strengthen the influence of the *Ramayana*; it also humanised the main characters of the work. As Suchita Ramdin points out, the human dimension of these central characters makes them accessible to the simplest folk in Mauritius. (This is equally true of British Guiana). She observes:

..... the unsophisticated folk have their own sets of beliefs which is in no way based on any philosophical reflection about the universe or its problems. The ordinary peasant is the least bothered about such philosophical reflections. What matters to him are the facts and troubles of life While most of the other gods presented themselves as uncommon and extraordinary, Rama and Sita became closer to the common man by living a life full of struggles and hardships.¹⁶⁰

The indentureds could possess these characters of the *Ramayana*. Rama, in particular, by never deviating from the path of virtue, devotion, honesty; by a tenacious pursuit of his perceived duty in the most difficult conditions, lifts human-kind above worldly frailties, to the level of the divine. Sita's self-abnegation — her subordination of personal needs, the expression of her character through her loyalty and devotion to her husband — embodies what is most admirable in the Hindu woman. And in a patriarchal society, where the right to define was a prerogative of the male, women took to such conceptions of themselves without fuss. Sita embodied the ideals of piety, endurance, and devotion. As Romesh C. Dutt argues: 'The creative imagination of the Hindus has conceived no loftier and holier character than Sita; the literature of the world has not produced a higher ideal of womanly love, womanly truth, and womanly devotion'.¹⁶¹

In British Guiana, this ideal of womanhood survived; and women, in spite of their paucity, did not disappoint. They generally settled into stable family relationships; they laboured hard in the fields and in the home; they contributed greatly to the cultural and material achievements of the community. The Sita ideal still runs deep in the Indo-Guyanese tradition.

But the *Ramayana* also memorialises the ideal of brotherly love, epitomised by Lakshman's loyalty to Rama, throughout their fourteen years in exile: he is always prepared to walk that extra mile. The lesson was not lost upon the *jahajis*, the shipmates, after they had survived the crossing. And Hanuman's magnanimity, his super-human ability to fly, to skip over oceans, to literally lift mountains to procure the curative herbs, had special resonances for the indentureds.¹⁶² It was a metaphor for the transcendence of the mundane: the rising above the sordidness and consuming pettiness of daily living; the conquest of darkness, symbolised by Ravana and the Rakshas.

In British Guiana, this conception of Ravana fed a deep fear of the Blacks; especially a dread of their supposed sexual prowess. In 1955, Skinner observed that 'East Indians often hesitate to invite black men to their homes because they don't quite trust the black men with their wives. I overheard an East Indian telling a black man [that] they call them "Ravan" the lustful, curly-haired King of Ceylon, who kidnapped the beautiful and chaste Sita, the wife of Rama'¹⁶³

Their contact with the Blacks also fell within an area of darkness. The *Ramayana* of Tulsi Das, however, ends with the rule of Rama, the Golden Age, the age of light. The absence of poverty and pain, petty jealousies, disease, hunger and death, during *Ram Raj*, was the very antithesis of life in 19th century eastern United Provinces and western Bihar. The immense appeal of the former is understandable: it offered a flight from the meanness and meagreness of a bare existence; it was cathartic.

Those who experienced a real flight, those who went overseas to British Guiana and elsewhere, probably wished to forget the bleak, immediate past — to erase the pain of flight, the severing of family ties, the abandonment of traditional duties; to erase the guilt. The *Ramayana*, with its powerful theme of Rama's banishment, answered the void created by the loss of the familiar, however dark and stultifying. As the Indo-Fijian literary critic, Vijay Mishra argues:

Both Trinidad and Fiji (one could add to them Mauritius, Guyana etc.) easily become the forest of Dandak in the *Ramayana*, a temporary state from which Rama and Sita would some day return. It was a perfect structure and Indians in Fiji responded to it with enthusiasm. It also ameliorated any severe psychological pressures at work in the society; it was, in one way, an escape which transcended men as well as gods.¹⁶⁴

This probably explains why so much of the comparatively recent past remains a blank — life in India, the reasons for leaving, indentureship, etc. Because the indentureds wished to forget so much of that bleak past which evoked guilt and caused pain, a mythical construct was created. That is why, as Mishra suggests, the entire blame for 'banishment' was placed on the infamous *arkatis*,¹⁶⁵ a shadowy, folk figure of incomparable notoriety. It absolved them of the guilt for making a complete break with that recent past.

Jayawardena suggests that because the Indians in British Guiana have retained no direct contact with India, their conception of it derived from the *Ramayana*, and the hazy, eclectic recollections extracted from the indentureds, India is something of a 'mythical' land. And because it exists primarily in the imagination, he says, their notion of India is susceptible of manipulation in order to fit specific exigencies.¹⁶⁶

The distant, mythological past of the *Ramayana*, even in India, has a greater immediacy, a deeper actual and psychological presence, than the recent past. A sense of history does not run deep in the

Hindu tradition. In British Guiana, to the indentureds, the distant past of the *Ramayana*, of *Ram Raj*, was safe; it was idyllic; it was remote from the sordid, personal, recent past. It was recorded. It survives. And, as Jerome Bruner says of 'mythologically instructed' societies, there exists 'a corpus of images and models that provide the pattern to which the individual may aspire'.¹⁶⁷ The *Ramayana* of Tulsī Das has provided that legacy to the Indians in British Guiana. Historical knowledge is sparse and often incorrect; but the legacy of the *Ramayana* thrives: it instructs and inspires. Many of the work-a-day skills and attitudes, drawn from the Indian heritage, blossomed in the new, freer environment; these eased the pain of adaptation on the sugar plantations, and made survival and achievement possible, especially after the end of indentureship on 15 April 1920.¹⁶⁸

Notes

1. For a scholarly interpretation of the events of 1842, see James Rose, 'The Strike of 1842', *Release*, Vols. 8 & 9, (1979). He argues: 'Not only was the newly freed population capable of combining in a determined manner to challenge the mystique of the plantation system, but the utter contempt with which this was successfully achieved was a frightening experience. This experience coupled with the arrogance of an emerging peasantry and the unreliability and inadequacy of an indifferent labour force strongly questioned the concept of who was superior and who was not on the plantation. To save itself, the plantocracy had to devise a way to free itself of its dependence on a Black creole labour force' (p.45).
2. For an account of the tentative character of indentureship from 1834 to the early 1850s, and the diverse sources of indentured labourers, see K.O. Laurence, *Immigration into the West Indies in the 19th Century* (Aylesbury, Bucks: Ginn and Co., 1971), pp.7-26; and Brian L. Moore, *Race, Power and Social Segmentation in Colonial Society: Guyana after Slavery, 1838-1891* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1987), pp.42-46.
3. Raymond T. Smith, 'Some Social Characteristics of Indian Immigrants to British Guiana', *Population Studies*, Vol. 13, Pt. 1, (1959); K.L. Gillion, 'The Sources of Indian Emigration to Fiji', *Population Studies*, Vol. 10, Pt. 2, (1956); and his *Fiji's Indian Migrants: A History to the End of Indenture in 1920* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962); Brij V. Lal, *Girmitiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians* (Canberra: The Journal of Pacific History, 1983).
4. There are 188,917 individual embarkation slips, bound in 358 volumes, with the name of the ship and the year of the voyage embossed on the spine. (These volumes are in the National Archives, Guyana). Each slip has the name of the immigrant, his ship's number, any peculiar identification mark, his village of origin, as well as his tahsil (sub-district) and his district. It also states his place of registration, and the nearest of kin, if any, accompanying him. The estate to which he was sent is pencilled in. A study of these records, such as Lal's on Fiji, is long overdue.
5. Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], p.131.
6. *Ibid.*, pp.44-45.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Laurence, *op. cit.*, [1971], p.46. See also Robert J. Moore, 'East Indians and Negroes in British Guiana, 1838-1880', D. Phil. Thesis, University of Sussex, 1970, p.102.
9. Steven A. Vertovec, 'Hinduism and Social Change in Village Trinidad', D. Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1987, Table 2:6.
10. Kusha Haraksingh, 'Control and Resistance among Overseas Indian Workers: A Study of Labour on the Sugar Plantations of Trinidad', *The Journal of Caribbean History*, Vol. 14, (1981), p. 15.
11. Smith, *op. cit.*, [1959], p.39.
12. Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], pp.69-70.
13. H.R. Nevill, (comp. and ed.), *District Gazetteer of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Vol. XXXII — Basti* (Allahabad: Government Press, United Provinces, 1907), pp.76,102.
14. *Ibid.*, p.102.
15. *Ibid.*, pp.102-103.
16. William Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, Vol II* (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1896), p.354.
17. *Ibid.*, pp.293-294.
18. Nevill, *op. cit.*, [1907], p.76.
19. *Ibid.*, p.108.
20. H.R. Nevill, (comp. and ed.), *District Gazetteer of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Vol XLIV — Gonda* (Nainital: Government Press, United Provinces, 1905), p.67.
21. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol. XXIV — The United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), pp.193-194.
22. Nevill, *op. cit.*, [1905], p.67.
23. William Crooke, *The North-Western Provinces of India: Their History, Ethnology, and Administration* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1972 [1897]), p.330.
24. E.A.H. Blunt, 'The Structure of the Indian People', in *Social Service in India: An Introduction to Some Social and Economic Problems of the Indian People*, Blunt, (ed.), (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1938), pp.64-65.
25. Nevill, *op. cit.*, [1905], p.68.
26. H.R. Nevill, (comp. and ed.), *District Gazetteer of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Vol. XXIX — Ghazipur* (Allahabad: Government Press, United Provinces, 1909), p.84.
27. *Ibid.*, pp.95-96, 118.

28. *Ibid.*, pp.86-87, 95-96, 118.
29. *Ibid.*, pp.84-85, 118.
30. *Ibid.*, pp.95-96.
31. E.A.H. Blunt, 'The Environment and the Distribution of the Indian People' in Blunt, *op. cit.*, [1938], pp.30-31.
32. E.A.H. Blunt, *The Caste System of Northern India with Special Reference to the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p.266.
33. Crooke, *op. cit.*, [1972], p.207.
34. Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], pp.71 and 74. See also Brij V. Lal, 'Fiji Girmitiyas: The Background to Banishment', in *Rama's Banishment: A Centenary Tribute to the Fiji Indians, 1879-1979*, Vijay Mishra, (ed.), (Auckland, N.Z.: Heinemann, 1979); and Chandra Jayawardena, 'Social Contours of an Indian Labour Force during the Indenture Period in Fiji', in Mishra, *ibid.*, [1979].
35. Basdeo Mangru, *Benevolent Neutrality: Indian Government Policy and Labour Migration to British Guiana, 1854-1884* (London: Hansib, 1987).
36. *Ibid.*, p.58.
37. *Ibid.*, p.59.
38. *Ibid.*, p.63.
39. *Ibid.*, p.101.
40. *Ibid.*, p.58.
41. *Ibid.*, p.59.
42. *Ibid.*, p.92.
43. Crooke, *op. cit.*, [1972], p.206.
44. L.S.S. O'Malley later observed the tendency among sections of the low castes to improve their social status by leaving their 'ancestral calling' and adopting a more 'respectable' job: 'There is a particular tendency to change handiwork for trade Or a clean sweep may be made and an entirely new means of livelihood adopted, such as agriculture but unfortunately it does not remove or mitigate the stigma of birth in places where, and so long as, the origin of the men in question is known'. See his *Indian Caste Customs* (London: Curzon Press, 1974 [1932]), pp.126-127. (For the enterprising low caste person, the prospect of advancement, away from the ancestral village, would have been alluring).
45. Nevill, *op. cit.*, [1909], pp.78-79.
46. Anand A. Yang, 'Peasants on the Move: A Study of Internal Migration in India', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol.10, No.1, (1979), p.50.
47. Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], p.77.
48. Nevill, *op. cit.*, [1909], pp.95-96.
49. See note 47.
50. Ira Klein, 'Population and Agriculture in Northern India, 1872-1921', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.8, No.2, (1974), p.197.
51. Crooke, *op. cit.*, [1972], p.321.
52. *Ibid.*, p.274.
53. Nevill, *op. cit.*, [1907], p.108.
54. Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], pp.75-76.
55. *Ibid.*, p.82.
56. P.J. Musgrave, 'Indian Rural Society: Aspects of the Structure of Rural Society in the United Provinces, 1860-1921', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1976, pp.235-236.
57. Blunt, *op. cit.*, [1938], p.35.
58. Jayawardena, *op. cit.*, [1979], pp.54,60.
59. Blunt, *op. cit.*, [1938], p.35.
60. Nevill, *op. cit.*, [1905], pp.28-29.
61. Nevill, *op. cit.*, [1907], p.31.
62. *Ibid.*, pp.31-32.
63. Nevill, *op. cit.*, [1909], p.24.
64. Klein, *op. cit.*, [1974], p.203.
65. *Census of India, 1901, Vol.XVI: N-W (North Western) Provinces and Oudh, Part I—Report* (Allahabad: Government Press, 1902), p.44.

66. Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], p.64.
67. Yang, *op. cit.*, [1979], p.56.
68. See note 65.
69. See note 66.
70. Yang, *op. cit.*, [1979], p.57.
71. Nevill, *op. cit.*, [1905], p.68.
72. Smith, *op. cit.*, [1959], p.35.
73. Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], p.67.
74. See note 65.
75. Mangru, *op. cit.*, [1987], p.92.
76. Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], p.83.
77. Mangru, *op. cit.*, [1987], p.68.
78. Quoted in Gillion, *op. cit.*, [1962], pp.41-42.
79. Crooke, *op. cit.*, [1972], p.328.
80. Crooke, *op. cit.*, [1896], pp.189-190. The Dhobi and the Dom, because of their caste occupation, were ranked lower than the Chamars in the United Provinces. Of the Dhobi, Crooke wrote: 'One of his chief tasks is to wash the clothing of women after child-birth, and his association with blood of this kind, which is particularly abhorred, stamps him as specially impure' (*ibid.*, p.288). O'Malley observed: 'No work is more abhorred than that connected with dead bodies, human and animal the Doms who perform menial work connected with the last offices to the dead are among the lowest of the low' (*op. cit.*, [1974], p.129). Smith found some Dhobis and Doms, as well as other menial castes, such as Dusads, Bhangis (sweepers), and Khatiks (pig-rearers), in his sample of indentureds to British Guiana (*op. cit.*, [1959], p.38).
81. Quoted in Musgrave, *op. cit.*, [1976], p.79.
82. *Ibid.*
83. See note 44.
84. Mangru, *op. cit.*, [1987], pp.96-97.
85. Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in Guyana* (London: The Author, 1970), p.144.
86. Smith, *op. cit.*, [1959], p.35. The various percentages are calculated from Table 1.
87. Gillion, *op. cit.*, [1956], pp.150-151.
88. Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], pp.102-104.
89. Quoted in Lal, *ibid.*, p.103.
90. Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p.130.
91. Gillion, *op. cit.*, [1962], p.57.
92. Mangru, *op. cit.*, [1987], p.97.
93. Basdeo Mangru, 'The Sex-Ratio Disparity and its Consequences under the Indenture in British Guiana,' in *India in the Caribbean*, David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo, (eds.), (London: Hansib, 1987), p.213.
94. Rhoda Reddock, 'Indian Women and Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago, 1845-1917: Freedom Denied', *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol.32, Nos.3 & 4, (1986), pp.30-31.
95. Rhoda Reddock, 'Women, Labour and Struggle in 20th Century Trinidad and Tobago', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 1984, p.167.
96. Rosemarijn Hoefte, 'Female Indentured Labour in Suriname: For Better or for Worse', *Boletín de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, No.42, (1987), p.57.
97. P.C. Emmer, 'The Great Escape: The Migration of Female Indentured Servants from British India to Surinam [sic], 1873-1916', in *Abolition and its Aftermath: The Historical Context, 1790-1916*, David Richardson, (ed.), (London: Frank Cass, 1985), pp.250-251.
98. *Ibid.*, p.251.
99. P.C. Emmer, 'The Meek Hindu: The Recruitment of Indian Indentured Labourers for Services Overseas, 1870-1916', in *Colonialism and Migration: Indentured Labour Before and After Slavery*, Emmer, (ed.), (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), p.189.
100. *Ibid.*
101. Brij V. Lal, 'Kunti's Cry: Indentured Women on Fiji Plantations', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol.22, No.1, (1985), p.57.

102. *Ibid.*, p.58.
103. Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], p.111.
104. *Ibid.*, p.112.
105. Gillion, *op. cit.*, [1956], p.151.
106. Vertovec, *op. cit.*, [1987], p.31.
107. A recent study shows that since 1975 small cultivators from U.P. and Bihar have been going to Punjab as seasonal, or permanent agricultural labourers. (Many are from the districts of origin of the Guianese indentureds). Poverty and indebtedness remain the principal reasons for migration. Some were victims of the infamous money-lenders who charge extortionate interests, ranging from 30 to 120 per cent per annum, and require 'the pledging of their lands for loans even of one hundred rupees'. Many were recruited by contractors, who, 'collected 350 to 400 rupees per labourer from the employers from the advance wages to labourers as service charges. Under the contract, the employer-farmer did not pay the first two months salary to such labourers'. 75.6 per cent of the U.P. and Bihar migrants were illiterate. See A.K. Gupta, D.R. Arora, and B.K. Aggarwal, 'Sociological Analysis of Migration of Agricultural Labourers from Eastern to North-Western Regions of India', *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol.23, No.4, (1988).
108. Quoted in Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], p.113.
109. Blunt, *op. cit.*, [1938], pp.71, 72-73.
110. Lal, *op. cit.*, [1985], pp.57-58.
111. Crooke, *op. cit.*, [1972], pp.229-230.
112. *Ibid.*, pp.230-231.
113. Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World: A Psycho-analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981, 2nd edn., [1978]), pp.73-74.
114. Lal, *op. cit.*, [1983], p.108.
115. *Ibid.*, p.114.
116. Apart from being a prolific contributor to the vibrant local press of the 1880s — 1890s, H.V.P. Bronkhurst was the author of the following books: *The Origin of the Guyanese Indians* ([Georgetown], Demerara: 'The Colonist' Press, 1881); *The Colony of British Guyana [sic] and its Labouring Population* (London: T. Woolmer, 1883); *The Ancestry or Origin of our East Indian Immigrants; being an Ethnological and Philological Paper* (Georgetown: 'The Argosy' Press, 1886); *Among the Hindus and Creoles of British Guyana [sic]* (London: T. Woolmer, 1888); *A Descriptive and Historical Geography of British Guiana and West India Islands* ([Georgetown], Demerara: The Argosy Press, 1890).
117. Chandra Jayawardena, 'Religious Belief and Social Change: Aspects of the Development of Hinduism in British Guiana', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.8, (1966), p.212.
118. Bronkhurst, *op. cit.*, [1888], p.48; *op. cit.*, [1883], p.286.
119. Jayawardena, *op. cit.*, [1966], p.224.
120. Chandra Jayawardena, *Conflict and Solidarity in a Guianese Plantation* (London: The Athlone Press, 1963), pp.48-49.
121. Kusha Haraksingh sees the 'enduring ties of jahaji bhai' and the transcendence of traditional caste, and even religious, divisions as a demonstration of 'how prepared the community was to devise new approaches to suit new circumstances'. See his 'Structure, Process and Indian Culture in Trinidad', *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol.7, No.1, (1988), p.121.
122. Vertovec, *op. cit.*, [1987], pp.102-103.
123. Bronkhurst, *op. cit.*, [1888], p.27.
124. Henry Kirke, *Twenty-Five Years in British Guiana* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co., 1898), p.342.
125. Subramani, (ed.), *The Indo-Fijian Experience* (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1979), p.179.
126. Lakshmi Mansingh and Ajai Mansingh, 'Indian Heritage in Jamaica', *Jamaica Journal*, Vol.10, Nos.2-4, (1976), p.13; Ajai Mansingh and Dharendra K. Garg, 'East Indians in Jamaica', in *Indians in the Caribbean*, I.J. Bahadur Singh, (ed.), (London: Oriental Universities Press, 1987), pp.329-332; Noorkumar Mahabir, 'East Indians in Grenada: A Study in Absorption', in [Bahadur Singh], *ibid.*, p.375. Mahabir argues: 'The absence of Indian priests (pandits and moulvis) in substantial numbers, who would have administered psychological protection to the flock and as forms of social and cultural resistance, made it easier for the Presbyterian missionaries to carry out their work of conversion'.
127. Vertovec, *op. cit.*, [1987], p.135.
128. Bronkhurst, *op. cit.*, [1883], p.292.
129. Bronkhurst, *op. cit.*, [1888], p.72; *op. cit.*, [1883], p.291.
130. Jayawardena, *op. cit.*, [1966], p.228.
131. *Ibid.*, p.229; Ravinda K. Jain, 'Freedom Denied?: Indian Women and Indentureship', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXI, No.7, (15 February 1986), p.316.

132. Percival Spear, *India, Pakistan, and the West* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958, 3rd edn.), p.57; Jayawardena, *op. cit.*, [1966].
133. Elliott P. Skinner, 'Ethnic Interaction in a British Guiana Rural Community: A Study in Secondary Acculturation and Group Dynamics', Ph. D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1955, p.240.
134. Vertovec, *op. cit.*, [1987], pp. 131-135; see also Kusha Haraksingh, 'The Hindu Experience in Trinidad', in Bahadur Singh, *op. cit.*, [1987].
135. Jayawardena, *op. cit.*, [1966], p.229.
136. For aspects of the ritual elaboration of Guianese Hinduism, see Raymond T. Smith and Chandra Jayawardena, 'Hindu Marriage Customs in British Guiana', *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol.7, No.2, (1958); and Mohammad A. Rauf, *Indian Village in Guyana: A Study of Cultural Change and Ethnic Identity* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), Chapter 7.
137. Jim Wilson has noted the 'entertainment and enjoyment' value of Hinduism in Fiji. He observes: 'In Hinduism a great deal of religious and moral teaching is mediated through story and drama and through song and ritual. Unless these stories and activities were enjoyed, rather than endured as a duty, it is doubtful whether people would participate enough for this method to work the dominant element is enjoyment. This enjoyment of religion cannot but increase knowledge of, and probably influence by, the religious tradition'. See his 'Text and Context in Fijian Hinduism: Uses of Religion', *Religion*, Vol.5, Pt.1, (1975), pp.54-55.
138. Vertovec, *op. cit.*, [1987], p.133; Jim Wilson, 'Some Glimpses of Hinduism in Fiji', Conference on South Asians Overseas, University of Oxford, 1987, (mimeo.), p.4.
139. Bronkurst, *op. cit.*, [1888], p.58.
140. *Ibid.*, p.52.
141. *Ibid.*
142. Bronkurst, *op. cit.*, [1890], p.80.
143. Edward Shils, *Tradition* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), p.91.
144. The synopsis rendered here is based on the original version of the *Ramayana* by Valmiki, condensed into English verse by the distinguished Bengali scholar and administrator, Romesh C. Dutt (1848-1909). It was originally published in Everyman's Library in 1910. The reprint used may be cited thus: Romesh C. Dutt, *The Ramayana and The Mahabharata* (London: Dent, 1978).
145. *Ibid.*, p.38.
146. *Ibid.*, p.140.
147. *Ibid.*, p.142.
148. *Ibid.*, p.146.
149. *Ibid.*, p.152.
150. S.N. Vyas, *India in the Ramayan Age* (Delhi: Atma Ram, 1967), p.104.
151. Tulsi Das (ca. 1532-1623) was born in the United Provinces. He started his version of the *Ramayana* in 1574, in Ayodhya; and completed it some years later in Varanasi (Benares).
152. Kakar, *op. cit.*, [1981], pp.63-64.
153. Frank Whaling, *The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rama* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), p.254.
154. J.L. Brockington, *The Sacred Thread: Hinduism in its Continuity and Diversity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), p.170.
155. *Ibid.*, p.169.
156. See note 153.
157. Vyas, *op. cit.*, [1967], p.9.
158. Dutt, *op. cit.*, [1978], p.32.
159. Brockington, *op. cit.*, [1981], p.171.
160. Suchita Ramdin, 'Folk Religion of the Hindu Immigrant: A Case Study', in *Indians Overseas: The Mauritian Experience*, U. Bissoondoyal, (ed.), (Moka, Mauritius: Mahatma Gandhi Institute, 1984), p.109. See also Jim Wilson, 'Fijian Hinduism', in Mishra, *op. cit.*, [1979]; and his *op. cit.*, [1987].
161. Dutt, *op. cit.*, [1987], p.160.
162. See Wilson, *op. cit.*, [1987]; and *op. cit.* [1979], p.92, for the importance of the *Hanuman Chalisa* among Hindus in Fiji.
163. Skinner, *op. cit.*, [1955], pp.184-185.
164. Vijay Mishra, 'Epilogue: Rama Returns', in Mishra, *op. cit.*, [1979], p.140.
165. *Ibid.*, p.7.
166. Chandra Jayawardena, 'Culture and Ethnicity in Guyana and Fiji', *Man*, Vol.15, (1980), pp.433-434.

167. Quoted in Kakar, *op. cit.*, [1981], p.64.
168. *The Daily Argosy*, 2 April 1920, reported that in response to a resolution passed by the British Guiana East Indian Association on 12 March 1920, that all indentures be cancelled before new immigration from India was started, the Government was bringing the system to an end on 15 April. *The Daily Argosy*, 20 April 1920, carried the following brief item on this historic occasion.: 'There was great rejoicing among the East Indians of the County of Berbice on Friday last when they were informed that their period of indenture had expired and they were free. To many of them the news was too good to be true and it was not until they were told by their more intelligent brethren that they were really free, that they believed it. The day was given up to feasting and drinking

CHAPTER 2

ADAPTATION, RESISTANCE, AND SURVIVAL IN A HARSH ENVIRONMENT: INDIANS ON THE PLANTATIONS OF BRITISH GUIANA, 1919-1929

It is well known.... that the wage which suffices to maintain the East Indian in comparative comfort would mean a starvation pittance to the black man. The latter's civilisation is essentially British in its characteristics. The negro has been christianised and educated in accordance with British ideas and conceptions; his tastes on food and clothing approximate to those of the British, and he has been taught to think and to act in harmony with the particular tradition of which he is a product. On the other hand, the Coolie on the sugar estates is content for the most part with a loin-cloth and a frugal diet consisting chiefly of rice. The rate of wages, therefore, upon which an East Indian immigrant can subsist would be inadequate for the need of the African race.

Memorandum submitted by the People's Association to the Sanderson Committee, 1909, quoted in Peter D. Fraser, 'The Immigration Issue in British Guiana, 1903-1913: The Economic and Constitutional Origins of Racist Politics in Guyana', *Journal of Caribbean History*, Vol.14, (1981), p.37.

I

The Natural Constraints Of The Coastal Environment

In the 1920s, about 80 per cent of the population on the sugar plantations of British Guiana were Indians. By 1921, 68 per cent of all Indians were born in the colony; by 1931, this had increased to 81 per cent. About 44 per cent of them lived on the plantations in the 1920s;¹ but much ignorance persists with regard to the character of plantation life. Assertions that it was marked by unremitting oppression, moral degradation, and despair have become axiomatic; they remain unexamined. Partial truths are alluring; they also distort.

The Indians on the plantations used a variety of instruments to humanise their lives. As was seen earlier, their rich religious and cultural heritage, adapted to the new environment, gave them a sense of self-worth; it also infused a sense of purpose. In spite of the harshness of indentureship, they exploited a wide range of ecological niches on the plantations in order to supplement their fluctuating, often inadequate, wages: Indian men, women, and children worked to maintain a base for the construction of a stable family life. These efforts also contributed to the more substantial

achievements of the Indians off the plantations, in the villages and the urban areas. That they survived in the ecologically hazardous, malarial, coastal environment of British Guiana was an achievement; that they made considerable progress, considering their circumstances in India, was a testimony to their industry, thrift, ingenuity, and deep sense of familial responsibility.

The coastal environment of the colony was subversive of the efforts of the small cultivator. Yet over 90 per cent of the population of Guyana still lives on this narrow coastal strip, which comprises about 1,750 square miles, or a mere 4 per cent of the total area of 83,000 square miles. Eighty per cent of the country is under tropical rain forest, with soils like the Amazon Basin, which have been severely leached. Veined with a labyrinth of rivers, tributaries, and creeks, this substantial area is not amenable to commercial agriculture. About 16 per cent is savannah grasslands of poor soils, located in the interior,² between the rain forests and the south-western frontier with Brazil. The best agricultural lands are found on the coastland; but even here, there are many hazards. *Guyana is no El Dorado.*

The narrow coastal belt varies in width from about 10 miles in the county of Essequibo, in the west, to about 40 miles on the Corentyne, in the county of Berbice, in the east. (Cultivation rarely extends beyond 10 miles from the coast).³ Even on the coastal strip, there is differential soil fertility. There are three main types of soil — a preponderance of clays and rich alluvium (silt); bands of sandy or 'reef' lands, possibly 'remnant beaches', running parallel to, and often inland from, the coastline; and a 'pegasse' zone, where the clays and silt merge into clay and peat, towards the inner margin of the coastal belt. The latter tends to become pure peat under swamp conditions. It is rich in organic matter, highly acidic, with high levels of aluminium salts. The humus content is very high. The 'pegasse' soil shrinks when it is drained; the level of the land is lowered; and it lends itself readily to combustion during prolonged dry spells. It is not naturally suited to agriculture.⁴ The sandy 'reefs' are especially suited to the cultivation of coconuts and vegetables; these are the sites of several villages on the Corentyne.

The coastland clays and silt provide the prime agricultural lands, comprising 80 per cent of the coastal belt. They extend inland for about 1 to 2 miles on the Essequibo Coast, about 5 miles on the West and East Coast Demerara, and 10 miles or more on the Corentyne Coast, in Berbice.⁵ The coastal clays are primarily alluvial deposits, (originating in the upper reaches of the Amazon), which

are pushed out into the South Atlantic by the mighty river, and subsequently transported back towards the littoral of the Guianas by the South Equatorial Current. The silt is thus deposited from east to west. This accounts for the greater width of the clay deposits on the Corentyne, compared with the deposits on the Essequibo Coast, in the far west: the coastland tapers off as the supply of Amazonian silt weakens towards the north-western coast of Guyana, in Essequibo.⁶

The coastland clay is low in organic content, generally alkaline or neutral in composition; and is deficient in nitrogen and phosphorous. It is saline near the coast, especially where the original vegetation — mangrove and courida — remains. Their roots aid coastal accretion: the marine deposits, prior to reclamation, have a high magnesium salts component. The coastland is generally below sea-level, varying from 6 feet below to sea-level. The average elevation is a mere .46 inches.⁷ Sugar-cane and wet rice thrive on the alluvial clay; but drainage and irrigation are a vital prerequisite for sustained agriculture

This impermeable band of clay suffers both from its flatness and its being below sea-level. The average annual rainfall between 1880 and 1925 was 91.6 inches.⁸ Floods were endemic. This has necessitated the construction of embankments to keep out the sea in front, and the deluge from the 'pegasse' backlands during the heavy rains. The coastal belt also demands an intricate and expensive system of drainage and irrigation. (This process is termed 'empoldering', from the Dutch, *polder*, an area reclaimed from the swamp, or the sea). The maintenance of this complex hydraulic system requires systematic management. The possibility of the land reverting to swamp never diminishes.

Ever since the early efforts by the Dutch to emploter the coastland with slave labour, in the eighteenth century, planters have had to contend with marine erosion of vast sections of the coast; while periodic accretions of Amazonian silt clogged the estuaries of drainage channels taking surplus water to the sea. Every thirty years or so, 'nodes, or points of attack', at intervals of about 20 miles, are subject to erosion; between these 'nodes', accretion takes place. Thick, heavy silt accumulates, damming back the excess water and flooding out the cultivated areas. (The early coastal settlers were ignorant of this mercurial process). Both the sea and the deluge from the peaty backlands contrived to make agriculture a precarious venture.⁹

In the graphic language of historian, James Rodway (1848-1927): '... every acre at present in cultivation has been the scene of a struggle with the sea in front and the flood behind. As a result of this arduous labour during two centuries, a narrow strip of land along the coast has been rescued from the mangrove swamp and kept under cultivation by an elaborate system of dams and dykes'.¹⁰

How was this epic struggle for each acre won? It was, indeed, a labyrinthine process. Probably only the Dutch, with their incomparable tradition of land reclamation, could have undertaken this monumental task. An idea of the mechanics of empoldering is indispensable for the study of Guyanese history;¹¹ it also goes a far way in accounting for the general fear which the north-eastern coast of South America engendered among colonists.

The first task in reclaiming an estate was to defend it from the sea. A front-dam or sea-dam was thrown up parallel to the sea, with dirt obtained by digging two trenches parallel, and adjacent to, the dam under construction. A *koker* or sluice, which served as an outlet to the sea was erected at the centre of the 'sea-dam'.

Two side dams (side-line dams) were then thrown up, extending from the extremities of the sea-dam, parallel to each other. These protected the flanks of the property from the encroaching flood-waters from the 'pegasse' area in the rear. The side-line dams were built with dirt obtained by digging two side-line canals, parallel with, and adjacent to, them. The two side-line dams and canals were extended to the back-dam. This back-dam completed a rectangle, which, as Bonham Richardson notes, resulted 'in each plantation acquiring an elongated rectangular shape with the long axis oriented at right angle to the edge of the ocean'.¹² The back-dam, like the sea-dam, was also penetrated in the centre by a *koker* or sluice. Irrigation water from the backlands could be let into the middle-walk canals during dry spells, or when additional water was required for flood - following the sugar-cane fields. The back-dam also kept out the deluge during the rainy season.

A middle-walk dam, flanked by two middle-walk canals, bisected the rectangular plantations. At intervals, parallel cross canals were dug. These extended at right angles to the middle-walk canals, and were linked to them. The cross canals ran to within a couple of roods (1 Rhymland rood = 12.36 feet) of the side-line canal, leaving a dam-bed between the fields. This facilitated easy movement from one field to another. Fields of between 10 and 12 acres were created. But the task was not complete.

To drain and irrigate these fields, a ditch ('four-foot') was dug in the centre of each field, from the middle-walk to the side-line canal, to accommodate irrigation water stored in the former. Within the field, numerous smaller drainage ditches extended from both sides of the 'four-foot' to within a rood of the cross canals, thus delimiting beds of about a third of a rood wide by 40 to 45 roods long. (The cane was grown on these beds). The 'four-foot' drained into the side-line canal which, in turn, drained into the larger canal taking surplus water to the sea-dam *koker* and the sea.

This is a slightly simplified description of the drainage and irrigation system found on most sugar plantations in British Guiana in the 1920s. It had not changed since the mid-eighteenth century. It was a phenomenal achievement. As Shahabuddeen, who has had an aerial overview of the estates, noted recently: 'One thing which has not changed is the cartographic appearance of the estates.... Geometrical symmetry was a fetish with the Dutch'.¹³ In French Guiana, where the Dutch never settled, the land remained in its tropical fecundity.¹⁴

If this account of Dutch empoldering leaves one in a state of incomprehension, it will have achieved its purpose. In 1949, the Venn Commission dramatised this bewildering aspect of colonisation on the British Guiana coast. They quoted a contemporary source, who observed that 'every square mile of cane cultivation involves the provision of 49 miles of drainage canals and ditches and 16 miles of high level waterways. If these figures are raised to cover the whole area under cane the sum total approaches 5,000 miles'. They noted that in 1947 the cost of maintaining this system was estimated at \$1,350,000, or over \$7 for each ton of sugar produced. And they suggested that the original construction of these artificial waterways must have entailed the moving of at least 100,000,000 tons of soil.¹⁵ Walter Rodney calls up the human dimension in the execution of this massive project. He reflects:

This meant that slaves moved 100 million tons of heavy, water-logged clay with shovel in hand, while enduring conditions of perpetual mud and water.¹⁶

The impervious clay and the heavy rainfall on the flat coastland, which is below sea-level, meant that lands which were not empoldered, or where the intricate hydraulic system had collapsed through neglect, were flooded during the rainy seasons — May-July/December-January. But the texture of the alluvial clay, which tended to compress, becoming hard and solid as masonry during the dry season, as a result of high evaporation and rapid dessication in immediate coastal areas of high salinity, meant that droughts also were common. Alternating floods and droughts, official

indifference to drainage and irrigation, and planters' opposition to the reclamation of non-plantation lands — these were the eternal problems of the small cultivators. And the character of the coastal environment was also injurious to their health. But, even with better finances, it is clear that the execution and maintenance of this expensive hydraulic system could have been undertaken only by a centralised authority, such as the plantations or the government.

This, then, was the environment to which the Indians had to adapt. The ex-slaves found it daunting: it stifled and killed their embryonic farming efforts. The Indians came later; they settled on the land later, in a comparatively free atmosphere. They were not slaves. They came with, and retained, many established, self-sustaining aspects of their religious and material culture. From the eastern U.P. and western Bihar, they brought their ancient proficiency in wet-rice cultivation and water-conservation, cattle-rearing, fishing, fruit and vegetable husbandry as well.

By the 1920s, especially in the villages and in the urban areas, small, but steady, progress was being made. On the plantations, the options were fewer; but it was here, within the interstices of the system, that the Indians of British Guiana were able to evolve strategies which contributed to their achievements both on and off the plantations. In spite of the prolonged depression of the sugar industry in the 1920s, they adapted their rich Indian heritage in order to shape a better life on the plantations. It required immense sacrifices; nothing came easily.

II

Housing on the Plantations: The Obnoxious 'Logies'

I have seen.... the quarters of labourers who have emigrated from India in almost every part of the world; but I do not think I have seen anything quite so bad as these old ranges for the labourers in Demerara.

C.F. Andrews, 'Impressions of British Guiana', (mimeo.), p.36 — C.O.111/689/75141 [1930].

Throughout the 1920s, a substantial number of Indians continued to live on the sugar plantations, primarily in ranges or 'logies', provided rent-free by their employers. In 1913, 66,450 or 50.3 per cent of the Indian population of the colony resided there; while 65,421 or 49.6 per cent lived off the plantations, mainly on land bought by them in villages, often adjacent, or near to, these sugar estates. By 1919, those on the plantations had fallen to 60,686 or 46.3 per cent of the Indian population:

most of these also acquired land in the villages. Between 1920 and 1929, a little over 5,000 left the estates: some moved to the villages; some were repatriated to India. (The total repatriated between 1919 and 1929 was 7,335).¹⁷ By 1928-1929, Indians on the estates had stabilised at about 55,000 or 43 per cent of the Indian population of British Guiana (see Table 2.1).

YEAR	ON ESTATES		OFF ESTATES		TOTAL INDIAN POPULATION
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
1913	66,450	50.3	65,421	49.6	131,871
1919	60,686	46.3	70,168	53.6	130,854
1920	60,744	48.7	63,802	51.2	124,546
1921	58,275	46.6	66,625	53.3	124,900
1922	56,781	45.6	67,557	54.3	124,338
1923	57,185	45.9	67,268	54.0	124,453
1924	56,616	45.3	68,351	54.6	124,967
1925	56,348	45.0	68,858	54.9	125,204
1926	57,125	45.1	69,301	54.8	126,426
1927	56,875	44.7	70,142	55.2	127,017
1928	55,440	43.6	71,524	56.3	126,964
1929	55,445	43.2	72,764	56.7	128,209

SOURCES: C.O. 111/658, O.A.G. (ag.) to Wiseman, s.o., 13 November 1925, encl.; C.O. 114/195, 200, 204, 205A, 207, Reports of the Immigration Agent General, 1925-1929.

Meanwhile, the chronic shortage of women as result of the 40:100 recruitment ratio under indentureship, was being rapidly reduced, on and off the plantations. The proportion of women to men on the estates had increased from 70 to 100 in 1919 to 82 to 100 in 1929. The reduction of the sexual imbalance among estate children was even more impressive: there were about 90 girls to 100 boys in the 1920s. In the villages, because most Indians owned land and had greater possibilities for economic advancement, the woman-man ratio was 86 to 100 by 1926 (see Table 2.2). It is most likely that many estate women were getting married to men in the villages and leaving the plantations.¹⁸ To acquire a plot of land in a village, preferably near to a plantation, was the ambition of every Indian living on the sugar estates.¹⁹ After the depression of sugar prices in 1921-1922, however, fewer were able to do so; but they tried to arrange marriages for their daughters to young men whose families owned land in the villages, and thus had a greater degree of independence of plantation labour.²⁰ The considerable redressing of the sexual imbalance on the estates by the 1920s, had a beneficial effect on the stability of the Indian family; on the quality of life generally.²¹

Table 2.2			
The proportion of Indian women to men, on and off sugar estates, 1919-1929			
	<i>ON ESTATES</i>		<i>OFF ESTATES</i>
<i>Year</i>	<i>Females to Males (adults)</i>	<i>Females to Males (children)</i>	<i>Females to Males (adults)</i>
1919	70 to 100	92 to 100	(not available)
1920	72 to 100	91 to 100	84 to 100
1921	77 to 100	93 to 100	81 to 100
1922	75 to 100	88 to 100	84 to 100
1923	76 to 100	90 to 100	84 to 100
1924	76 to 100	92 to 100	84 to 100
1925	(not available)	(not available)	(not available)
1926	79 to 100	88 to 100	86 to 100
1927	81 to 100	89 to 100	(not available)
1928	81 to 100	89 to 100	do.
1929	82 to 100	91 to 100	do.

SOURCE: C.O. 114/172, 177, 182, 184, 187, 192, 195, 200, 204, 205A, 207, Reports of the Immigration Agent General, 1919-1929.

But the quality of life on the plantations was influenced primarily by the state of the international sugar market. The price of sugar determined the wage-rate and the social conditions. In the 1920s, sugar prices were subject to violent fluctuations: they rose from a low of £12.12s. per ton in 1913, progressively through the War, to £29.16s. in 1919; jumped precipitously to £50.16s. in 1920; then declined continuously from the depression of 1921-1922, with the salutary exception of 1923, slumping to £14.16s. and £12.6s. per ton in 1928 and 1929 respectively. Export revenues declined substantially. In 1920 and 1921, sugar and its by-products yielded nearly \$22 million and \$12 million — 83 and 77 per cent of total export earnings respectively; this dropped to a little over \$7¹/₄ million in 1921; fluctuated between \$7 and \$9 million after 1924; and then slumped to a little over \$6¹/₂ million or 55 per cent of total exports in 1929, at the start of the Great Depression (see Table 2.3). (In the 1930s, the price of sugar averaged £8 to £9 per ton).

In 1929, when the preferential price for sugar in London had fallen to 11s.11.8d. per cwt., the Olivier Commission estimated that the cost of production in British Guiana was 14s. 4¹/₂d. per cwt.²² The profit margin after 1924 must have been negligible. Why did the industry survive? Planters devised various economies in order to boost productivity and weather the prolonged economic depression. The Director of Agriculture observed in 1929 that improved husbandry made survival possible, and noted: 'As the principal variety cultivated remains the same, improvements in tillage and field management — in some cases extended practice of the water-fallow system (keeping old cane fields

under water for some months before replanting) — would appear largely responsible for the increased yield of sugar per acre....²³

Year	Price per ton		Value of exports (\$)	% of total exports	Gold and Bauxite diamond		Rice	Other products
	£	S.						
1913	£12	12s.	\$6,410,400	67	15	—	5	13
1914	14	14	\$8,741,728	77	11	—	4	8
1915	21	6	\$12,124,104	82	7	—	4	7
1916	20	13	\$13,115,412	81	5	—	6	8
1917	21	6	\$14,782,607	81	4	—	8	7
1918	22	0	\$11,230,034	81	4	—	7	15
1919	29	6	\$14,378,114	82	4	—	5	9
1920	50	16	\$21,927,898	83	4	1	4	8
1921	18	9	\$11,874,821	77	12	1	2	8
1922	16	10	\$7,374,195	56	31	—	4	9
1923	25	13	\$10,461,794	60	30	3	1	6
1924	20	11	\$8,959,005	57	27	5	2	9
1925	14	8	\$7,469,267	53	29	6	4	8
1926	14	18	\$6,570,314	53	28	7	2	10
1927	16	14	\$9,464,844	60	24	5	5	6
1928	14	16	\$8,895,454	61	18	5	8	8
1929	12	6	\$6,603,676	55	20	8	7	10

SOURCES: Nath, *A History of Indians in Guyana* (London: The Author, 1970 [1950]), p.251; C.O. 114/207, Report of the Comptroller of Customs, 1929.

This official assessment was only partially correct. It overlooked the human dimension in the planters' strategy for survival. Corners were cut to the maximum: wages were depressed; social amenities stagnated and degenerated; official violence was used to curb workers' protests. Health and housing, in this malarial, backward colony, were neglected. Indian workers and their families carried much of the burden in the fight to save the sugar industry in the latter half of the 1920s.

But it is the 'logies', the infamous ranges, in which most of the Indians on the plantations lived, which survive today in the popular imagination, as a symbol of the 'coolie's' harsh life. The area where they were located was, significantly, called 'the nigger yard',²⁴ an evocation of those dark days of slavery: many of these derelict structures had not been altered materially since then. In 1929,

Hon. A.E. Seeram, an Indian member of the local legislature, argued passionately that: 'Lack of proper housing accommodation and sanitary methods.... amongst the labourers..... drove a number of them out of the estates to the villages.... Had the sugar planters not treated them as semi-slaves and as mere dumb-driven cattle, the Sugar Industry would never have suffered such a terrible fate',²⁵

Pillai and Tivary, (along with Keatinge, who submitted a separate report), studied the condition of the Indians in British Guiana in 1922, for the Government of India. The former were not enamoured of the 'logies' or ranges which they encountered on the plantations. They described a typical one thus:

A range is a single-storied building, fifty to a hundred feet long, fourteen feet broad, and fifteen feet high from the floor to the apex of the rafters. Its roof is either shingled or covered with corrugated iron-sheets. It has either a mud-floor or wooden flooring plastered over with earth. Some ranges are raised two feet above the ground level. Each range is divided by thin partitions into five or ten rooms, according to length. The floor area of a room may roughly be taken as 120 square feet. The partitions between the rooms are usually close-boarded to a height of 10 feet from the floor, the space above that being close-lathed. Each range has a covered verandah, four to six feet wide, running along the whole length of the front side. For ventilation there is a window on the windward side and a door on the leeward side in every compartment. The distance between two ranges vary between fifty to sixty feet.²⁶

Pillai and Tivary thought that some of the ranges were 'fairly satisfactory'; but that most of them were in a 'state of advanced dilapidation', such as those at Plantation Friends, on the East Bank Berbice. Some were considered unfit for humans; more like a 'pig-sty'. The ranges presented a 'dreary and dismal appearance' — white-washing was rarely done. They also deplored the lack of privacy. This, they argued, undermined family life and subverted morality: 'words whispered on one side of the partition may be overheard on the other'.²⁷ Pillai and Tivary were, however, impressed with the separate cottages which were built in 1919 and 1920 to house Barbadian labourers. About ten were erected on each estate; but the Barbadian labourers were not interested in wage labour on the plantations; they did not stay long in the colony; and Indian labourers had moved in. These cottages, though infinitely better than the obnoxious 'logies', were few; and construction ceased in 1921, with the fall in sugar prices.²⁸

Keatinge was less critical in his assessment of the ranges. He thought that they were 'substantial and dry'; the compounds were 'fairly sanitary'; and the latrine facilities adequate. (He was there from 12 February to 7 April 1922, during the dry season). But he did not find the ranges 'very attractive'. They lacked the 'charm' of the separate cottage with a garden attached. He recommended that the

plantations be encouraged to construct more cottages when their financial situation improved. The planters had argued that such cottages cost \$200 or \$300 each; and that the project had to be halted because of the depression in sugar prices.²⁹

In 1924, the Immigration Agent General reported that on some plantations the construction of 'well-designed cottage dwellings' was proceeding.³⁰ Sugar prices had improved substantially in 1923; and the Colonisation Scheme, with hopes of new immigrants from India, was revived. In 1925, Kunwar Maharaj Singh, in his report to the Government of India, noted that at Plantations Blairmont and Diamond, 46 and 126 new ranges and cottages respectively, had been built. Each room in the new ranges was 192 square feet, seventy-two square feet more than the rooms in the old ranges. He considered the cottages 'a distinct advance on the ranges'; one cottage, with two rooms of 120 square feet each, was allotted to a family.³¹ But this improvement ceased, with the depression in sugar prices after the short-lived boom of 1923.

By 1929, there had been no perceptible increase in these new ranges and cottages. Better housing for Indian labourers was a principal casualty of estate austerity, designed to weather the poor sugar market in the late-1920s. Between 1919 and 1928, the plantations spent an average of about £160,000 annually on the renewal and improvement of machinery, the greater part between 1919 and 1923.³² But even when prices rose sharply, immediately after the War, estate housing was a low priority. The minor improvements made were initiated primarily in anticipation of new immigrants from India, or for Barbadian contract labourers. Indian labourers lived rent-free in the 'logies'; they were afraid to make housing an issue. As late as 1939, as J.D. Tyson noted, estate residents lived in fear of eviction. He wrote:

Even if he has been permitted or helped by the estate to build his own house on estate land, he remains a tenant at will and can be called upon by the estate to remove at twenty-four hours' notice; and though, if he refuses to go, recourse must be taken to the Courts for his eviction, the respite..... is short and eviction is inevitable if the management press for it.... the dread of eviction.... is an ever-present one with the labourers. A sufficient number of cases have occurred for the realities of their position to be appreciated by the labourers and their families.³³

In 1929, the Sugar Planters' Association acknowledged that the importation of labour from the West Indian islands could not be contemplated in the short-run, as it entailed the building of separate cottages.³⁴ Neither Barbadians nor the Black Guianese would live in the 'logies'.³⁵ These were too painfully poignant a reminder of slavery; they were the unenviable preserves of the Indians.

Gandhi's confidant, Rev. C.F. Andrews, an unremitting opponent of indentureship, and a vigorous champion of Indians overseas, visited British Guiana in mid-1929. He was sickened by many of the hovels he saw on the plantations: the ranges at Leonora were a 'disgrace', with the exception of a few new ones. He observed that house sullage was allowed to accumulate and breed flies, while a drainage canal passed innocently by, close to the ranges. Andrews thought it 'outrageous' that a small drain was not dug from the dwelling area to the canal, to facilitate the disposal of the 'filth', which was simply thrown out onto the surrounding mud. (Unlike Keatinge, Andrews visited the estates during the heavy rains — June/July, 1929). He also, noted the cramped conditions in the 'logies', and deplored 'the petty economy' of boarding half the floor, leaving the other half bare and muddy. The verandahs, also, were invariably of bare earth.³⁶

At Plantation Skeldon, on the Upper Corentyne, the ranges were equally repellent. Andrews considered them 'death traps'; some of the derelict wooden structures were probably nearly fifty years old. His revulsion was overpowering; he wrote:

..... the filth that has been thrown outside the door (where no drain exists at all) must have accumulated in such thick layers that the ground in front of the lines was almost like a cesspit The buildings themselves were in a dilapidated condition. In some cases, the floor was entirely of mud and there had been no attempt whatever to raise the building above the level of the mud outside.³⁷

One gets a picture of these 'logies' marooned in a sea of mud and stinking waste.

However, Andrews was deeply impressed with other parts of the Corentyne, which he saw 'under the very worst weather conditions'. He was lifted by 'the remarkable healthiness of the people', their lively appearance, and the increasing population on the bigger estates. Andrews was lavish in his praise of Plantation Port Mourant³⁸ and its manager, J.C. Gibson. He noted the 'progressive character' of this estate, and its care for the social condition of the Indian labourers. He considered Gibson's 'efficiency', 'ability', and 'knowledge of good labour conditions' incomparable among managers in British Guiana.³⁹ It was a most satisfying visit to Port Mourant; and he concluded:

.... here at last I saw what could be done with people living in their own separate houses and owning their own land for rice cultivation this was one of the best mornings I have had since I came to the Colony.⁴⁰

Port Mourant notwithstanding, Andrews thought that the ranges on the plantations were the worst he had seen among Indians overseas. He blamed the planters and the government for the retention of these 'filthy, slum properties', through years of prosperity. He wrote:

.... I do not think I have ever seen anything quite so bad as these old ranges for the labourers in Demerara. The managers whom I have already met, are obviously ashamed of these ranges, but they call themselves helpless. I have asked them what happened in 1920 when sugar profits were soaring high. Even at such a time nothing seems to have been done....⁴¹

Andrews published an interim report while he was still in British Guiana.⁴² His final report, surprisingly, was never published. He sent a mimeographed copy to the Colonial Office in mid-1930. The Permanent Under-secretary of State, Gilbert Grindle, read it and minuted that they had been 'well aware' of the health and sanitation points raised by Andrews; and that 'for years' there had been an 'impasse' on the matter. He summed up this aspect of colonial inertia thus:

India says: 'No more Indians unless you improve health conditions'.
British Guiana sugar says: 'How can we spend money on sanitation on a large scale unless we are assured of more Indians'.⁴³

Improved sanitation meant better health and greater productivity. This was not readily communicable to much of the plantocracy, bred in the tradition of slavery and indentureship. And the Indian labourers in these 'rent-free' hovels, cowed into silence by the fear of eviction, could do little. The colonial administration did nothing; the Colonial Office as well.

But even in the midst of the dereliction, the Indians were able to retain some dignity and decency. The earthen floor of the 'logie' was daubed with a mixture of soft earth — clay, dug from the canals, and cow-dung. This produced a smooth, pleasing surface. The shaded verandah in front was also daubed. It was used as a kitchen: a *choolah* or fire-side for cooking, built with stiff clay and reinforced with flat, iron staves, was located on one side.⁴⁴ On the other side, a hammock was slung; and there, as Peter Ruhomon observed, 'the father of the home may recline of an evening, when the day's toil is over, lost to the cares of the world in the fumes of his beloved hookah'.⁴⁵ This was usually a collective exercise: *jahajis*, ship mates from India, living on the same estate, met, smoked, and lessened the pain of toil. (By the 1920s, rum drinking had replaced this as a principal social diversion; creole Indians were in a majority).⁴⁶

The women, also, visited each other's verandah to chat and sing Hindi songs after the long day's work was done. It was these robust women, who did most of the preparation for Hindu and Muslim religious functions and festivals.⁴⁷ These were usually held in their cramped homes; but they conveyed a divine sanctity, and rendered these 'logies' more liveable. The retention of the ancestral tradition also conduced to effort and achievement. As Leo Despres notes of the Hindus in Guyana:

.... the East Indian must devote considerable time and energy to work in order to practise his religion. Saving money is a necessary part of Hinduism

Hinduism represents a belief system that is woven into almost every aspect of the East Indian's economic and social life. The virtuous Hindu is simultaneously a good man and a powerful man. His conformity to prescribed religious practices is taken as evidence of his virtue. At the same time, his ability to conform is evidence of his economic progress. Without some accumulation of wealth, it is extremely difficult to fulfil his ritual obligations.⁴⁸

The elaborate rituals, the lavish preparation, and the informal, joyful participation in festivals, like *Holi* and *Diwali*, fed a sense of community among the residents on the estates. The Indians were irrepressible; their wit was spontaneous; they were alive. To paint a picture of darkness, of a pervasive melancholy, is a distortion.

Yet this visibly strong sense of community, and a proclivity for communal celebrating, fed a complacency among planters, especially on the housing question. In November 1929, several months after Andrews had left the colony, the British Guiana East Indian Association submitted a memorandum to the Olivier Commission. They also, were critical of estate housing. They observed that the rooms in the 'logies' were ten feet by ten; some were completely floored; others were half-floored; while others sat on the bare earth. Apart from the end rooms, which had two windows each, there was only one each for the other rooms. The Association suggested that the ranges which were not floored should be raised on 2 feet blocks, and that more room space be allocated to each family, in order to facilitate better ventilation and the entry of sunlight.⁴⁹

Throughout the 1930s, however, the depression provided the planters with an excuse for doing nothing. And the colonial administration, as usual, turned a blind eye. In February 1939, ten years after Andrews's visit, the Director of Medical Services, Dr N.M. MacLennan, admitted to the Moyne Commission that 'housing legislation does not exist in this Colony'. With respect to housing on the sugar estates, he said that it would be 'helpful' if the Commission gave them some advice. He added: 'Housing on the estates depended on the initiative of the estate authorities, the zeal, and the financial resources open to the individual estate manager'. Sir Walter Citrine, a member of the Commission, intervened crisply: 'A company might have the means but not the zeal'.⁵⁰

As a result of the interim recommendations of the Commission, some improvements in estate housing were attempted in the early-1940s. Several one-family and semi-detached cottages, with adjoining garden-lots, were built; some four-block dwellings were also erected. But many of the infamous

'logies' survived. In January 1949, following the shooting of Indian workers at Plantation Enmore in June 1948, the Venn Commission went to British Guiana. They inspected many of these ranges. Their indictment of them read like an extract from the report by C.F. Andrews, twenty years earlier. They observed:

In quite a number, the corrugated iron roofs [zinc sheets] were leaking and the fabric of the buildings was in a general state of decay. In numerous instances temporary sheets or awnings had been fixed over the beds to keep off the rain. They had mud floors and consequently with the rain dropping from the roofs these were made slippery and dangerous; and in many cases we found bags laid over the floor to prevent slipping. They are built without plan on low-lying uneven ground. There are few, if any, proper footpaths and in rainy weather communication is difficult. The common latrines, often built over a drainage trench, are frequently in a bad state of repair, with little privacy.⁵¹

It is, therefore, easy to understand why these obnoxious, derelict 'logies' survive in the popular imagination, possibly the singularly most enduring symbol of plantation life. In the 1920s, poor housing, combined with inadequate, often primitive, sanitation, produced a higher death rate among the Indians than the Blacks.

III

Sanitation and Health, with Special Reference to Malaria

It is a sad reflection that if the many thousands of immigrants brought into the Colony in the past had been able to enjoy what are now considered merely reasonable health conditions, the problem of supplying an increased population would not now be before us If it be indeed the case that the majority of the inhabitants of British Guiana suffer from malaria, hookworm, or kindred diseases, this must greatly reduce the vitality and efficiency of the worker and calls for as much thought and attention on the part of the community as does the introduction of additional population

Sir Edward Davson, (sugar planter), to Sir Samuel Wilson, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies — C.O. 111/659, (Individuals, Sir Edward Davson), 29 September 1925.

The coastal landscape, etched with a bewildering riddle of canals, ditches, drains, ponds, and fortuitous pot-holes, made British Guiana infamous for its malaria. Many of these were originally created to drain the swampy, impermeable clay; often, from neglect, they became reservoirs for stagnant water, choked with impenetrably thick grass, several varieties of luxuriant, aquatic vegetation, and refuse — a haven for the dreaded anopheles mosquitoes. Some contemporary observers attributed the high incidence of malaria to the prevalence of flooded rice fields, near to the houses in the Indian villages. In 1920, however, the Government Medical Officer of Health, Dr

E.P. Minett, refuted this. He argued that the ubiquitous pot-holes, resulting from indiscriminate digging in order to get clay-dirt for the making of red-bricks for road maintenance, were the principal breeding-ground for the malarial anopheles. And he believed that sanitation and good health were inextricably linked to the provision of adequate drainage and potable water. Dr Minett wrote:

Our present high mortality from mosquito-borne and intestinal diseases is intimately bound up with the deplorable condition of the drainage system of the coast villages and coast lands generally. The first essential to any improvement in general health conditions lies in the provision of an efficient drainage system kept always in a high state of perfection at all costs. The question is 'who pays the piper'?⁵²

Indians in the villages and on the sugar estates, the principal agriculturalists and agricultural labourers in the colony, were the main victims of the poor sanitary conditions. Their numbers declined between 1911 and 1921; there was a small increase between 1921 and 1931. The Indian population in 1911 was 126,517; in 1921, it was 124,938; over the next decade, small yearly increments were recorded, reaching 130,540 by 1931. The Immigration Agent General noted in 1922, that of the 238,969 Indians brought to British Guiana between 1838 and 1921, 69,803 had returned to India, leaving a balance of 169,166. But the census of 1921 revealed that there were 44,228 fewer Indians in the colony — 124,938. He attributed the decline to the shortage of women.⁵³ His explanation was inadequate. The world-wide influenza epidemic struck the Indians hardest. At its peak — late-1918 and early-1919 — 6,949 or 51.6 per thousand died; whereas 2,857 Blacks died or 24.1 per thousand. In 1918 and 1919, the death-rate among Indians on the plantations was 35.4 and 39.9 per thousand; in the villages it reached 38.0 and 59.6 respectively.⁵⁴ On Plantation Mara, East Bank Berbice, a notoriously malarial area, influenza claimed 112 lives in a population of 539. Most of the influenza victims were between 20 and 40. The Surgeon-General described the epidemic as 'the most formidable visitation of disease within living memory'.⁵⁵

Governor Collet attributed the higher mortality among Indians to the shortage of *dāl* (split peas), a major source of protein, and their excessive thrift and the consequent neglect of their nutritional needs. He wrote:

..... some East Indians have deliberately underfed themselves in order to save money. The idea of the East Indian immigrant is to save as much money as he can and take it back with him to India, and in the meantime he spends as little as possible on himself.⁵⁶

A.R.F. Webber, the legislator, noted that mortality was highest among Indian vegetarians and teetotallers.⁵⁷ But he argued that malaria was at the bottom of the generally unsatisfactory health of

the people: '..... perhaps 50 per cent of the deaths recorded as due to other causes are really super-induced by recurrent attacks of malaria, which so weaken the resistance of the people that almost any complaint ends fatally. Had the people sufficient food and sustenance, resistance to malaria itself, would be greater'.⁵⁸ He was right.

Collet and the Immigration Agent General had missed the main point: endemic malaria on many plantations and villages made Indians in particular, susceptible to recurring attacks; it also weakened their resistance to dysentery, diarrhoea, and other bowel diseases, associated with the drinking of water from the drainage canals and contaminated ponds. Poor ventilation in the 'logies', and in the dark, dank, wattle-and-daub houses, brought on bronchitis and pneumonia.

The Surgeon General noted that malaria reduced the value of the labourer, and undermined the reproductive capacity of the population. It accounted for a high incidence of still-births, premature births, and births of weak infants.⁵⁹ It is significant that the Indian population, which was about 138,000 in 1916-1917, had declined to 130,638 by 1919; it stagnated at about 124,000 for most of the early 1920s; it did not reach 130,000 until 1930-1931. Between 1916 and 1924, deaths exceeded births every year among the Indians, except for 1920 and 1921, when meagre natural increments of 864 and 460 respectively, were recorded. Infant mortality averaged about 173 per thousand in the first half of the 1920s (see Table 2.4).

<i>Year</i>	<i>Indian population</i>	<i>Births</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Annual rate per 1000 living</i>		<i>Infant death rate per 1000</i>
				<i>Births</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	
1916	137,850	3,512	3,739	25.5	27.1	191
1917	137,959	3,813	4,560	27.6	33.1	221
1918	134,670	3,144	6,656	23.3	49.4	241
1919	130,638	3,214	6,444	24.6	49.3	175
1920	129,331	4,264	3,400	33.0	26.3	143
1921	124,900	4,623	4,163	37.0	33.3	189
1922	124,338	3,491	4,067	28.1	32.7	194
1923	124,453	3,880	3,924	31.2	31.5	179
1924	124,967	4,317	3,459	34.5	27.7	163

SOURCE: C.O. 111/658, O.A.G. (ag.) to Wiseman, s.o., 13 November 1925, encl.: Memorandum by the Government of British Guiana to Kunwar Maharaj Singh.

Malaria was responsible for the decline and stagnation of the population. As Edgar Beckett, an agricultural expert, observed in 1918: 'Malaria is omnipresent as the light and wind, a blight on our land, checking and distorting the growth of the community'.⁶⁰ As early as 1911, Dr A.T. Ozzard had argued that much more could be done on the plantations, beyond the merely prophylactic measure of distributing quinine. He suggested that drainage around the 'logies' be improved; that all drains be cleared of grass and weeds and banks be weeded; and that bush near the ranges be cleared away. He also noted that the authorities on the estates had the power to mobilise the residents to undertake these rudimentary, but essential, preventative measures themselves.⁶¹

In 1919, Dr Ozzard was the acting Surgeon General; and he made a reassessment of sanitation on the estates. He observed that some effort had been made to keep the yards clean by weeding, filling up unnecessary holes, grading surfaces, redigging drains, etc. But he regretted that 'such work on most estates is not carried out in a methodical way'; and suggested that a 'driver' (foreman), with a small gang, be engaged permanently to ensure that the whole residential areas was cleaned at least once a week.

Dr Ozzard believed that such work could have been performed rather cheaply. It had to be of a 'continuous nature', he said, and not 'haphazard as at present'. With regard to 'pasture' lands, where Indian labourers were allowed to squat, he noted that there was an 'absence of all sanitation'; well-drained settlements on plantations were very few.⁶²

In 1922, the Surgeon General reported that the estate hospitals, where labourers received free treatment, were 'adequately equipped', and that the general sanitation was good. But the depression had led to a deterioration of sanitation on some plantations. He felt that unless that was rectified, the people's health would be undermined.⁶³ This was precisely what happened: deaths from malaria on estates, increased from 7.6 per cent of total deaths from this disease in the colony in 1921, to 10 and 11¹/₂ per cent between 1922 and 1924. But the situation was much worse in the villages (see Table 2.5)

The deaths attributed to malaria, however, could not convey the truth. The Public Health Department reported that in 1922 the deaths from this disease in the colony were 1,292, compared with 1,096 in 1921. But they noted that the disease played 'a large part in increasing the mortality from other

diseases'; and lamented the popular tendency to dismiss malaria as 'fever': its routine affliction deemed 'normal and natural'. They regretted public ignorance of the extent to which the disease 'saps the vitality of the population'.⁶⁴ This deep-seated complacency embraced all: at no time, in the 1920s, did the British Guiana East Indian Association, or the Negro Progress Convention manifest a knowledge of the pervasively negative impact of malaria on the society; nor did they pressure the authorities to work toward its eradication.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Cases on estates</i>	<i>Deaths on estate</i>	<i>Deaths in whole colony</i>	<i>Percentage deaths on estates</i>
1919	7,046	79	1249	6.3
1920	5,826	79	1010	7.8
1921	6,323	84	1100	7.6
1922	5,496	135	1296	10.0
1923	5,769	117	1086	10.7
1924	7,871	135	1155	11.6

SOURCE: C.O. 114/199, Sessional Papers: Combined Court, no.2 of 1926.

This complacency claimed the Government and the planters as well. A small minority, however, argued that quinine could not take the place of thorough drainage, in fighting the disease. One of these was the progressive Surgeon General, Dr Wise. In January 1919, he explained why neither the government nor the plantocracy paid much attention to the people's health. He argued:

With regard to sanitation in the past, millions of dollars had been spent on immigration, whereas they could reckon the amount spend on sanitation in hundreds *The sanitation maintained by the estates in the past was largely one that was the minimum that would satisfy the Indian Government. The question was not what was the minimum in order to allow immigration to continue but what was the maximum to keep the labourers in the best conditions possible*⁶⁵ (emphasis added).

Dr Wise was transferred to Trinidad shortly afterwards.

During indentureship, the health of the 'coolies' was not an especially great concern of the planters: the labour force could be readily replenished. And until the end of recruiting in India in 1917, reserves seemed inexhaustible. In the 1920s, planters were seeking a renewal of Indian immigration, under a Colonisation Scheme; only then, between 1924 and 1926, did the government implement a limited drainage and artesian water scheme in some of the coastal villages.⁶⁶ But the depressed sugar market,

exacerbated by the Great Depression of 1929, allowed the planters to argue that they could not afford more than a basic, minimum expenditure on sanitation.⁶⁷

In 1929, the President of the British Guiana East Indian Association, Dr J.B. Singh, a Government Medical Officer with first-hand knowledge of sugar estates, told the Olivier Commission that 'in the estate yards where the labourers live, there are small ditches and holes which form breeding places for mosquitoes.' On some estates, however, he observed that sanitation gangs were deployed regularly; but in this communal environment, the efforts of some residents to keep their surroundings clean were nullified by the negligence of others. Some managers were 'very rigid' in maintaining sanitary standards; Dr Singh regretted that this was not wide-spread.⁶⁸

The efforts of a few managers were commendable. In 1926, Dr P.M. Earle, who had worked for 37 years among Indians on the plantations, said that with the end of indentureship, the planters were not required by law to provide free medical services for their workers. But several of the bigger estates continued to do so. He noted the contributions of a minority of managers in this respect, among them, J.C. Gibson of Port Mourant. Dr Earle drew attention to the good work undertaken on some estates. He said:

..... some of our estates distribute quinine in their hospitals and yards; not only do they provide a night and day trained nursing-staff inside of their hospitals but they subsidise qualified nurse-midwives for the succour of the women and infants in their own homes in the times of greatest stress and suffering; they provide creches and free milk for the children and trusty East Indian women to care same when the women are at work; they erect and maintain schools for education; they help to build mosques; they made light and easy tasks for the weak and infirm; and they give free housing and allowances to the deserving aged, who are past work.⁶⁹

On the whole, in the 1920s, despite their many shortcomings, the estates did infinitely more to protect the health of their Indian labourers than the colonial authorities did for the villagers. The miserly, often inadequate, contribution of the former looks good against the 'puny efforts' of the government, 'a standing reproach to any community'.⁷⁰ The villagers had to pay a fee at Government hospitals; often, the sick had to travel long distances over impassable roads. And, as the Surgeon General reported in 1922 and 1923, sanitation in the villages was 'backward':⁷¹ the residents reduced to an aquatic existence during the heavy rains, because of a lack of drainage. The drinking-water was often contaminated, the source being 'an open trench befouled in the most abominable way'. Toilets were primitive; the contents of these seeped into the drinking-water ponds during frequent floods.⁷² In the drought of 1926, man and beast competed for the brackish, slimy-green water in residual pools.⁷³

On the sugar estates, the canals were deeper, and subject to replenishment with creek and 'back-dam water' in the dry season. The drinking-water, though impure, was better.

A contemporary observer remarked that a serious handicap to estate residents was the continual reinfection by adjacent villages, 'where no sanitation exists at all'.⁷⁴ A malarial sluggishness characterised colonial attitudes to drainage and irrigation, sanitation, and 'the demon of Malaria'.⁷⁵ In 1922, Keatinge deemed this disease 'the most serious evil in the Colony'.⁷⁶ Even the progressive fighter for the working people, A.R.F. Webber, was daunted by it. In 1928, he remarked that it was a 'sisyphean' task to render innocuous all the potential breeding-places of the anopheles. He concluded: 'The problem of malaria in British Guiana is not the elimination, but the control of the mosquito. Elimination is an utter impossibility'.⁷⁷

A stubborn inertia governed imperial attitudes to this backward colony. No other question illustrated this better than official resignation to the futility of eradicating malaria. The following response, in February 1939, by the Director of Medical Services, Dr N.M. MacLennan, to Dr Mary Blacklock of the Moyne Commission, is permeated by a stubborn impotence; the despair showed:

DR MACLENNAN: malaria is the biggest single cause of death in the country.

DR BLACKLOCK: What has been done about malaria in this country? What steps do you propose to take?

DR MACLENNAN: Practically nothing has been done except treatment of malaria. From the preventive standpoint little has been done, because the country is up against great difficulties.

DR BLACKLOCK: Is it a difficult problem?

DR MACLENNAN: It is a difficult problem, probably the most difficult problem I have come across

DR BLACKLOCK: Why is that?

DR MACLENNAN: Because of the extraordinary hydrographic condition of the country.

DR BLACKLOCK: The amount of water?

DR MACLENNAN: Yes.

DR BLACKLOCK: What steps do you take to ameliorate conditions?

DR MACLENNAN: I have now an assurance from the Rockefeller Foundation that they are going to give some assistance towards investigation of the problem of malaria in the country.

We believe that malaria cannot be eliminated from this country. It would be too costly and would not be an economic proposition, but we believe, from certain investigations that have already been carried out by the Health Adviser to the Sugar Producers' Association [S.P.A.], that we can reduce its incidence and control it to some extent.⁷⁸

This darkness also clouded the rulers' approach to drainage and irrigation, peasant agriculture, education, trade unionism, representative government: there was no vision for the development of the colony. The architects of the Empire had bitten off more than they could chew. And the

voluminous official reports and correspondence in the 1920s, suggest a refined, highly-cultivated capacity for simulating movement, while standing still.

A most remarkable departure from this colonial emptiness, was the same Health Adviser to the S.P.A., cited by MacLennan, the eminent Italian malariologist, Dr George Giglioli. Throughout the 1930s, he researched the anopheles mosquitoes with a professional passion. By 1938, he was able to report that a species, *Anopheles darlingi*, was the sole carrier of malaria in the colony.⁷⁹ In June 1939, a Malaria Research Unit, headed by Dr Giglioli, was established, with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, the S.P.A., and the Government.

Giglioli argued that, paradoxically, the humanising of the coastal environment by empoldering, provided a habitat which was ideal for the propagation of *A. Darlingi*. Stagnant bodies of fresh water were its haven; not sea water. The construction of sea-dams in many districts reduced the supply of salt-water on the coastland. The numerous canals, ditches, drains, and pot-holes were a reservoir for rain water; the canals also brought fresh water from the 'pegasse' back-lands unto the coastal belt; wet-rice cultivation and the flood-fallowing of cane-fields increased the surface area of stagnant fresh-water. The ecological change also, was considerable: the stunted salt-grass or shrub, on the wind-swept littoral, was replaced by rice, sugar-cane, and the coconut palm. The latter two, in particular, shut out the sea breezes, thus increasing humidity.⁸⁰

Giglioli observed that *A. darlingi* did not breed in salt water, nor the acidic water of the 'pegasse' back-lands. The latter, however, once diluted by rain-water and the brackish water on the alluvial clays, in the cane and rice fields, became ideal breeding grounds for *A. darlingi*. So also were the stagnant drains, ponds, and pot-holes in the villages and the residential areas on the plantations. The wind-swept areas on the immediate front-lands, where the salinity was higher and the humidity lower, were avoided by these mosquitoes — the windy, drier Corentyne Coast was less malarious than the wetter, more humid, Essequibo Coast.⁸¹

In 1946, the systematic spraying of the interior of all houses on the coastal belt was commenced. Towards the end of 1948, Giglioli reported that *A. darlingi* was 'banished, eradicated from the inhabited coastlands'.⁸² He explained:

The very characteristics which made *Anopheles darlingi* an exceptionally dangerous malaria carrier, has also been the cause of its downfall: its selective preference for human blood and its habit of biting and resting in houses, and not in the open, renders this mosquito specially vulnerable to D.D.T., when this powerful insecticide is applied as a thin residual film to the interior of all houses of a community. The mosquito not only disappears from the houses, but it actually becomes extinct in the surrounding countryside.⁸³

Dr George Giglioli's position in Guyanese social history is unassailable. The Indians, in particular, should include him in their pantheon of heroes. They were 'constitutionally less tolerant of malaria than the Africans'.⁸⁴ The eradication of the disease in 1948 was a significant milestone in their social history in British Guiana.

It has been necessary to go beyond the period of study, in order to underline the debilitating effect of malaria on the Indians in the 1920s. Shortly before the conquest of the disease, Giglioli remarked on the 'stagnation and loss of vitality' which it engendered in the Indian population. His observations were even more applicable to the 1920s:

Over vast districts and in large population groups it is often difficult to find even one individual who conforms entirely to the accepted standards of normal health. Among the rural East Indian labourers of the Essequibo and Demerara coastlands, and the Berbice estuary for instance, blood values 70% of normal are so prevalent as to constitute the local 'normal average'; values of 60, 50 and 40% are painfully frequent

In regions which are subject to endemic malaria not only is the death rate high, particularly among infants and children, but fertility becomes subnormal⁸⁵

The eradication of malaria was magic. Between 1931 and 1946, the population on the malarious East Coast Demerara increased by only 87 per thousand; on the endemically malarious Essequibo Coast it declined by 142 per thousand.⁸⁶ The Indian population declined between 1911 and 1921; and stagnated for most of the 1920s. The death rate among Indians between 1921 and 1930 was 28.4 per thousand; in 1946-1950, with the eradication of malaria, it dropped to 13.9, declining further to 9.7 in 1956-60. Indian birth rates were 30.3 and 36.4 per thousand in 1928 and 1929; by 1948-1949, it had increased to about 48 per thousand. (Black birth rate was about 35 per thousand in the latter years) (see Tables 2.6 and 2.7). Infant mortality in the colony also declined from 175 per thousand in 1921-1925 to 110 in 1941-1945, and 63.7 in 1956-60.⁸⁷

This was a phenomenal achievement. Yet in the 1920s, the government and the planters fiddled and prevaricated, while the population stagnated. The Colonial Secretary of British Guiana explained partially the reason behind this ostrich-like policy. In an address to the Royal Colonial Institute in London, on 23 May 1922, he argued:

Table 2.6
Crude death rates of Indians and Blacks,
1911/1920 — 1956/1960 (per 1,000)

<i>Years</i>	<i>Indians</i>	<i>Blacks</i>
1911 — 1920	31.7	29.7
1921 — 1930	28.4	25.2
1931 — 1935	25.4	21.5
1936 — 1940	23.3	21.0
1941 — 1945	19.6	21.1
1946 — 1950	13.9	16.7
1951 — 1955	12.1	15.0
1956 — 1960	9.7	12.5

SOURCE: Jay R. Mandle, *The Plantation Economy: Population and Economic Change in Guyana, 1838-1960*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973), p.97.

Table 2.7
Birth rates of Indians and Blacks,
1928-1929 and 1948-1949 (per 1,000)

<i>Years</i>	<i>Indians</i>	<i>Blacks</i>
1928	30.3	26.6
1929	36.4	27.8
1948	48.8	34.9
1949	48.7	35.3

SOURCE: Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], p.233.

The planters' chief aim was to obtain the labour they needed as cheaply as possible; they therefore preferred to replace wastage of man-power by the simple expedient of introducing more immigrants rather than to attempt the exceedingly difficult and costly task of improving sanitary conditions along the coast by schemes for preventing inundation by the sea or flooding by rain, for sewage disposal, and for a pure supply of potable water.⁸⁸

The planters were terrified of the prospect of Indian labour being siphoned off if these works were done on the coastland, thus strengthening peasant agriculture. And the government connived with the planters in opposing drainage and irrigation (see Chapter 3). The short-sightedness of this approach was unveiled by Giglioli. He noted that two years after the spraying of D.D.T. on the sugar estates, the incidence of malaria was reduced by 95 per cent. In the three years preceding the start of the campaign, malaria cost the estates 56,475 man-days, through hospitalisation.⁸⁹ With the disease virtually eliminated by 1948, he concluded: 'We suggest \$300,000 as a very conservative estimate of the saving realised annually by the effective control of malaria on the Colony's sugar estates. The figure is ten times as great as the cost of control by D.D.T.'⁹⁰

By the 1930s, sugar prices had plummeted to around £8 and £9 per ton — a reduction of 50 per cent on the prices during the depression of 1921-1922.⁹¹ All immigration had ceased. The extinction of the industry seemed inevitable. The efforts to beat malaria were spawned by these dire economic circumstances. It was an aspect of a vigorous policy of rationalisation on the plantations in the 1930s. These issues, especially sanitation, received paltry consideration in the 1920s.

Malaria, coupled with greater austerity by the planters in the 1920s, exposed the Indians on the estates to other diseases. Ankylostomiasis, or hook-worm was common. Dr J.F.C. Haslam, a former Government Medical Officer of Health in the colony, observed that in the villages, while Indians complied with the sanitary requirements and built latrines, the tendency for men to defecate in the bush was wide-spread. People stepped on faecal matter, in which hook-worm eggs thrived. On the estates, he noted that efforts to control the disease in the ranges were undermined by infection in the fields, where labourers defecated 'promiscuously'; no toilets were available there.⁹² In 1929, Dr Earle also, noted the prevalence of the disease on the plantations. He considered it a 'serious menace' to labour and capital; contamination of soil and water was common.⁹³

Estate labourers in the fields drank contaminated water; no water-tanks were provided in the 1920s. But even in the ranges, people used water which was susceptible to pollution. It invariably originated in some conservancy at the back of the estates, and was brought to the residential area in open trenches. It was often fouled both by animals and the labourers themselves: knowledge of hygiene was very rudimentary.⁹⁴ As Dr Ozzard of the colonial medical service noted, polluted water was responsible for a high incidence of bowel complaints. He wrote:

You will frequently see small platforms erected along the sides of some of these trenches, and coolie women cheerfully washing their dirty clothes in the same water which they will later drink! I have even seen a coolie performing the toilet of his perineum in a drinking water trench!!!(sic)⁹⁵

Dr Ozzard was at one time connected with a sugar estate, where residents suffered from a variety of bowel complaints. He made an investigation; his discovery is worth reproducing:

... I found that a very large proportion of these cases came from a series of ranges, the occupants of which obtained their drinking water from an open trench, one side of which was used as the public latrine, of which fact there was no mistake, as it was perfectly evident both to sight and smell!.... these people were drinking the water from their own cesspool!⁹⁶

In 1929, the British Guiana East Indian Association stated that several estates had dug artesian wells; but these were in^{su}fficient; and called on the Government to assist them to drill more.⁹⁷ The planters

complained that in the mid-1920s, government spent \$2 million on drainage and the digging of artesian wells in some of the villages; whereas no assistance was given to the estates.⁹⁸ As usual, they pleaded that hard times prevented them from doing more. Malaria, hook-worm, and several diseases caused by the use of polluted water— dysentery, diarrhoea, and enteric fever — undermined the health of the Indian labourer in the 1920s. It also undermined productivity on the estates.

As early as 1911, Dr Ozzard had advised the planters that the cost to the estates in the long-run, from water-borne diseases, more than justified the initial expenses for the provision of water-receptacles for storing drinking-water. And he had pointed to the 'notable reduction' in bowel complaints at Plantation Blairmont, in Berbice, where a large concrete tank was erected, and water was being piped to the ranges. He argued that if Blairmont, a small estate, could afford the cost of installing the new system, most of the other estates could do the same. Few followed this example.⁹⁹ It is noteworthy that Blairmont belonged to the firm of S. Davson and Co. In 1933, it obtained the services of Dr Giglioli to reorganise the medical services on their plantations, on the Berbice estuary. And as Giglioli noted: '... great advances were made on Davson's Estates between 1934 and 1937 in the unravelling of the local malaria transmission problem'¹⁰⁰ The head of Davson's was Sir Edward Davson, a progressive thinker.

In 1928, the death rate among Indians in the villages was 35.7 per thousand; on the estates it was 29.3.¹⁰¹ But much more could have been done on the estates. Indian workers and their families suffered as a result of the tougher austerities designed to tide the sugar industry over the poor market in the late-1920s; in the 1930s as well.

IV

Stagnant Wages and the Struggle for a Subsistence on the Plantations

Indian labour primarily, was responsible for the survival and expansion of the sugar industry in the latter half of the 19th century; again, in the 1920s-1930s, it rescued it from potential extinction. Those living in the rent-free 'logies' on the estates constituted the core of the labour force in the fields. As early as 1889, *The Daily Argosy* noted: '.... it is a rare thing to find any resident blacks on

an estate: from the driver downwards these people have either flocked into the towns or into some slum or village'.¹⁰² Blacks associated labour in the cane fields with slavery; it carried a stubborn social stigma; it was 'coolie work', to be avoided, if possible. The Royal Commission of 1897 observed that Black representation in the shovel gangs, their traditional area of expertise, was diminishing; Indians were replacing them as trench diggers and cane cutters. They were also beginning to encroach on areas of creole monopoly in the factory, such as mechanics and artisans. By the First World War, Indians dominated the lower levels of estate management, as 'drivers' (sirdars) or heads of the gangs in the fields.¹⁰³ The higher levels — managers and overseers — were the preserves of Europeans, particularly Scotsmen.

By 1921, 88.8 per cent of the residents on the main estates were Indians. On the healthier, more progressive estates on the Corentyne (Albion, Port Mourant, Springlands, and Skeldon), Indians comprised 10,611 or 94.1 per cent of the population. At Plantation Rose Hall, East Canje, they were 89.1 per cent. On the East Coast, East Bank, and West Coast Demerara, Indians were 85.9, 81.8 and 88.5 per cent of the estate population respectively.¹⁰⁴ In 1928, 21,592 adults were employed weekly on the plantations; 13,114 or 69 per cent were resident workers; 2,555 children were also employed weekly, some of them below the statutory limit of 12 years. About 30 per cent of the labourers were women: Indian women virtually monopolised the female labour force.¹⁰⁵

During the prolonged depression of the 1920s, as noted earlier, the planters embarked on a comprehensive programme of rationalisation, in order to reduce the cost of producing sugar. The modernisation of sugar technology, in conjunction with the centralisation of factories, contributed to considerably higher productivity. By 1928, the number of factories had declined to 21, compared with 51 in 1905, and the acreage under sugar-cane had fallen by 27 per cent, but the reduction in exports was negligible (see Table 2.8). Flood-fallowing, the introduction of mechanical tillage on the bigger estates, and a systematic application of fertiliser boosted productivity. But the reduction of the wage-bill also, was a major factor in the survival of the sugar industry in the 1920s.

The Sugar Planters' Association stated in 1929 that wages accounted for 50 per cent of their total expenditure.¹⁰⁶ They also acknowledged that 'labour costs have been reduced to a level where any attempt to carry them lower would be to drive the labourers from the field'¹⁰⁷ The seemingly high wages of 1920, when sugar prices rose astronomically, were deceptive: the cost of living had risen

substantially. For the rest of the decade, the cutting of workers' wages was a principal instrument in their strategy for survival.

Table 2.8			
Centralisation and sugar exports, 1897-1928			
<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of factories</i>	<i>Area cultivated (acres)</i>	<i>Exports (tons)</i>
1897	62	66,582	100,840
1905	51	70,880	116,550
1915	35	70,747	116,223
1928	21	51,073	114,687

SOURCE: *West Indian Sugar Commission Report* (Lord Olivier, chairman), Appendix 7, Vol.II, 1930: Memorandum by the British Guiana Sugar Planters' Association.

1922 was a dismal year: wages had fallen by an average of 45 points since 1920, while the cost of living among Indian workers had dropped by only 22 points (see Tables 2.9 and 2.10). In their report based on their study of conditions during the depression of 1922, Pillai and Tivary argued that the weekly wages of shovelmens had to be increased by 80 per cent, male weeders by 120 per cent, and female weeders by 88 per cent 'before they can make both ends meet'.¹⁰⁸ Both of these delegates were implacably against the renewal of Indian immigration; they were uncompromising, or as Webber noted, 'treated the matter from a political standpoint'.¹⁰⁹ They did not recognise that 1922 was an extraordinarily bad year; neither did they acknowledge adequately the extent to which Indians had devised other, subsidiary forms of subsistence.

G.F. Keatinge, the other member of the Commission, did so. He tended to be 'unbiased';¹¹⁰ but he also noted wide-spread dissatisfaction among Indian workers: conditions had deteriorated since the War. With regard to wages on the estates in 1922, he reported:

Prior to the War wages certainly permitted savings, and the best workmen did save on a considerable scale. In the sugar boom that occurred during the War, wages were very good, savings were larger, and the standard of comfort went up. The present is a time of great depression. Wages are higher than before the War, but the difference is probably not so great as the difference in the cost of living. Wages now permit a good workman to live well up to his standard of comfort and in some cases to save a little; but the less efficient workers find life hard, and amongst them there is a good deal of distress The sudden change from abnormally good times to abnormally bad ones has caused general dissatisfaction.¹¹¹

In 1923, sugar prices rose 24 points from 1922; wages increased by an average of 5.5 points; while the cost of living dropped by 15 points. Wages stagnated between 1923 and 1928, then fell in 1929; while sugar prices declined substantially after 1924, the price in 1929 being 37 points below the 1923

price. The cost of living had stabilised between 1923 and 1925; it fell by about 8 or 9 points in 1928-1929 from 1923-1924 (see Tables 2.9 and 2.10).

Year	Average earnings per day worked (cents)			Average highest earnings per day worked (cents)			
	Shovelmen	Male Weeders	Female Weeders	Shovelmen	Male Weeders	Female Weeders	% days lost
1920	81	71	56	\$1.08	\$1.20	61	25
1921	56	50	39	76	72	51	30
1922	44	39	32	62	57	42	27
1923	50	43	34	73	64	48	25
1924	51	44	34	73	65	46	26
1925	51	44	33	73	61	48	25
1926	51	43	32	69	61	41	28.7
1927	52	46	35	73	64	49	26
1928	52	46	35	75	71	49	25.7
1929	50	43	33	68	60	42	27.5 26.5 (avg.)

SOURCE: Report by Kunwar Maharaj Singh on his Deputation to British Guiana in 1925, p.8; C.O. 114/207, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1929.

Year	Index of the cost of 12 commodities of consumption	Index of the earnings of shovelmen	Index of the earnings of male weeders	Index of the earnings of female weeders	Index of the export price of sugar
1920	100	100	100	100	100
1921	78	69	70	69	41
1922	78	54	55	57	42
1923	63	62	60	60	66
1924	63	63	62	60	52
1925	62	63	63	60	34
1926	59	63	60	57	37
1927	55	64	64	62	38
1928	55	64	64	62	35
1929	54	62	60	58	29

SOURCE: J.D. Tyson, *Report on the Condition of Indians in Jamaica, British Guiana and Trinidad, 1938-1939* (Simla: Government of India Press, 1939), Appendix IV, p.88.

These figures suggest that there was some improvement from 1922; the situation was stable from 1924 to 1928; but there was a deterioration from 1929, the beginning of the Great Depression. However, 'the less efficient workers', as Keatinge called them, were probably in a majority: they, as in 1922, continued to 'find life hard'. Labourers on the estate did not have a guaranteed minimum

wage; neither was it indexed to the cost of living. They were paid by the task (picce-work). The task was set, and the wage-rate determined by the managers and overseers. Often, the amount of work required per task was not uniform, as the texture of the soil, or the quality of the cane varied from one field to another. This was the single most contentious issue on the estates: workers often felt that the standard rate did not compensate for harder tasks; and this was, invariably, not realised until after they had started to work (see sections V and VI).

Keatinge's assessment that the very competent, robust workers were able to maintain a fair degree of comfort was probably correct. As Table 2.9 indicates, these workers were able to earn considerably more than the average worker. But the stiff coastland clay, especially during the heavy rains, required substantial expenditure of skill and energy. The overwhelming majority could not earn enough for them to live exclusively on their wages. In the struggle to gain a subsistence, it was imperative for Indian women on the estates to work as well. But as Table 2.11 shows, between 1921 and 1925, the male weeder and his labouring wife (with two children) could not subsist on their combined earnings. The figures for 1926-1929 are incomplete; but it is safe to conclude that although there was an increase in earnings in 1927-1928 and a fall in the cost of living, it would have been impossible for the average worker and his/her family to save from their wages. The shovelman and his working wife were probably able to contrive a small saving; but only the most sturdy ones were able to do this demanding job.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Male weeder and wife-earnings per day worked</i>	<i>Earnings for 5 days</i>	<i>C.O.L. per week (food, clothing, implements)</i>	<i>Savings</i>
1921	89c	\$4.45	\$5.10	-65c
1922	71c	\$3.55	\$4.75	-20c
1923	77c	\$3.85	\$4.10	-25c
1924	78c	\$3.90	\$4.12	-22c
1925	77c	\$3.85	\$4.43	-58c
1926	75c	\$3.75	NOT AVAILABLE	NOT AVAILABLE
1927	81c	\$4.05	do.	do.
1928	81c	\$4.05	do.	do.
1929	76c	\$3.80	do.	do.

SOURCE: C.O. 111/658, O.A.G. (ag.) to Wiseman, s.o., 25 November 1925, encl.

This explains why Indian children (boys and girls, sometimes under the age of 12), were sent to work in the 'creole' gangs on the estates - as punt-bailers (flat-bottom iron tugs used to transport cane), mule boys, and the girls in particular, as manure throwers. Every estate employed children. In 1925, 1926, 1927, and 1928, the average weekly earnings of a child was 95c, 92c, 96c and \$1.01 respectively.¹¹² These earnings, amounting to 25 per cent of the combined earnings of their parents, were crucial to the survival of their families. Men, women, and children toiled to eke out a subsistence on the plantations of British Guiana.,

Field labour was hard; but it was rendered substantially more arduous because labourers often had to walk 3 to 5 miles, knee-deep in mud, to get to the fields, during the heavy rains. Maharaj Singh noted in 1925 that only two estates, Blairmont and Port Mourant, had constructed light railways to convey labourers to the fields. Two other Berbice estates, Bath and Providence (these, like Blairmont, were owned by Davson's), used mule-drawn boats to transport workers. Maharaj Singh hoped that others would follow this 'excellent example'.¹¹³ But, as the Olivier Commission reported in 1929, little had changed:

The labourers on the sugar estates live on the 'front lands' of the estates along the seashore or river front, and as the cane-fields are often many miles inland, they must walk along the 'dams' which are often muddy and almost impassable and, in many cases, wade waist-deep through irrigation trenches to reach their work, returning the same way in the evening.¹¹⁴

In 1922, Pillai and Tivary had observed that women had to wade through canals to gather up the cane which had fallen from the punts. They noted: 'In the canals crocodiles abound, and several [women] were bitten. Even in an advanced stage of pregnancy, they were made to work contrary to the rules'.¹¹⁵ Twenty-seven years later, in 1949, the Venn Commission cited the evidence of a young Indian woman worker on the estate: she had expressed pain over 'the long distances she has to travel to get to work, often in the dark of early morning; and the danger of injury to pregnant women who found themselves having to jump over ditches when working in the fields'.¹¹⁶

The Indian woman worker had to be awake at 3a.m., during the grinding season, in order to prepare her husband's meal, before she herself set off for the fields, walking several miles. Often, a young daughter was assigned the task of early-morning cooking. This was one reason why Indians were not inclined to send their daughters to school. Besides, young girls and their young brothers on the estates were also workers.¹¹⁷

But Indians on the plantations devised several strategies to alleviate the harshness of plantation life. Free housing, free medical attention at estate hospitals, including free maternity treatment, helped. (Non-plantation residents did not have access to these facilities, although estate labourers living in the villages, also received free medical attention). But immense sacrifices were required in the 1920s, to ensure that the basis for a decent family life was maintained. Men, women, and children worked hard; they manifested a deep sense of responsibility to the family.¹¹⁸

Thrift was reported to be endemic among the Indians. They acquired an infamous reputation for skimping, allegedly hoarding money, at the expense of their nutrition. (Among the Blacks, this perception of the Indians had acquired a certain notoriety, deemed to be a demonstration of the 'coolie's' lack of civilised British breeding).¹¹⁹ Governor Collet, commenting on the high death-rate among Indians, during the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919, argued that the Indian labourer 'deliberately underfed [himself] to save money when he receives higher wages, he wants to save them and grudges spending more on food than he used to'.¹²⁰ A.A. Thorne, a Black leader, argued that the 'meager wages and returns from rice on which the East Indian exists would kill out the negro population rapidly'.¹²¹ There was a measure of truth in both of these opinions; but in the 1920s, if the Indian labourers on the estates were not thrifty, if they did not have a strong sense of familial responsibility, they might not have survived.

Maud Going, a visitor to British Guiana at the end of the War, was impressed with the tendency to save among the Indians. She observed:

'Sammy' as he is called, is not so strong as the negro, but one could depend on him. He is not very energetic, but he is ambitious for himself and for his dearly beloved children. He wants money and will save to get it.¹²²

She should have added that the Indian women, often, were even more thrifty. They also laboured long hours — at home and in the fields; and they gave stability to the family. Usually, it was the women who protected the men from the excesses of plantation life, thus ensuring a measure of security for the family. And as custodians of their religious heritage, women contributed to the retention of a sense of purpose, when the harsh struggle for survival threatened established, sustaining values.¹²³

Women saved. To do this, they usually joined a 'box hand' — a form of compulsory saving, in which a fixed sum, say \$50, comprising shares of \$1 each, was contributed by each member and held by

a responsible resident; this pool was available for sequential borrowing. If a woman took one share, she paid \$1 into the box each week. The holder of the box received the first 'hand' of \$50 immediately. The others drew lots, or rotated the right to draw into the 'box', on the basis of a verbal agreement. If a person drew number 3, for example, she was the third person to receive the \$50. Of course, members could take more than one share. The 'box-hand' provided a lump-sum, which might never have materialised ordinarily; it promoted the idea of saving on the estates.¹²⁴ The commercial banks and the Post Office Savings Bank were also very popular.

Indians on the estates did not rely exclusively on their wages: it was the major source of subsistence; but it was not the only one. Consequently, they exploited every available niche in the plantation environment, in order to supplement their wages. In the 1920s, about 26.5 per cent of the working days were 'lost': very few availed themselves of estate work for more than 4¹/₂ days per week (see Table 2.9). The so-called 'lost' time was utilised by the workers to rear a few heads of cattle, to plant a plot of rice, and to cultivate a kitchen garden on provision ground, on the estates. The Indians devised a comprehensive means of husbanding the maximum resources from the plantation habitat.¹²⁵ Keatinge was an astute observer of this process, when he visited several plantations during the depression of 1922. He noted:

..... the estate labourer becomes partly a small holder On many estates also firewood can be cut on the back lands and brought in by boat; and over most of the colony fish are abundant and fishing a popular occupation. There can be no doubt that a man whose rice field provides him with enough rice for his family consumption and sometimes with rice to sell, whose ground provision plot provides him with vegetables, who gets his milk supply from his own cows and can catch fish in his spare moments, is in a much better position than the man who has to purchase all these things.¹²⁶

Most plantations provided resident labourers with pasturage on the saline frontlands, which were not suitable for cane cultivation. Live stock rearing, especially cattle, as in the villages of the United Provinces, appealed readily to the Indians in British Guiana. This practice began as early as the 1860s and 1870s, when a \$50 reindenture bonus was paid to those who, before 1873, entered into a second five-year term of indentureship. This lump-sum was often invested in a few head of cattle, sheep, or goats, which grazed on estate lands. 'Box-hand' savings were also invested in live stock.¹²⁷

In 1890, free and indentured Indians on the estates owned 20,631 head of cattle, as well as sheep and goats. In July-August 1891, D.W.D. Comins visited most plantations in the colony, while preparing a report on the Indians. He noted that at Plantation Hampton Court, on the Essequibo Coast, Indians reared 400 head of cattle: nothing was charged for pasturage; but they had to provide

their own cow-minders, who were paid about 4^d per month. On Plantation Anna Regina, Indians reared 572 head of cattle, as well as goats; estate workers paid an agistment fee of 12^d per month.¹²⁸ At Plantation L.B.I., on the East Coast Demerara, the whole of the frontlands, about 500 acres, was used by the Indians for stock rearing. They paid no rent; but contributed between 4^d and 6^d per month towards the wages of two stock-minders.¹²⁹

In the 1920s, cattle rearing was practised most extensively on the estates in Berbice. In 1928, 48.8 per cent of the cattle on sugar estates were reared here: Rose Hall, Port Mourant, Blairmont, Bath, and Albion, being the principal plantations. There were also big stocks at Lusignan, Vryheid's Lust, and Ogle, on the East Coast Demerara, and Uitvlugt, on the West Coast Demerara.¹³⁰

But the labourers could not be allowed to become independent of labour on the estates. A ceiling was placed on the expansion of live stock rearing. In the 1920s, the cattle herd on the estates varied between 16,500 and 20,000; the latter was not reached again after 1920. Sheep and goats averaged about 5,000 (see Table 2.12). Because of their voracious grazing habits, and the restricted pasturage, the labourers must have opted for cattle, with its many subsidiary benefits.

<i>Years</i>	<i>Number of cattle</i>	<i>Number of sheep and goats</i>
1916	18,863	5,285
1918	20,750	?
1920	20,000	5,000
1922	17,214	4,506
1924	16,700	?
1926	16,512	?
1928	18,186	5,073

SOURCES: C.O. 114/158, 167, 177, 184, 192, 200, 205A, Reports of the Immigration Agent General, 1916, 1918, 1920, 1922, 1924, 1926, 1928; *Report of the West Indian Sugar Commission* (Lord Olivier, chairman), Appendix 7, Vol.II, 1930, p.135; Memorandum by the Acting Immigration Agent General.

Cattle rearing, though restricted by the planters, was an important adjunct to the resident workers' wages: an animal could be sold during an emergency; and milk-selling became a regular source of small, supplementary earnings, after domestic requirements were met. Milk was an important source of protein; most Hindus did not eat beef (although they sold their cattle to butchers); many did not use pork. Steers were used for ploughing and threshing ('bull-mashing') in the rice field. Meanwhile,

cattle provided manure for the small plots on the estates, usually kitchen gardens, in which vegetables and fruits were grown primarily for the home; but, often, a small surplus was sold at the estate market. It is noteworthy that many of the popular fruits in India were also grown here: mango, used as food in Northern India, was also prepared into a variety of chutneys and sweet-meats; but they also grew sour-sop, tamarind, guava, plum, papaw, sapodilla, banana, and coconut. Vegetables included calaloo (thick-leaf spinach), karaila, squash, pumpkin, egg-plant, same, nenwah, and bora; but room was also found for a *pān* or *tulsi* plant, essential in Hindu rituals. So even on the plantation, the Indians were able to retain much of the flora and fauna of the U.P. village.¹³¹

As in India, cows were revered. A contemporary observer, J.A. Van Sertima, noted: 'The East Indian loves his cow as the cat loves milk' He was impressed with their thrifty habits and their commitment to their families; and applauded the 'unflagging perseverance' of a people whose physical slightness was 'compensated for by an exemplary industry and continuity of purpose'.¹³²

It was on the plantations, where drainage and irrigation were available, that the Indians adapted their knowledge of rice culture, already highly developed in the eastern U.P. and western Bihar. This tradition died out in the smaller West Indian islands of Grenada, St. Vincent, Martinique and Guadeloupe, where land was not readily available. The planters in British Guiana, by offering their Indian labourers small plots on the estates for rice cultivation, aided the perpetuation and refining of rice culture.¹³³ Consequently, the Indians developed an industry which yielded a considerable part of their food requirements; it was also a commercial product, for which there was substantial local and external demand. (The Black small cultivators did not have the latter advantage).

Rice was apparently first planted in the colony around 1782, during the French occupation: some was grown as food for the slaves. By the end of the 18th century, bush negroes or runaways 'commonly' grew rice in the neighbourhood of their hiding places. In 1810, they cultivated a substantial acreage at the back of Mahaicony, East Coast Demerara; but the planters sent a special expedition to destroy the crop.¹³⁴ Rice offered a potentially good subsistence; however, it was seen as a threat to the labour supply of the plantations. These early efforts by the Blacks were wiped out ruthlessly.

William Russell, 'the sugar king', recorded that in 1848 he saw Timini Africans, ex-slaves, growing

rice in Berbice. This was of the 'dry' land variety. This effort also was aborted: the interests of the Black rice growers clashed with the labour demands of the sugar planters. However, in 1865, some 'hill coolies' (Indians) were allowed to plant 16 acres on the West Coast Demerara. In 1886, Indians cultivated over 200 acres of rice on the Essequibo Coast; areas on the Mahaicony, Abary, and Canje Creeks were also under this crop.¹³⁵

In 1891, D.W.D. Comins reported that estate managers permitted Indians to tend small rice-plots on the frontlands because this anchored 'a supply of labour within easy reach of the sugar estates without going to the expense and trouble of maintaining indentured immigrants'. At Plantation Prospect, East Canje, for example, he saw the whole of this abandoned estate under rice. The growers rented land at \$1 a month for 600 yards. When they were not engaged in their own work, they were employed on the neighbouring estate, Rose Hall; but they were not obligated to do so.¹³⁶

It was during the sugar depression of the 1880s-1890s that sugar planters made land available for rice cultivation, on a regular basis. The emergence and expansion of rice cultivation coincided with the progressive fall in sugar prices from 1884 through World War I. These small plots on the estates were a major source of subsistence for the Indian labourers; they also helped to keep a body of satisfied, seasoned labour on the estates. This decision was a sensible, pragmatic step by the planters, during a difficult period; it was not based on altruism.¹³⁷

In 1919, Indians on the estates cultivated 9,910 acres of rice. In 1920, when 55,250 acres were under rice in the whole colony, most if it planted by Indians, 9,406 acres were cultivated on the estates. The average yield per acre on the estates was 17 bags; while the yield in Demerara and Berbice, on non-plantation land, was 12 bags per acre; on the West Coast Demerara and the Essequibo Coast, it was 15 bags. In 1920, on the large Corentyne sugar estates, Port Mourant and Albion, 1,445¹/₂ and 1,214 acres respectively, were cultivated by resident Indian labourers. (The residents of Albion also leased 500 acres from Edgar Hicken, at Borlam, a neighbouring estate). At Rose Hall, East Canje, Indians cultivated 1,702 acres. The yield at Port Mourant, Albion, and Rose Hall, in 1920, was 25, 20, and 26 bags per acre respectively, twice the output on most non-plantation land in Berbice.¹³⁸

Rents varied between \$1 and \$5 an acre at Rose Hall, and between \$4 and \$6 per acre at Port Mourant. Water for irrigation was invariably guaranteed on sugar estates,¹³⁹ thus eliminating the chronic

hazard on village lands, where throughout the 1920s, drainage and irrigation were rudimentary, often non-existent. Rice farmers were totally at the mercy of the fickle weather. The dramatic difference between the irrigated estates and the unirrigated villages was underlined during the drought of 1920. A Corentyne correspondent to the *Daily Argosy* reported:

From Bloomfield to No.68, a distance of about 26 miles, no rice is expected. This stretch of land used to give very good returns. The Rose Hall and Port Mourant districts expect a fair crop. The authorities of the estates, besides meeting their own needs, are good enough to give supplies to the village. On the lower part of the coast, between Prospect and Albion, the situation is quite as bad, except for Plantation Kendalls, owned by Ramsingh, a driver at Rose Hall, which estate waters Kendalls. Albion is assured of a crop.¹⁴⁰

In October 1920, it was reported that many properties adjoining irrigated estate lands were 'practically burnt up'.¹⁴¹ The condition of man and beast was said to be 'pitiable'. Water for drinking and other household purposes, in the ponds and ditches in the villages, had dried up. Many villagers in the neighbourhood of Plantation Port Mourant survived, only because the manager of this estate, J.C. Gibson, made the water in his canals available to all.¹⁴² Another manager whose relationship with his resident workers, as well as those in the neighbouring villages, was considered excellent, was Cecil Morris of Albion. He spend 28 years there; and supplied rice growers in the villages with water from his canals during droughts. When he died, he was reported to have been a 'father' to many; and thousands of Indians congregated along the road on the day of his funeral.¹⁴³

Manager James Smith of Rose Hall also earned respect from the Indians on his estate. He often lent them the estate's punts to transport their padi (unhusked rice) to their homes;¹⁴⁴ and he usually stopped grinding in order to allow the resident workers to reap their crops.¹⁴⁵ Smith rented ten sections at Rose Hall to his workers for rice cultivation. The stark contrast between these well-watered, verdant fields and the stunted growth at Cumberland, a neighbouring village, did much to keep many of the labourers on the estate.¹⁴⁶

The Berbice estates — Port Mourant, Albion, and Rose Hall — were the only ones where over 1,000 acres were rented to resident workers. By 1928, however, there was a slight decline in the acreage rented at Albion and Rose Hall; at Port Mourant it increased marginally from 1,445 acres in 1920 to 1,537 in 1928 (see Table 2.13). Residents at Rose Hall also had 2,417 head of cattle in 1928; at Port Mourant they reared 1,201 head of cattle, and 626 sheep and goats.¹⁴⁷

Table 2.13
Rice cultivation by Indians on sugar estates, 1920 and 1928

		1920			1928			
	<i>Estates</i>	<i>No. who planted plots</i>	<i>Acreage cultivated</i>	<i>Rent paid per acre</i>	<i>No. who planted plots</i>	<i>Acreage cultivated</i>	<i>Rent paid per acre</i>	
<i>Berbice:</i> (Corentyne)	Skeldon	402	275	\$1	470	356	\$1	
	Springlands	48	60	NIL	49	60	NIL	
	Port Mourant	2086	1445 ^{1/2}	\$4-\$6	1670	1537	\$4-\$6	
	Albion	1700	1214	\$3	1412	1028	\$3	
	(East Canje)	Rose Hall	2000	1702	\$1-\$5	704	1500	\$1-\$5
	(East Bank)	Providence	128	64	\$3	222	200	NIL
		Friends	27	15	NIL	-	-	-
		Mara	-	-	-	11	10	\$6
	(West Bank)	Blairmont	500	500	NIL	130	130	NIL
	(West Coast)	Bath	350	400	\$3	320	175	NIL
<i>Demerara:</i> (East Coast)	Cane Grove	46	58	NIL	71	60	50 ^c	
	Enmore	950	414	NIL	500	480	NIL	
	Non Pareil	996	498	NIL	1220	579	NIL	
	Lusignan	1218	649	\$5	1036	560	NIL	
	Mon Repos	150	75	NIL	230	167	NIL	
	L.B.I.	359	246	NIL	356	195	NIL	
	Vryheid's Lust	520	260	NIL	266	169	NIL	
	Ogle	975	473	NIL	875	495	NIL	
	(East Bank)	Ruimveldt	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Houston	26	13	NIL	12	7	NIL
		Providence	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Farm	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Diamond	20	13	NIL	-	-	-
	(West Bank)	Wales	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Schoon Ord	13	5	NIL	65	35	48 ^c
		Versailles	180	78	NIL	89	55	24 ^e
	(West Coast)	Leonora	396	468	\$4	798	345	\$4
	Uitvlugt	150	90	NIL	520	261	NIL	
	De Kinderen	126	90	NIL	195	132	NIL	
	Tuschen	190	101	NIL	108	95	NIL	
<i>Essequibo:</i>	Hampton Court	368	200	\$3	280	140	\$3	
	Marionville	-	-	-	69	50	\$3	

SOURCES: C.O. 114/177, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1920; Olivier, *op. cit.*, [1930], p.135.

On the Corentyne, the drier, less humid, and substantially more salubrious climate, the lower incidence of malaria, and the better facilities for rice and cattle, produced a generally higher standard of living, and better industrial relations on the estates. On the East Bank Demerara, where no rice was grown,¹⁴⁸ it is significant that the workers were generally less satisfied. Wherever rice was grown and cattle reared, the workers were happier, and healthier. On the plantations, as well as in the villages, as Ramnarine observes, 'a complementary relationship developed between the cattle and rice industries'; the steers were used for ploughing, raking, and levelling the rice beds before planting; they were also used, during the harvest, for transporting the bound rice stalks to the threshing floor,

and for 'mashing', separating the grains from the stalks.¹⁴⁹ Cattle manure was used liberally on the garden plots, in the cultivation of vegetables.¹⁵⁰ Throughout the 1920s, the Indians exploited several ecological niches to boost subsistence.

But, as with cattle rearing, rice cultivation on the estates was controlled — a ceiling of about 9 to 10,000 acres existed. In the 1920s, cultivation had stabilised around 9,000 acres.¹⁵¹ In 1922, the acreage under rice in British Guiana had declined to 49,000, or 6,000 less than in 1920; while the acreage on the estates remained stable at about 9,673 acres.¹⁵² In 1923 and 1924, as the industry declined further because of the Governor's policies: poor prices, inadequate drainage and irrigation, and the loss of the West Indian market (see Chapter 3), 34,965 and 29,406 acres were cultivated; estate acreage being 9,130 and 9,145 respectively.¹⁵³ In 1926, of 32,798 acres under rice in the colony, 9,841 were on the estates.¹⁵⁴ By 1928, the total acreage had increased to 44,359; but estate cultivation dropped to 8,821 acres, the first time in the 1920s that it fell below 9,000 acres.¹⁵⁵ In 1937, rice acreage on the plantations stood at 9,391; labourers also grew vegetables on 1,896 acres; and they owned 14,170 head of cattle.¹⁵⁶

It is clear that the policy of the sugar planters was to ensure that while rice and cattle farming provided a small supplement to wages on the estates, it did not expand to the point where their resident labourers became independent of wage labour. The average rice plot on the estates in 1920 was $\frac{2}{3}$ acre; in 1928, it was $\frac{3}{4}$ acre (see Table 2.13). However, cultivation remained stable; it did not fluctuate as violently as in the villages in the 1920s. Even during the period of depression in the rice industry, in the middle of the decade, most labourers on the estates were able to grow at least enough for domestic needs: irrigation water was available even during the prolonged drought of 1925-1926. And the higher returns on the estates demonstrated the Indian cultivator's capacity for good husbandry, when he was able to work empoldered land. In this backward colony, as Table 2.14 shows, while the acreage under rice on the estates was made to stagnate at around 9,000 acres, in the 1920s, planters kept idle an average of 82,000 acres of reclaimed, prime agricultural land.

This was one of the most reprehensible features of the economy of British Guiana: small cultivators were frequently devastated by floods and droughts, while vast tracts of drained and irrigated land were bottled-up on the sugar plantations. Even *The Daily Argosy*, an invariably strong ally of the plantocracy, found this practice indefensible. It argued:

Table 2.14			
Use of empoldered, prime agricultural land on sugar estates, 1922/1923 — 1928/1929 (acres)			
<i>Year</i>	<i>Sugar-cane</i>	<i>Rice</i>	<i>Uncultivated*</i>
1922	59,032	9,130	86,279
1923	55,121	9,145	89,005
1928	57,618	9,731	77,376
1929	57,705	8,831	76,816
*Under 2,000 acres per annum were used by resident labourers for the cultivation of vegetables and fruits.			

SOURCES: C.O. 114/187, Report of the Lands and Mines Department, 1923; C.O. 114/207, Report of the Lands and Mines Department, 1929.

.... it must be obvious that if a tide of immigration sets in to British Guiana, no Government can allow large acres of fertile land to be locked up indefinitely, nor allow the owners of such lands to profit enormously by unearned increments. The Government has always in reserve the weapon of taxation, and possibly that also of expropriation It is greatly to the interests of the sugar planters that settlements should be installed in close proximity to the estates Herein lies a splendid chance for the sugar estates to co-operate with the Government in the great task of supplying the colony with a large and increasing population of prosperous and contented farmers or small-holders¹⁵⁷

Whether the planters would have countenanced a release of some of their empoldered land if there were a 'tide' of immigrants is debatable; none went to the colony. Such action was always perceived as potentially subversive of their labour supply; and they had no desire to see, much less aid, the emergence of a 'prosperous and contented' peasantry. That was why they were implacably opposed to the drainage and irrigation of the coastal villages. Everything had to be sacrificed to Moloch, 'King Sugar'; and the Government's compliance was assured. In 1939, ten years after *The Daily Argosy's* bold exhortation, a distinguished visitor to the colony noted:

The importance of land settlement as a means of reducing the pressure of would-be labourers upon the sugar estates is, I believe, appreciated by the Administration in British Guiana, though the present leaders of the East Indian Association are inclined to impute to the sugar interests, who naturally exert a big influence in the councils of the Colony, a general disposition to resist or even to wreck land settlement schemes and alternative industries like the rice trade in order to main Sugar's grip on the Colony and on labour in particular.¹⁵⁸

It is to the credit of the Indians that they survived in this backward, malarious colony. That they achieved much, even on the sugar estates, they owe to themselves — their industry, thrift, ingenuity, culture,¹⁵⁹ and their unwavering commitment to their families.¹⁶⁰ They built up the rice industry,

grew fruits and vegetables, reared live stock, and contrived an ingenious exploitation of every conceivable niche within the plantation environment. Fish, for example, was caught in the numerous ditches and canals on the estates. Here, these sources never dried up because of the sophisticated hydraulic system. And when the flood-fallowing of cane-fields became wide-spread in the 1920s, the supply of fresh-water fish (*hassa, hourie, patwa, sun-fish, etc.*) and crabs was augmented substantially. Fire-wood was obtained from the backlands of the estates. Wild vegetables (*bān karaila* and *karmie bhagie* or wild spinach) and snails, a delicacy to many, were gathered in the cane-fields and canals. Water-nut leaves, the standard 'plate' at Hindu weddings, were collected in the canals. Grass for feeding cattle was cut in the fields and on the dams.¹⁶¹

Indian men, women, and children worked hard and saved, in order to fashion a decent life. They were never satisfied with their bare wages. In spite of the limitations, the harshness of the plantation, it was a nursery for the adaptation of Indian culture, and the development of attitudes and skills, which proved invaluable when Indians settled in the villages. But the social and economic links between these Indian villages and the plantations tended to be resilient: villagers also, continued to exploit several niches within the plantation environment. They had their feet in both worlds: Indians preferred to settle in the neighbourhood of their old sugar estate.

Because of the backward economy of the colony, and the generally depressed sugar prices in the 1920s, many continued to live on the estates. For these, the options were more restricted. On the riverine plantations especially, such as Diamond, Peter's Hall, and Providence, on the East Bank Demerara, no rice lands were available for the workers; grazing lands also were limited. Because the rich alluvial belt became narrower as one advanced up the rivers, planters were excessively miserly in their release of cultivable land. Wages on the estates were crucial to the survival of the Indians in these areas; possibilities for buying rice lands away from the estates were meagre. A greater discontent prevailed here; but in other areas also, they resisted, sometimes with their lives, the perceived injustices of the plantocracy. Indian workers had a tradition of resistance in British Guiana. By the 1920s, an overwhelming majority were born in the colony. Resistance is a sign of hope; it feeds on a vision that a better life is possible. Resignation suggests despair, the death of hope. Indian workers resisted.

V

Labour and Resistance on the Plantations, 1919-1923, with Special Reference to the Strike Epidemic of 1920

It takes a very jaundiced eye to read a people's history as a record of undiluted compliance and docility. Such an interpretation with respect to slavery was never comfortable in the light of numerous examples of slave rebellion and revolt. Surely, when the myth of docility was transferred to indentured immigrants, it clearly conflicted with the evidence of resistance. The dialectic of accommodation and resistance is in many ways most readily perceptible within the history of the East Indian immigrant population.

Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p.151.

It would be inaccurate to claim that resistance by Indian workers dominated their instinct for accommodation. The argument, so far, has been that throughout the 1920s, they used a variety of instruments to improve their material condition. And on estates such as Port Mourant, Albion, and Rose Hall, in Berbice, better health in a less malarious region, in conjunction with more ample alternatives for boosting subsistence, produced a healthier, less contentious industrial climate. In short, accommodation usually took precedence over resistance. This did not always suggest contentment; it was 'a necessary aspect of survival', as Rodney argues, 'within a system in which power was so comprehensively monopolised by the planter class'.¹⁶²

However, the evidence suggests that Indians had a strong tradition of resistance to supplement their capacity for hard work within the plantation system. As early as 1869, there were 'riots' at Leonora. In 1872, at Devonshire Castle, in Essequibo, five were killed and seven wounded. Resistance to perceived injustices, especially after the 1884 depression and continuing through 1905, was an established feature of Indian life on the estates. Between 1886 and 1889, no less than 100 strikes were recorded. In October 1896, five workers were killed and 59 wounded at Non Pareil, East Coast Demerara; in May 1903, at Friends, East Bank Berbice, six were killed and seven wounded; in April 1913, 14 were killed at Rose Hall, East Canje, Berbice. In April 1924, 13 were killed at Ruimveldt, East Bank Demerara.¹⁶³

Rodney sees a general pattern to these shootings. He notes that a small incident over wages would arise; the plantation authorities over-reacted; they arbitrarily proceeded to remove 'ringleaders' from the estate in question; this sparked an agitated response from the workers, who saw such action as

'arbitrary and crude victimisation'. The police were brought in, in numbers which the situation did not warrant. This was provocative and productive of hysteria, consequently leading to a scenario in which the police would begin to shoot.¹⁶⁴ It should be added, that underlying all these manifestations of brutality, was an endemic fear by the White minority of the excitable, irrational 'coolie' in the mass, a distorted, unexamined vision of horror, fed by the Indian Mutiny of 1857, and sustained in the imperial memory.¹⁶⁵

Invariably, the strikes followed a dispute over wages. Indian workers would march to the Immigration Agent, seeking his intervention. The issue was usually defused quickly, whether their grievances were resolved to their satisfaction or not: they tended to accept the ruling of the Agent. As Table 2.15 shows, up to 1924, strikes were commonplace and wide-spread. It is significant that apart from the 1913 shootings at Rose Hall, which followed a dispute over the granting of a holiday, and efforts to remove the 'ringleaders', rather than over wages,¹⁶⁶ strikes were comparatively rare on Berbice estates — infamous exceptions being Mara and Friends, dying estates in a derelict, riverine district. (In the 1920s, workers on these estates had no rice lands). Accommodation was generally greater in Berbice: possibilities for supplementing wages were greater.

In the 1920s also, even in the absence of a trade union, Indian workers struck from time to time, mainly over wages. There were at least 6 strikes in 1919, 15 in 1920, 5 in 1921, 8 in 1922, 4 in 1923, 3 in 1924, including the catastrophic one on East Bank Demerara estates. Significantly, no strikes were recorded between 1925 and 1928 (see Table 2.15).

It is noteworthy that there was an epidemic of strikes in 1920, although the wages obtained were the highest recorded on the estates in the 1920s. From an average of 48[¢] per day for men and 29^{1/2}[¢] per day for women, in 1919, wages climbed to an unprecedented 76[¢] and 56^{1/2}[¢] per day for men and women respectively, in 1920.¹⁶⁷ This was very deceptive: a precipitous rise in the cost of living — 50 per cent more than the average between 1921 and 1929 — quickly consumed the seemingly generous increments (see Tables 2.9 and 2.10). The massive increase in the cost of living was the principal reason for these strikes; but there were other, less conspicuous, ones. It is remarkable that all the strikes took place on plantations in Demerara, where wages were the highest, reaching 82[¢] and 84[¢] for shovelmen, 73[¢] and 80[¢] for male weeders, and 57[¢] and 63[¢] for female weeders.¹⁶⁸

Table 2.15
'Disturbances', strikes, and fatal shootings on the plantations, selected years, 1872-1928

YEAR	ETATES
1869	'riots', LEONORA
1872	DEVONSHIRE CASTLE (5 Killed; 7 wounded)
1873	14 strikes (July-August)
1884	5 strikes
1886	31 'strikes and disturbances'
1887	15 'strikes and disturbances'
1888	42 'strikes and disturbances'
	[1886-1889: no less than 100 strikes]
1894	'principal disturbances': LEGUAN, FARM, SUCCESS, SKELDON, LA BONNE MERE
1898	'principal disturbances': GOLDEN FLEECE, DE KINDEREN, CORNELIA IDA, NISMES, GOEDVERWAGTING, MON REPOS, CANE GROVE, MELVILLE, BLAIRMONT
1896	NON PAREIL (5 killed; 59 wounded)
1900	'More strikes throughout the colony over wages, with assaults on overseers and drivers'. Most sessions at BLAIRMONT and PETER'S HALL
1903	LEGUAN, DE KINDEREN, WALES, DIAMOND, PETER'S HALL, SUCCESS, CANE GROVE, FRIENDS (6 killed; 7 wounded)
1905	LUSIGNAN, NON PAREIL, FRIENDS, LEONORA, WALES, VRIESLAND, MARIONVILLE, SPRINGLANDS
1913	6 strikes, including ROSE HALL (14 killed)
1914	5 strikes (April-December)
1915	ANNA REGINA, SUCCESS
1916	23 strikes, including MA RETRAITE, MARA, SUCCESS, DE KINDEREN, UITVLUGT, L.B.I., DIAMOND, FRIENDS, DIAMOND, UITVLUGT, ANNA REGINA, FARM, COVE AND JOHN, MARA, L.B.I., WALES
1917	10 strikes, including WALES, OGLE, SUCCESS, L.B.I., GOLDEN FLEECE, LEONORA, DIAMOND
1918	L.B.I., DIAMOND, MARIONVILLE, NON PAREIL, DIAMOND, DE KINDEREN, LEONORA, MARA
1919	7 strikes, including LEONORA, L.B.I., MARA, LEONORA, MARA, HAMPTON COURT
1920	15 strikes: HOPE, DIAMOND, NON PAREIL, L.B.I., ENMORE, PETER'S HALL, VRYHEID'S LUST, PROVIDENCE (East Bank Demerara), DIAMOND, CANE GROVE, LA BONNE MERE, LEONORA, COVE AND JOHN, LEONORA, VERSAILLES
1921	NON PAREIL, HAMPTON COURT, GOLDEN FLEECE, PETER'S HALL, PROVIDENCE (East Bank Demerara)
1922	ROSE HALL, MARA, ALBION, PORT MOURANT, ALBION, PORT MOURANT, SPRINGLANDS, HAMPTON COURT
1923	SPRINGLANDS, WALES, PROVIDENCE (East Bank Demerara), MARA
1924	ALBION, DIAMOND, East Bank Demerara estates (DIAMOND, PROVIDENCE, FARM, PETER'S HALL) — (13 killed; 24 wounded)
1925	No strikes reported
1926	No strikes
1927	No strikes reported
1928	No strikes
1929	ALBION, FRIENDS-('two small strikes')

SOURCES: Brian L. Moore, *Race, Power and Social Segmentation in Colonial Society: Guyana after Slavery, 1838-1891* (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1987), p.173; Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp.154, 158-159; C.O. 114/150, 154, 158, 162, 167, 172, 177, 182, 184, 187, 192, 195, 200, 204, 205A, 207, Reports of the Immigration Agent General, 1914-1929.

The substantial wage hike — 58 per cent in the case of men, 91 per cent for women — must have strengthened the generalised feeling that they were grossly underpaid; and that possibilities for further increases were ample, if the demands were made. Moreover, several strikes by Black workers in Georgetown, supported by the British Guiana Labour Union, exerted much influence on Indian workers on estates near to the city, on the East Bank and East Coast Demerara.¹⁶⁹ And the termination of indentureship from 15 April 1920 probably kindled hopes of greater material benefits, commensurate with exaggerated conceptions of freedom. The efforts to get new immigrants from India in 1919-1920, with promises of land grants to all, fed and enlarged these expectations.

In all but four of the fifteen strikes in 1920, no increase in wages was granted.¹⁷⁰ The women at Diamond got an increase. It is interesting that shovelmen struck more frequently than others. They obviously saw themselves as skilled workers; and were consequently inclined to be more forthright in advancing their claims. None of these strikes occurred in Berbice: as noted earlier, at Port Mourant, Albion, and Rose Hall, industrial relations were better; opportunities for supplementary earnings were greater. In July-August 1920, there were four strikes on the estates on the East Bank Demerara — Peter's Hall, Providence, and two at Diamond. On none of these was rice cultivated by the workers; and cattle rearing was very limited. Wage labour was virtually their only source of income.

The strike at Diamond, in August 1920, was a prototype of many of these strikes; in several ways it may be interpreted as a precursor of the fatal strike on the East Bank, in April 1924, and warrants special consideration. The Indian labourers complained to the manager of Diamond that their wages were inadequate, and requested a raise. None was given; and they went on strike. They alleged that as a result of their action, the manager prevented them from using the well on the estate; and that a pond from which they had hitherto obtained water, was contaminated by Blacks, who threw a dead dog into it, at the instigation of the manager. They also alleged that they could no longer cut grass on estate lands for their cattle; and that free medicine, which they used to get from the estate hospital, had been cut off. Some claimed that they were given notices to quit their rooms in the ranges.¹⁷¹

On Tuesday, 10 August 1920, about 1,500 Indian labourers marched to Georgetown to see H.N. Critchlow, the Black trade unionist, who had founded the British Guiana Labour Union (B.G.L.U.) in January 1919, and had since won several concessions for his dock workers. Critchlow sent them on to the Immigration Agent General, their traditional channel of complaint. This officer was

apparently not sympathetic; he probably felt slighted. The labourers reported that he told them that 'whatever the estate authorities had done to them they deserved it'.¹⁷² He did not intervene.

The workers then requested Critchlow to present their case to the Governor, Sir Wilfred Collet. The Governor met Critchlow and a deputation representing the workers at Diamond, which included two Indians, R. Pundit and James Ramkedarsingh. Collet also, was not sympathetic. He wrote that 'they made no demand for higher wages before the strike..... they were under the impression that the Labour Union would somehow arrange extra rates for them and made up a plausible protest'. He believed that the strike would not have taken place had the B.G.L.U. not 'been carrying on for the last two months', a reference to a spate of strikes among Black workers in Georgetown.¹⁷³

Critchlow said that the labourers struck then sought his intervention: 'He never at any time told them to strike'. But he conceded that workers were often forced to commence work in ignorance of the rate of pay.¹⁷⁴

The strike at Diamond collapsed;¹⁷⁵ but it revealed the backward state of industrial relations on the estates. There was no recognised bargaining agent for the labourers; there was no legal procedure for the ventilation of grievances and the resolution of recurring allegations of injustice on the estates. The workers continued to march *en masse* to the Immigration Agent General in Georgetown, or his sub-agents in the rural areas, whenever a problem arose. While these officers continued to intervene when grievances were reported, their statutory authority, under the old ordinance during indentureship, no longer applied: they functioned at the discretion of the planters. Their capacity to influence the planters had been diminished, with the arrival of the last indentureds in 1917; the abrupt termination of the system, in April 1920, hastened their impotence.

Meanwhile, the high-profile trade union work of Critchlow and the B.G.L.U. since 1919, made an impression on the Indian workers on the Demerara estates; and they were inclined to see him as a replacement for the moribund 'Crosby', the Immigration Agent General. (Critchlow visited many rural areas in 1919-1920, enrolling Indian workers for his union. They called him 'Black Crosby'). His brave initiatives, however, were undermined by the meagre resources of the B.G.L.U., and an impracticably ambitious effort to represent all categories of workers in all parts of the colony.¹⁷⁶ An

abortive business venture, and a prolonged factional dispute in 1920, further sapped the efficacy of the union.¹⁷⁷ Critchlow could not do much for the Indian plantation workers.

The British Guiana East Indian Association (B.G.E.I.A.), which was revived in Georgetown in March 1919, also, was ill-equipped to represent them. The leaders of the Association were embroiled in internal wranglings; their energies consumed by the controversy over the Colonisation Scheme of 1919-1920. Besides, other than a grandiloquent programme, and a rhetorical commitment to defending Indian rights, they had no instrument for the representation of Indian workers. Unlike Critchlow, they did not have a trade union; and made no efforts to found one.

As noted earlier, the strikes of 1920 invariably followed dissatisfaction with rates of pay. Workers on the estates did piece-work; a wage rate was fixed by the estate for each 'task'. But the work required for each 'task' varied from one field to another, depending on the texture of the soil to be forked, or the grass to be weeded, or the cane to be cut. Workers became dissatisfied because no mechanism existed by which the wage rate could be adjusted for the more onerous 'tasks'.

Moreover, the dispute at Diamond demonstrated the extent to which the threat of eviction could be arbitrarily employed by managers to pressure resident workers into compliance. These resided rent-free in the 'logies', and were dependent, in a variety of ways, on the estates.

Another strike which occurred earlier, on 29 June 1920, at Non Pareil, unmasked the stubbornly authoritarian character of some plantations. Workers struck over the rates of pay for shovelmen and weeders. They were also incensed by what they saw as an unfair allocation of rice-beds on the estate by Indian headmen; and by rumours that they had to sign contracts to work on the estate, before they could procure land. (Collet said that an 'East Indian overseer.... seems to have appropriated most of it for himself, and to have left insufficient for the labourers'). The situation exploded when the deputy manager, a White man, and four Indian 'drivers', apparently, tried to 'drag' Indian women workers, who had stayed at home during the strike by their men-folk, from the estate ranges. The men were understandably inflamed; and they proceeded to attack the White manager, who fled to his house, 'seeking refuge in a water-tank'.¹⁷⁸

The Non Pareil workers marched to Georgetown, where, apparently, as members of the Buxton

branch of the B.G.L.U., they requested Critchlow to accompany them to the Immigration Agent General. Critchlow did not seem to be able to do anything. They went on to Harry Scaford, the attorney of the estate, who listened to their case. The workers 'presented their case very intelligently', and poignantly 'referred to riots throughout the world, including the rising at Amritsar'. Scaford made arrangements for the men to be fed, and promised to carry out an inquiry the next morning.¹⁷⁹ This was done. Two White overseers and five Indian 'drivers' were dismissed summarily; and the workers were assured that no contracts were required for the acquisition of rice-beds on the estate.¹⁸⁰ Collet noted that both the British Guiana East Indian Association and the British Guiana Labour Union claimed credit for the satisfactory resolution of the conflict.¹⁸¹

It is noteworthy that the workers reposed greater confidence in Critchlow than they did in the Immigration Agent General; and that they were aware of the butchery inflicted on their compatriots at Amritsar, in Punjab, the previous year.¹⁸² In a rudimentary way, they were making a connection between the imperial arrogance and brutality of the British army in India, and the behaviour of the British overseer at Non Pareil.

In July and October 1920, Indian workers struck at Plantations Enmore¹⁸³ and Leonora respectively. The latter strike was attributed to the influence of Critchlow, who had visited the estate on two occasions.¹⁸⁴ About 250 workers travelled from Leonora to Georgetown to see Critchlow. They also went to the Immigration Department; but were advised to return to the estate and resume work. The District Immigration Agent intervened and found the wages 'fair and reasonable'.¹⁸⁵ The workers refused to go back to work. Neither the B.G.L.U. nor the B.G.E.I.A. seemed to have been directly involved. The police, however, were brought in 'to preserve order',¹⁸⁶ although there was 'no inclination on the part of the labourers to create any disturbance'.¹⁸⁷ The strike petered out after about two weeks. The provocative presence of the police was the only threat to the peace.

The I.A.G. reported five strikes on the estates in 1921; two were on the East Bank Demerara. The depression of 1921-1922 produced a massive drop in living standards. In 1922, for the first time, strikes engulfed all the estates in Berbice, including comparatively progressive Port Mourant, Albion, and Rose Hall: two strikes each took place at Albion and Port Mourant.¹⁸⁸ Even the generally useful supplement provided by rice and cattle could not suffice during the depression. Collet's ruinous rice policy made the situation worse (see Chapter 3).

In 1923, four strikes were recorded.¹⁸⁹ The B.G.L.U. was experiencing grave internal problems; and it was forced to terminate its contacts with Indian workers. There is no reference to it in the strikes between 1921 and 1923. Neither did the B.G.E.I.A. make any effort to form a union among estate workers. These labourers, as in the past, had to fall back on the Immigration Agents; sometimes, as on the East Bank Demerara, with the aid of the B.G.E.I.A.. Workers' resistance between 1921 and 1923 was spasmodic, their protests diffused; while the planters and the colonial administration saw in all manifestations of discontent, the hands of 'agitators'. This paranoia contributed to the failure of the B.G.E.I.A. to form a trade union; this was a major error, especially inexcusable because of a tendency for its leadership to dissipate its energy in unquenchable, petty factiousness.

The industrial unease on the sugar plantations in the early-1920s stemmed from the failure of colonial society to fashion new instruments, which could enhance the conception of freedom, spawned by the abolition of indentureship. The planters and the colonial state interpreted each attempt to advance this freedom as potentially subversive, a threat to law and order; indeed, as a threat to the ruling, White minority. It was against this background that the fateful strike on the East Bank Demerara in 1924, took place.

VI The Ruimveldt Killings of 1924

On Thursday, 3 April 1924, the colonial police opened fire, at Ruimveldt, on striking workers from several sugar estates on the East Bank Demerara (Providence, Farm, Peter's Hall, Diamond), as they tried to march to Georgetown, apparently to meet H.N. Critchlow of the British Guiana Labour Union. (This was not clear. There was much confusion among Indian workers as to who had the authority to represent them, after the end of indentureship: the Immigration Agent General was considered impotent after 1920). The crowd was estimated at between four and five thousand; about 12 to 15 per cent were reported to be Black, a most unusual occurrence in the history of Indian resistance on the estates. Thirteen were killed (12 Indians and 1 Black); 24 were wounded.

What were the circumstances which precipitated the strike on the East Bank Demerara during the first week of April 1924? Who were the leaders, if any, that made the decision, which resulted in predominantly Indian workers, and a minority of Blacks, trying to enter Georgetown, while the

whole colony was under martial law? Was this indeed a manifestation of Indian-African unity, as some have suggested recently? What does this fatal event reveal about race relations in British Guiana in the 1920s? Were the shootings unavoidable?

On Monday, 31 March 1924, Black water-front workers in Georgetown, under the leadership of Critchlow and the B.G.L.U., went on strike. They demanded an increase in pay for stevedores, from \$1.60 to \$2.00 per day; for ordinary packers, from \$1.12 to \$1.44; and for truckers, from 84¢ to \$1.20 per day. The B.G.L.U. also wanted double-time rates for night work, Saturday afternoons, holidays, and work done between 4p.m. and 6p.m.¹⁹⁰

On the first day of the strike (31 March), the B.G.L.U. circulated a hand-bill in Georgetown, as well as on the estates on the East Bank Demerara, exhorting all workers to join a demonstration in the city on Tuesday, 1 April, in order to pressure employers to grant an increase in wages. The hand-bill was grandiloquently phrased; it was evocative of a call to war; and was addressed to all workers, Blacks and Indians, in the city and on the plantations:

WHETHER YOU ARE FROM TOWN OR COUNTRY, YOU SUFFER THE SAME.
If you want BETTER WAGES and better means of LIVING
JOIN THE
BIG DEMONSTRATION
on Tuesday, 1st April, 1924,
at 9a.m. from
B.G. LABOUR UNION HALL,
Regent St.
To Arms! To Arms! Ye Brave!
The Avenging sword unsheath!
March on! March!
All Hearts resolved
On Liberty or death!
Don't halt in your opinions, Remember 'THERE'S NOT TO
REASON WHY, THERE'S BUT TO DO OR DIE'
DO YOUR BIT.....
We will demonstrate for days, until we get what we want.¹⁹¹

The B.G.L.U. march took place in Georgetown on 1 April 1924; but *déclasse* elements, many of them Black women, subverted the peaceful, industrial objectives of the exercise. They entered the homes of wealthy individuals, mainly Europeans, and commanded their Black servants to leave. Several of the 'centipede' elements proceeded to the kitchens of the rich, and invited themselves to lunch. The next day, *The Daily Argosy*, the voice of the privileged, articulated the revulsion, fear, and anger which permeated the terrified, small White community. It blamed the indifference and unreliability of Black policemen for the perpetration of the outrageous acts:

It is exactly because it is known that the police are weak and unreliable that the disorderly elements dared to engage in riot and disorder. The Government will be well advised to set about stiffening the ranks with a number of European non-commissioned officers....¹⁹²

This fear surfaced quickly at times of crisis. On the morning of 3 April, hours before the Ruimveldt killings, the same paper indicted the Government for being 'weak, so pusillanimous, as to allow this gross outrage to pass without the most exemplary punishment of the delinquents'. None of the Black 'delinquents' were shot; and on 2 April, the day after the disorders, Critchlow, after meeting Governor Thomson and the merchants, appealed for peace, and advised all strikers to return to work, pending negotiations with the Chamber of Commerce.

According to Manager R.P. Daggett of Plantation Providence, the B.G.L.U. hand-bill was distributed by a 'black man' at Providence and Peter's Hall.¹⁹⁵ G.R.Reid, who conducted the one-man inquiry into the Ruimveldt killings, reported that this hand-bill was distributed on the East Bank estates by 'direct and indirect emissaries of the Labour Union'.¹⁹⁶ However, there is no evidence that Indian labourers from these estates participated in the demonstration in Georgetown, on 1 April, although several of them went to the city on that day, and witnessed some of the activities.

Nallapareddy, a labourer at Providence, told the Reid Inquiry that about 30 or 40 Indian labourers from the East Bank visited Francis Kawall, the president of the British Guiana East Indian Association (B.G.E.I.A.), in Georgetown, on 1 April. They each paid 36¢ to Kawall, who gave them 'buttons': they apparently became members of the Association. Nallapareddy added: 'Then we went to see what the black people were doing'.¹⁹⁷

Kawall, in his deposition to the Reid Inquiry, concurred that some labourers from the East Bank had visited him on 1 April; but that 'they had no grievances or I should have brought them on to the Immigration Agent General as before.... They have been coming to me since 1923...'¹⁹⁸ The Immigration Agent for the district, A.H. Hill, said Kawall had informed him on 1 April that 'a large number had come to enroll as members of the East Indian Association, and that some few had complained of being compelled to do work at Providence that they were not physically able to do'. He also stated that Anderson, the attorney of Providence, Farm, Peter's Hall, and Diamond, told him that workers reported for work on 1 April, except those from Providence who had gone to the city to attend a Labour Union meeting; he believed that some had gone to see Kawall.¹⁹⁹

There was nothing unusual in Indian workers from the East Bank estates going to see Kawall or Critchlow. This, as noted earlier, was quite common during the strikes of 1920. What was extraordinary was that several workers left work and travelled to Georgetown to join the B.G.E.I.A., on the same day as the B.G.L.U. demonstration; and that on 2 and 3 April, there was a seemingly well co-ordinated strike, which engulfed all the East Bank estates. The presence of Blacks in the aborted, fatal march to the city, on 3 April, was most extraordinary: it was unprecedented in the history of Indian resistance. Traditionally, strikes were small affairs, involving small sections, or particular gangs of Indians on individual estates. It is therefore necessary to assess the role of Kawall and the B.G.E.I.A. on one hand, and that of Critchlow and the B.G.L.U. on the other, in the events leading up to the day of the shootings.

In late-February 1924, there was some dissatisfaction among task-gang labourers at Plantation Diamond, who lived in the neighbouring village of Grove. These were freelance workers; and they objected to the wage rate.²⁰⁰ It is interesting that those who lived on the estates, in the 'logies', expressed no such grievance: their greater dependence on the estate restricted their freedom to protest. On 25 February, 55 men from Grove, accompanied by Kawall, presented their grievances to Immigration Agent, Hill, in Georgetown. They complained that the wage rate per task was not disclosed at the outset; and that the water at Grove was unfit for consumption.

Hill visited Grove on 26 February. He met Anderson, who told him that, contrary to allegations, the wage rate per task was set at the outset. Hill also discussed the water problem.²⁰¹ Of the source of drinking water at Grove, he observed: '.... the trench runs east and west, the burial ground is to the south, and if the water rises the water floods the burial ground That condition has been in existence for 30 years or more; it could be remedied'.²⁰² Anderson told Hill that the water issue was raised with the Local Government Inspector, who assured him that an artesian well for the village was 'under consideration'. He showed Hill an alternative source of water, a canal which ran along one end of the village; but people at the other end had to walk the length of the village to use it. Hill informed Kawall of the situation.²⁰³

On 28 February, 35 men from Grove, unaccompanied by Kawall, returned to Hill. They complained that the increase in wages, which, they alleged, Kawall told them the estate had promised, was not granted. Anderson denied that the question of an increase was ever raised. Hill said that Kawall also

denied telling the labourers of any such increase. There the matter rested. Hill claimed that he received no other complaints about wages until after the shootings at Ruimveldt.²⁰⁴

As in 1920, labour relations were in a mess. Hill, the Immigration Agent, admitted: 'our powers are not as great over the employers as they were when we had indentured immigrants'; he added that the elaborate provisions for settling disputes, which existed under indentureship, could no longer be invoked.²⁰⁵ The influence of the I.A.G. was greatly diminished by 1924.

This was the context in which Kawall and the British Guiana East Indian Association, and Critchlow and the British Guiana Labour Union sought to represent Indian plantation workers. The B.G.E.I.A., the main Indian organisation in the colony, felt that it had a natural right to represent Indian workers; but it lacked an effective, recognised instrument, such as the B.G.L.U.. The former had seemed to resent the latter's intervention on behalf of Indian workers in 1920. Shortly after the shootings in April 1924, Kawall told the Reid Inquiry: 'I never spoke to Critchlow and never worked with the Labour Union'.²⁰⁶

The evidence suggests that Kawall, more than any other person, had contributed to the rising expectations and consequent disaffection of the Indian workers on the East Bank estates. On Sunday, 30 March, the day before the B.G.L.U. strike, he was re-elected president of the B.G.E.I.A.. Kawall said that several workers from the East Bank were present at this meeting; but the poor drinking-water at Grove was the only grievance discussed. However, he admitted that he raised the controversial Colonisation issue. He told the workers that 'delegates had gone to India to represent them and to do the best for them. I did not say to get wages increased, but it came to that'.²⁰⁷

The Daily Argosy, reporting on the B.G.E.I.A. meeting of 30 March, noted that Kawall had exhibited bottles of impure water, which were brought by Indian workers from Grove. He commented on the effect of this water on their health, and promised to make representation to the authorities. He also discussed the injustice meted out to eight Indian residents at Plantation Albion, who had been evicted because of disagreements with a 'driver'. Kawall reportedly concluded that 'in the face of all these happenings, he did not see how the Colonisation Scheme could be a success'.²⁰⁸

There is no doubt that from 1923, when Kawall became president of the Association, the Indians on

the East Bank saw him as the main channel for the ventilation of their grievances. He admitted: 'They have been coming to me since 1923.... I always prepare grievances for Mr Hill's hearing, and he generally goes up to investigate'.²⁰⁹ It is difficult to assess how systematic his work among the East Bank Indians was. Kawall told the Reid Inquiry that he had not attended any meeting on the East Bank since July 1923, until 2 April 1924, the day before the shootings.²¹⁰ If Ann Spackman is correct, then he was obviously not telling the truth. She argues that prior to the events of April 1924, the B.G.E.I.A. was 'active' on the East Bank; Kawall was the 'fount' of this organisation in 1923-1924. She continues:

Meetings have been held in villages to discuss, in particular, demands for higher wages, and also the current Colonisation Scheme which was intended to bring colonists to settle in Guyana from India. It was believed, and resented, that these new colonists would be given special facilities to acquire land which had been properly drained and irrigated — the dream of most of the estate labourers.....²¹¹

Whether these meetings were held, and Kawall visited the East Bank or not, is immaterial: his influence on the East Bank workers was considerable.²¹² He was the foremost Indian opponent of the Colonisation Scheme, then being vigorously promoted in India by Attorney General Nunan, and the sole Indian member of the local legislature, J.A. Luckhoo. Kawall's argument was that the renewal of Indian immigration would be detrimental to the welfare of plantation workers in the colony. And the report by Pillai and Tivary, released in January 1924, had provided him with much ammunition.²¹³ (They painted a picture of despair; they had little to say of Indian achievements in the colony, unlike Keatinge, the other member, whose minority report was balanced). On the question of wages on the estates, Pillai and Tivary observed (it is essential to requote this):

..... it is clear that the average earnings of a shovelman must be raised by 80 per cent, of a male weeder by 120 per cent, and a female weeder by 88 per cent a week before they can make both ends meet..... if the above increments were to be granted, even then the labourers could not be said to be earning a living wage.....²¹⁴

Meanwhile, Nunan had sent a telegram to Governor Thomson, strangely asserting that the rather extravagant and impracticable demands of Pillai and Tivary were 'already included in the original scheme, or subsequently adopted or contemplated literally or in principle'.²¹⁵ Frustrated by the interminable hurdles which had confronted the Scheme since 1919, Nunan desperately accepted the report in its entirety. This kindled a fear among labourers in British Guiana, Indians and Blacks, that their interests would be subordinated to the welfare of the new immigrants.

This was the context in which Kawall was recruiting members for the B.G.E.I.A., from the East Bank estates. It was an attempt to stifle the Scheme, unless labourers in the colony were granted the benefits recommended by Pillai and Tivary. In January 1924, the B.G.E.I.A. had supported the Scheme on condition that a depression in wages did not accompany the arrival of new immigrants; and that a minimum wage to be fixed as a precaution.²¹⁶

Among the Blacks, strident opposition to the Colonisation Scheme developed, as the renewal of Indian immigration seemed imminent. At the celebrations to mark the fifth anniversary of the B.G.L.U., in January 1924, A.V. Crane, a Black lawyer, argued against the Scheme on two counts: he objected to new immigrants before provisions were made to protect local labour; moreover, he asserted that 'If the colony was flooded with thousands of people of one race the vested interests of the other races in the colony would be affected'.²¹⁷ In short, Crane feared Indian domination of the Blacks.

The Negro Progress Convention (N.P.C.) saw the Scheme as a threat to the Black race. (Critchlow was a member of this organisation;²¹⁸ its leaders were Black professionals, who were advisers to the B.G.L.U. The Inspector General of Police thought it was 'as anti-East Indian as it was anti-white').²¹⁹ In a memorandum to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in February 1924, they argued that 'the Negro's assimilation of Western civilisation and ideas' handicapped him in competition with Indian wage-earners, 'whose mode of life renders his cost of living considerably less, and who can thereby afford to accept lower wages'. They deemed the Colonisation Scheme 'a distinct act of discrimination' against the Blacks, who were entitled to 'first consideration', being the 'pioneer settlers' of British Guiana. The N.P.C. called up the long-term political implications, for the Blacks, of the restarting of Indian immigration in this racially-sensitive colony:

.... it would tend to rob them of their political potentialities as they would be in the minority in any voting contest — the Indian voters would become more than or equal to the votes of any two of the other sections of the community; it would be detrimental to good government and the preservation of the peace of the country, and would further tend to create a monopoly for fostering or laying the foundation for class labour and would place the Government in a state of embarrassment in times of stress..... All this makes it necessary that the different sections of the subject races should be as near as possible balanced.²²⁰

The Daily Argosy, responding to the N.P.C. memorandum, observed: 'it fears that if the numerical superiority of the East Indians becomes more marked', the comparatively better political position of the Blacks would be undermined; 'especially if East Indians begin to awaken to appreciation of the political power afforded by their numbers'.²²¹

Four weeks before the Ruimveldt shootings, a most ominous note was struck by A.A. Thorne, a prominent Black leader, in his memorandum of 6 March 1924 to the Colonial Office. He argued that the Colonisation Scheme had produced 'much friction and aroused racial feelings in the colony'. He also saw it as injurious to Black interests, and expressed fear that 'the introduction of labourers of any favoured race at the expense of the others is both undesirable and dangerous'.²²²

The Black leaders were correct. The Colonisation Scheme would have produced an Indian majority in the colony, with potential for their political domination. The Blacks took a long view; Kawall did not: he opposed the Scheme because he felt that it would lead to a fall in wages for the Indians on the estates. It was primarily because of fear of Indian supremacy, in the long-run, that the Black leaders opposed the Scheme.

Critchlow's association with the Negro Progress Convention led to accusations of 'racialist tendencies' in the Union. He countered by drawing attention to his work among Indian estate labourers in 1919 and 1920.²²³ But he admitted that Black professionals, leaders of the N.P.C., had an influence on the B.G.L.U.. In a speech in London in 1945 he stated: 'People said I was an uneducated man and that this thing was too big for me. It was suggested that I should bring in some of the professional men, lawyers, doctors, clergy, and form a wider committee.... They came in and started to educate'.²²⁴

Through the educated Black middle class in the N.P.C., the fear of Indian domination permeated the B.G.L.U., although this was not articulated explicitly by the latter. Its membership had dried up between 1921 and 1924, because of the depression. By early-1924, as Critchlow admitted, the Union had 5 and 42 financial members.²²⁵ It had dwindled to virtually nothing, from about 2,000 members in 1920. But, by this time, the situation among Indian workers on the East Bank was changing. The impotence of the I.A.G., coupled with the ineffectual record of Kawall and the B.G.E.I.A. in redressing grievances, created a leadership vacuum. Meanwhile, Kawall's opposition to the Colonisation Scheme, and his stimulation of workers' expectations, whilst feeding a sense of grinding injustice on plantations where few supplementary sources of subsistence existed, such as on the East Bank Demerara, created a potentially volatile situation. The Pillai-Tivary Report also contributed to this situation.

This was the context in which emissaries of the B.G.L.U. intervened on the East Bank Estates in April 1924. Critchlow, in his 1945 speech in London, explained the circumstances, and claimed credit for the strike in the city, and on the estates. (Contrary to his statement, the strike by Indian workers was restricted to the East Bank). He said:

The merchants threatened a reduction in our wages. They had reduced in 1920, 1921, 1922 and now in 1924, they threatened a reduction to sixty cents a day! When we wrote to the Governor, Sir Graham Thompson (sic), asking him to open up unemployed work, he said we must go to the estates. But the estates could not find enough work for the labour they already had. I threatened a general strike..... I planned a demonstration, as a result of which the whole colony went on strike..... There were riots and shootings. The Governor arranged for me to meet the Chamber of Commerce. Even while the conference was going on, some of the country people who were coming into the town were shot (emphasis added).²²⁶

Critchlow obviously wanted to resuscitate his union by bringing in Indian plantation workers. By trying to get them to join the B.G.L.U. march in Georgetown on 1 April 1924, he hoped to strengthen his position against the merchants. But a hidden, more powerful, motive for the activities of his emissaries on the estates on 2 and 3 April, after the declaration of martial law, was the determination of the Black leaders to stifle the Colonisation Scheme. If Indian workers could be seen to protest *en masse*, without the obtrusive prompting of the B.G.L.U., then the case for the Scheme would be gravely undermined in India. This probably explains the conspicuous absence of Critchlow and other prominent leaders of the Union on the East Bank, before or after the shootings on 3 April.

The emissaries of the B.G.L.U. intervened on these estates from 31 March, with the distribution of the inflammatory hand-bill. Several witnesses told the Reid Inquiry of its wide-spread circulation. Sundar Maraj, a 'driver' at Providence, said that he got the bill from 'a black man..... He had a large quantity of them in a parcel. He does not live at Providence. I do not know him'.²²⁷ Badal Khan, a shovelman at Providence, related: 'I saw a motor car with a black man sharing out news..... He was sitting inside the car and a black chauffeur was driving. They were giving out plenty all the way and went on up to Diamond. A coolie man told me he heard that shovelmen would get 10 bits [80¢] a day. He had a paper [hand-bill] in his hand'.²²⁸ Reid reported that 'direct and indirect emissaries of the Labour Union' distributed the hand-bills on the East Bank. He added that some were 'foolish, illiterate catspaws for other people'; others came in cars 'direct from Georgetown to distribute the bills'.²²⁹ But Reid did not implicate Critchlow directly; neither did he summon him to appear at the Inquiry.

What was most unusual, was the presence of several, 'strange', mainly Black men, who drove the

Indians from the fields on Wednesday, 2 April, when Critchlow was advising the strikers in Georgetown to return to work. Hoka, a 'headman' at the Plantation Farm, said that he was 'driven' from the fields by a 'a lot of strange people'. He added: 'I believe they came from Georgetown, mixed East Indians and Blacks..... There were about 100 shovelmen and 200 weeders who had taken work and were weeding. About 20 or more went all round and drive them out.... The workers were told if they don't leave work, they will be licked'.²³⁰

Prince Edwards, a 'headman' at Plantation Diamond, described similar scenes on that estate. He said: 'I saw some three people running aback on the north side of the estate.... They were shouting to the people to leave their work and come out, and said, "Everybody striking for price".'²³¹

Sundar Rai, a labourer at Providence, said that on 2 April he was going to work, when 'someone struck me on my arm, a black man, and told me I must not go to work'.²³²

Reid concluded that 'it is clear that gangs of from 50 to 100 men were driven from their work by handfuls of half a dozen agitators'.²³³ But he failed to disclose the identity of the 'agitators', or whether they also, were emissaries of Critchlow and the British Guiana Labour Union.

As several Indians had seen the disturbance in Georgetown on 1 April, they were probably impressionable. After being 'driven' from the fields on 2 April, about 200 or 300 labourers at Providence, armed with sticks and beating drums (the latter, an unusual occurrence among Indians), assembled in the compound of Manager R.P. Daggett. Some entered his house and commanded the servants to leave. Daggett identified the leader as a Black man, Abrahams, known as Francois. He said that the crowd comprised Indians and Blacks; the majority were Indians; a large number of them wore East Indian Association buttons. He believed that nothing would have happened had it not been for the distribution of the B.G.L.U. hand-bills.²³⁴

Stipendiary Magistrate Legge, who also witnessed the incident, said that the leaders 'appeared to be Black'; but the majority were Indians, many of whom were very excited.²³⁵ Apparently some tried to march to Georgetown, but were stopped. Others proceeded to Peter's Hall, Farm, and Diamond, and got the workers to leave the fields. The police and the militia were despatched to the East Bank.

The workers congregated at Diamond. Kawall arrived and had a meeting with the attorney of the estates, G.E. Anderson. Kawall said that some elderly Indian men and 'the black man', presumably Abrahams alias Francois, were demanding wages of 5 shillings a day.²³⁶ Legge also refers to this mysterious black man, who presented himself as a leader. He complained that some Indians had not received money for forking.²³⁷ Anderson refused to negotiate with a 'mob', but was prepared to meet with selected representatives of the workers and Kawall, on the following day, Thursday, 3 April.

On the morning of the 3 April, according to Kawall, the labourers at Diamond went to Anderson's house 'armed with sticks, beating drums, and waving red flags'.²³⁸ (The latter was a feature of B.G.L.U. marches). Anderson refused to meet with them. Meanwhile, Kawall and two other members of the B.G.E.I.A., Ramnarine Pundit and Ramprashad, left Georgetown at 9.30 a.m. to keep their appointment with Anderson. At Houston, they saw many boys going to Georgetown. As they approached Diamond, they encountered large crowds of Indians and Blacks who were proceeding towards the city. Kawall said that he and his colleagues tried to persuade the people to return to Diamond to see Anderson; but they were determined to go to Georgetown 'to ask for more money'. They told them that the city was under martial law, and that they should not go. (In fact, the whole colony came under martial from the previous evening). Apparently some of the Indians heeded their warning; but some Black men resisted, waving their sticks in anger, demanding, 'Let us pass; we must go'.²³⁹

The crowd was stopped by the police at Ruimveldt, about one mile outside of the city. Kawall and his colleagues then informed the crowd that the Inspector General of Police would allow five representative to go to Georgetown to present their case. But they insisted that all should go. The Riot Act was read; and Kawall again tried to persuade them to appoint delegates to accompany him to the city. However, they were adamant that they must remain on the road until the delegates returned. Captain Ramsay refused; he wanted the crowd to disperse. No delegates were selected. Kawall then informed Gamble, the Deputy Inspector General of Police, that he was going to Georgetown to bring 'Crosby', the Immigration Agent General. Shortly before he left, he heard firing; he learnt soon afterwards that several people were killed. He went to the I.A.G. who, he said, 'knew nothing of what was going on'.²⁴⁰

It is significant that Kawall made no mention of the fact that the people wanted to see Critchlow, as several witnesses testified; but he admitted that 'a few shouted for Crosby'.²⁴¹ The B.G.E.I.A. obviously saw Critchlow as a threat, and probably doubted his motives for seeking to mobilise Indian workers on the estates. As Kawall told the Reid Inquiry, J.A. Viapree, his predecessor as president of the Association, 'telephoned me on the 1st or 2nd April to dissociate myself from the Labour Union. I said we never were associated..... I never spoke to Critchlow and never worked with the Labour Union'.²⁴²

The Daily Argosy reported on 4 April 1924, the day after the shootings: 'Mr Kawall is of the opinion that the East Indians were incited by the black people who were entirely out of control'. Ashton Chase, a leader of the B.G.L.U. in the early-1950's, has written:

Certain Barbadian labourers from Diamond, reported to be members of the B.G.L.U., were said to be ring leaders of the crowd at Ruimveldt.²⁴³

Anderson, the attorney of the estates, attributed the trouble to Kawall and the B.G.E.I.A., and to a lesser degree, the B.G.L.U.. He blamed Kawall, 'the fount of the Association', who, 'with the best of intentions possible.... misled the people very gravely'. Anderson believed that the workers were egged on to believe that they ought to get 5 shillings per day. He added:

There is no doubt whatever that the report of the Indian delegates [Pillai and Tivary] has had an upsetting effect and I think a great deal has been made of that report.... I have been told that the people have been assured by men representing the Association that they should have a minimum wage of 5 shillings (\$1.20) per day, and promised that they would see that they got it. The women, I am told, were promised 80¢ per day.²⁴⁴

Anderson alleged that Kawall had been 'interfering with and getting at the people for a long time.... He practically got them to shunt the Immigration Department out of the way'. He also accused the B.G.L.U. of inflaming passions by circulation its hand-bill on the plantations.²⁴⁵ He said nothing of the role, or the connections of the Black man, Abrahams alias Francois. This was a strange omission.

Kawall disclaimed all responsibility. He said of the crowd on 3 April: 'I heard no grievances, it was a confused disorderly mob, and I got it to go home. I was satisfied that the Manager could not listen to them..... I have never seen a crowd like this before. I think they thought they could do the same thing as they saw in town on Tuesday'.²⁴⁶ He said that he was determined to dissuade them from

going to Georgetown, but 'eventually a black Barbadian came with a hackia stick to me, braced me with his arm and stick and shouted, "Let them go, don't stop them"'.²⁴⁷

Kawall told the Reid Inquiry that he always prepared reports on workers' grievances for Immigration Agent, Hill, who would then visit the East Bank estates to investigate. He added: 'I had no complaints of any kind that week..... They could not have acted in the way I saw unless they had been stirred up by someone'.²⁴⁸ He then commented on the hand-bill circulated by the B.G.L.U., tacitly implicating the Union in the fateful events: 'I do not like the chorus at all. It is not a decent bill. That might create a disturbance'.²⁴⁹

Kawall tried to absolve himself of blame for the tragic events. He said: 'On Thursday I telephoned the police as I was convinced the people would insist on going on to town. I wanted the police to stop them as I knew of the Proclamation. They were very excited; *one black man spoilt the show*' (emphasis added).²⁵⁰

This ubiquitous Black man, 'a Black Barbadian', is identified by District Inspector Bovell-Jones as 'a negro shovelman at Providence'.²⁵¹ Manager Daggett of Providence indentified this same man as Abrahams alias Francois, the leader of the crowd when his home was invaded on 2 April.²⁵² Stipendiary Magistrate Legge also considered him the leader of the crowd at Providence and Diamond on the same day; and he testified to the Reid Inquiry that this Black man was again most conspicuous on the day of the shootings. Legge said: 'He came up to me in a truculent manner and had a stick in his hand. I said "You seem to be a ringleader and I warned you yesterday. You broke the law yesterday and you are doing so now"'.²⁵³

Kawall's colleague, Ramnarine Pundit, also identified this Black Barbadian as the ringleader. He said: 'Others came up with a band, the Black man leading. The man I know he is the traitor. He pushed Mr Kawall aside and ^d said to the crowd "Do not mind them, let us go on"'. Ramnarine Pundit added: '.... the Black man in front kept saying, "must go to town to Critchlow"'.²⁵⁴

Ramprashad, an executive member of the B.G.E.I.A., told the Reid Inquiry that 'we got pushed aside.... they said that we were paid officers of the Government.... we could not hold the crowd back.... They kept calling in loud tones, but peacefully, that they must go to see Critchlow.... I did

not hear one single mention of "Crosby" [the I.A.G.]; they said they were going to see Critchlow to get grievances redressed....²⁵⁵ Kawall, as noted earlier, said that 'a few shouted for Crosby'.

It is obvious that the leadership of Kawall and the B.G.E.I.A. was discarded; and that the Black Barbadian, most likely an agent of the B.G.L.U., on 2 and 3 April 1924, arrogated unto himself the leadership of the predominantly Indian workers. Kawall and his colleagues knew that. That was why they did not try to contact Critchlow, although the crowd was clamouring for him. When, belatedly, Kawall acted, he went to the discredited Immigration Agent General. To have asked Critchlow to intervene would have been an admission that the Indian workers had rejected the B.G.E.I.A.. The prominence of the Black Barbadian, Abrahams alias Francois, suggests precisely that.

How does one explain the extraordinary control which this bizarre character exerted on Indian workers on 2 and 3 April? How does one account for the inordinately high proportion of Blacks — estimated at 12 to 15 per cent by Inspector of Police, Murtland — in the crowd, on 3 April? (Immigration Agent, Arthur Hill, told the Reid Inquiry that there were 'a few contract labourers from Barbados' on the estates, 'so I should be surprised if I heard a whole crowd of black men saying they were coming to see "Crosby"').²⁵⁶

It is equally bizarre that this Black Barbadian was not brought before the Reid Inquiry, although the principal witnesses testified to his considerable influence;²⁵⁷ neither was Critchlow or other leaders of the B.G.L.U. It is also incredible that Reid, at no point in his mediocre report, attempted to explain the role, or ascertain the possible links of this ubiquitous figure. These glaring omissions were probably shaped by a powerful need on the part of the Government and the planters to minimise the role of the B.G.L.U. in the fateful events on the East Bank. A thorough examination of the Black Barbadian might have established links with the B.G.L.U. An examination of the B.G.L.U.'s role might have led to the questioning of their motives. And there was no doubt that this would have established that the racial fears of the Blacks, associated with Indian colonisation, was a powerful force behind the machinations of the B.G.L.U. and the Negro Progress Convention. The Colonisation Scheme was at a crucial stage of negotiation in India; anything that tarnished it had to be concealed from the Government of India, and the nationalist leaders. Of course, the B.G.L.U. welcomed this: manifestations of Indian discontent, seemingly unprompted by Blacks, with brutal repression by the

Colonial state, damaged the Scheme irreparably. (Memories of the Amritsar massacre were fresh in Indian minds).

Yet the hand of the B.G.L.U. was evident at all stages of the East Bank strike: the widespread circulation of its inflammatory hand-bill on the estates by its 'emissaries'; the intimidation of workers in the fields; the drumming and the use of red flags at Providence and Diamond on 2 April — established features of B.G.L.U. marches; the use of a band on 3 April — unprecedented in Indian resistance; the prominence of several Black Barbadians, possibly members of the Union's branch at Diamond, as Ashton Chase suggests; and the extraordinary presence of Blacks, most of whom apparently were not estate workers, on the day of the march.

A few days after the shooting, *The Daily Argosy* reported the allegations of an unnamed informant, who implicated the B.G.L.U. and the N.P.C. in the Ruimveldt tragedy, imputing dark motives:

An East Indian gentleman visited this office on Friday [4 April] to assure us that the unfortunate people on the East Bank had been the victims of the machinations of the Labour Union and the Negro Progress Association (sic). He declared emphatically that the East Bank Indians had been deliberately incited to a dangerous degree with the specific object of leading them into an encounter with the forces of law, so that thereby the quietus might be given to any prospect of East Indian immigration, which the two bodies named intend to frustrate at all cost.²⁵⁸

The paper refused to 'credit' the leaders of these organisations with such 'Machiavellian cunning'; but argued that the tragedy had certainly put an end to hopes of the resumption of immigration from India.

But in 1945, as noted earlier, Critchlow did claim credit for the strike; consequently he should have borne some responsibility for the tragic outcome. It is true that Kawall did not bring him in, although on 3 April it was obvious that the people expected Critchlow to redress their grievances. Yet his 'emissaries' were deeply involved in inflaming passions; he should have intervened to defuse a potentially explosive situation, especially after the declaration of martial law on 2 April. The proclamation was emphatic; it was suicidal to try to march to Georgetown on 3 April. It declared:

Orders have been issued for all unlawful, riotous and tumultuous assemblies to be dispersed. If necessary the Riot Act will be read, and the powers conferred by Law will then be used: I earnestly call upon all peaceable inhabitants to avoid joining assemblies and crowds, as by so doing they will run the risk of being injured or even losing their lives.²⁵⁹

There is no evidence that Critchlow and other Black leaders deliberately orchestrated a confrontation between Indian workers and the police; but the pervasive fear among the Blacks of Indian domination, through the Colonisation Scheme, in late-1923 and early-1924, suggests that they would have gone to extremes to strangle the Scheme. This probably explains why prominent Black leaders were conspicuously absent on the East Bank, while minor agents agitated the crowd. Governor Thomson appreciated how deeply Black opinion ran against Indian immigration. In a confidential despatch, after the shootings, he observed:

The generous terms offered to East Indian settlers under the Colonisation Scheme in regard to land, housing and other matters have undoubtedly aroused envious feelings among certain sections of the local inhabitants who probably consider that if so much public money is to be spent on immigrants, something should also be done for those already there.²⁶⁰

Earlier in December 1923, a regular correspondent to *The Daily Argosy*, presumably Black, had been more unequivocal: he dreaded the possibility of British Guiana becoming an Indian colony. He wrote:

I am afraid that in the excitement to get East Indian immigrants to come here, some people are losing their heads. These people are making all sorts of preposterous demands, which the powers-that-be, are in fear and trembling, conceding..... Those who are hoping to see 'India in Guiana' will see it, and then everybody else will have to quit or be subject to these shrewd and wily people.... At the rate matters are heading, it would not at all surprise me were the East Indians to ask that the next Governor be an Indian.²⁶¹

In January 1924, as noted earlier, A.V. Crane expressed similar fears of Indian supremacy to a B.G.L.U. meeting. In February 1924, the N.P.C. submitted their 'Memorandum of Reasoned Statement' to the Colonial Office, expressing fear of becoming a minority, and being 'robbed of their political potentialities'. In March 1924, A.A. Thorne also sent a memorandum to the Colonial Office. He said that the Colonisation Scheme aroused 'friction' and 'racial feelings': Indian immigration was 'undesirable and dangerous'.

This, then, was the context in which the Blacks ousted Kawall and the B.G.E.I.A. from the leadership of Indian workers on the East Bank Demerara on 2 and 3 April 1924. It is wrong to see the unusual presence of Blacks at Ruimveldt as a manifestation of racial unity.²⁶² It was a perverse union, fed primarily by Black opposition to renewed Indian immigration and fear of Indian domination in the long-run, rather than by working-class grievances against the plantocracy.

But Kawall, as president of the B.G.E.I.A. in 1923-1924, contributed to his own humiliation and the tragedy. The Blacks could not have usurped the leadership on the East Bank if he were a stronger

leader, with a long view. His admission that 'one black man spoilt the whole show' epitomised his weaknesses, his inexperience. He, like the Black leaders, opposed the renewal of Indian immigration. While the latter feared Indian domination, Kawall feared that the condition of Indians already in the colony would be undermined. Although the B.G.E.I.A. had given conditional support to the Scheme in January 1924 (Kawall had signed the document), he proceeded to attack it.²⁶³ With the publication of the Pillai-Tivary Report, he allegedly fed Indian workers on the East Bank with ideas of larger wage claims,²⁶⁴ while having no authority, or any effective instrument, to achieve much. He was forced to fall back on the I.A.G., whose influence had dwindled with the end of indentureship. The Indian workers on the estates had no leadership. They had no confidence in the I.A.G.; they saw Kawall as impotent.

The Immigration Agent, Hill, admitted his dwindling influence; his role seemed more like a moral concession by the estate authorities. He conceded that with the end of indenture, he no longer had statutory authority to invoke 'the elaborate provisions for settling labour dispute'.²⁶⁵ On the East Bank Demerara, where people had no rice lands, their dependence on wages was much greater. In the absence of a trade union, discontent festered. That was why 'emissaries' of the B.G.L.U. were able to walk into the leadership in April 1924.

If Kawall had taken a long view, he would have seen that the Scheme offered possibilities for incremental changes on the estates: the planters needed to placate Indian nationalist opinion. Moreover, as the Blacks recognised, it could have led to decisive Indian political influence in the long-run. But while he opposed the Scheme, he and the B.G.E.I.A. did nothing to form a trade union among the Indian workers; they could only give rhetorical support to them.

The climate was conducive to the building of a union. The B.G.L.U. was formed in January 1919; it was registered in July 1922.²⁶⁶ Critchlow said that he started the union at the advice of Governor Collet.²⁶⁷ In March 1920, when the draft bill to register the B.G.L.U. was being prepared, Collet argued in favour of the recognition of many unions. He wrote:

The Bill, if adopted, would give a monopoly to one Union [B.G.L.U.], and this would be objectionable; but I would suggest that legislation be introduced enabling an unlimited number of unions to be established..... I am inclined to think that more harm may be done when there is no legal union than when there is one.....²⁶⁸

Secretary of State Milner concurred. The Trades Union Ordinance became law on 18 June 1921.²⁶⁹ The B.G.E.I.A. did nothing. The resurrection of the Colonisation Scheme in 1923 gave the Association an excellent opportunity to form a union. They did nothing. It is noteworthy that in May 1923, Captain Mitchell, the Deputy Manager of Plantation Wales, stated that he had resigned his job in order to form a trade union 'at the request of a large number of East Indians'.²⁷⁰ Nothing came of this.

Kawall said that the B.G.E.I.A. had nothing to do with Mitchell's plan; but that the Association had referred the issue of forming a union to the Governor; and they were awaiting his response.²⁷¹ Kawall and the Association did not pursue the matter. The running of a trade union required hard work; Kawall had his own substantial business to manage, so did several of his colleagues. But his opposition to the renewal of Indian immigration remained undiminished. He probably believed that by opposing the Colonisation Scheme, he was acting in the best interest of estate workers in the colony. He thought that some form of protest by the East Bank workers would damage the Scheme; and, as Reid reported, he did 'nothing of any moment during the earlier part of the week to allay the excitement'.²⁷²

Kawall probably also believed that the death of the Scheme was in the interest of racial harmony in the colony; he must have feared Black reprisals if, through renewed immigration, the Indians became a majority. In November 1925, during the visit of the Indian Commissioner, Kunwar Maharaj Singh, Kawall wrote that 'the foundation of the Ruimveldt tragedy was the outcome of the Colonisation Scheme'. And he proceeded to remind the Commissioner of the demands of the Black leaders. He asked:

What about the Negro leaders' demand which is so well known that there should be equal proportion of both Negro and East Indian colonists? Can the Commissioner fulfil this? I am sure not.²⁷³

Maharaj Singh reported that he met only two Indian leaders who were opposed to immigration in any form. One was 'Mr F. Kawall'. 'Educated Indian opinion' was in favour of further Indian immigration, providing it was not done through 'a purely or mainly labour scheme'. The Indian leaders argued that Indians were unable to 'secure their due influence' in British Guiana, unlike Mauritius, where they constituted 70 per cent of the population.²⁷⁴ They had belatedly awoken to the deeper implications of the Scheme for the long-term security of the Indians in the colony. The

Black leaders understood this; they, understandably, acted to protect the security of their own people. Kawall was correct: the tragic events at Ruimveldt could not be separated from the Colonisation issue; indeed, the latter was its 'foundation'.

The Indian workers felt betrayed. On 10 April 1924, the Colonial Secretary noted that he had been informed that the Indians on the East Bank Demerara were 'bitter against Mr Kawall and also against the negroes presumably on the ground that they had been led into trouble by them'.²⁷⁵ Among the Indians, this feeling of betrayal by Kawall in particular, was naturally greater. The anger rankled. In August 1927, an articulate Indian correspondent from Rose Hall Village, Corentyne, Abraham Jodhan, argued passionately that Kawall 'should never have had the brazen effrontery to seek the suffrage of an Indian audience again, considering his association with the demonstration at Ruimveldt, which regrettably culminated in a tragedy, and his subsequent cowardly action to efface his person from the neighbourhood'.²⁷⁶

But the weaknesses of Indian leadership persisted. At no time after Ruimveldt, well into the depression of the 1930s, do the records indicate any effort on the part of the B.G.E.I.A. to organise a trade union for Indian workers on the sugar estates. The leadership vacuum was yawning. During the first week of August 1933, Governor Denham reported to the Legislative Council that the workers at Diamond had gone on strike. He observed that 'only during the last ten days' Critchlow and his colleagues had been addressing workers on the East Bank on the question of higher wages, trying to induce them to strike, with a view to their joining a demonstration in Georgetown, planned by the Union for 15 August. The Governor believed that one of the motives for Critchlow's 'propaganda' was 'to increase his followers and bring in a large number of East Indians from the East Bank and put them in the forefront of the proposed demonstration following the precedent of 1924'.²⁷⁷

The Colonial Secretary, the Attorney General, and the Inspector General of Police met officials of the B.G.L.U., and pointed out to them 'the dangers' which might result if the demonstration was held. The police had taken 'precautions and were fully prepared to deal with the position'.²⁷⁸

A proclamation to this effect was issued in Hindi and English, and circulated among Indian workers on the East Bank. On 14 August 1933, the Governor informed the Executive Council that this was done to let the 'East Indians know the position as it was not sufficient to leave the matter to the

newspapers or the Labour Union....' He noted that 'it had a good effect'²⁷⁹: the B.G.L.U. called off the demonstration. (There was no reference to the B.G.E.I.A., or any Indian leaders). The Indians on the East Bank were wise not to march to Georgetown: the police had an established record of indiscretion and brutality to Indian crowds in British Guiana. The 1924 shootings at Ruimveldt underlined this.

The evidence presented to the Reid Inquiry suggests that while the crowd constituted an unlawful gathering — martial law was declared throughout the colony on 2 April — the decision to shoot was taken unilaterally, impulsively, in a moment of panic, by the Staff Officer to the Local Forces, Robert Ramsay: the acting Deputy Inspector General of Police, Gamble, who testified that he was 'the senior officer present and virtually in command', and was only about 140 yards away from Ramsay, was not consulted.²⁸⁰ (Ramsay ranked fourth after the Inspector General, his deputy, and the County Inspector of Police, Capt. Murtland; the latter two were present at Ruimveldt on 3 April 1924).²⁸¹ Neither was informed of the decision to use force.

Ramsay testified that his reason for firing was that 'mounted police were being attacked.... The men and horses were being hunted by men on foot with missiles and trying to get hold of them.. I saw an attempt to unseat several of the mounted police'. But he admitted: 'None of them actually held a mounted policeman. If they had held one for two seconds he would have been killed. My firing was to save life. To prevent them doing this'.²⁸² Ramsay added: 'I did not see them get physical hold of any of the police, they may have done so.... I fired on them as they were actually endeavouring to get at close quarters'.²⁸³ It is clear that his only reason for ordering fire was his apprehension that the mounted police were in danger of being attacked.

But several White policemen testified that the pelting began only after Ramsay ordered the mounted police to charge the crowd, which had hitherto been peaceful, even humorous. R.C. Clegg, an Englishman, who was a special constable at Ruimveldt, said: 'I should judge the first violence was after the mounted police charged the crowd.... most of the time we were enjoying a smoke on the bridge.... they were not attempting any violence at the time..... I never saw any cause for alarm.....'²⁸⁴

Charles C. Wood, another White special constable, testified: 'I saw no police wounded. I did not expect the firing..... I saw nothing to frighten me'.²⁸⁵ Special Constable, H.J.M. Earle, another

Englishman, substantiated this: 'I saw no one assaulted, nor any personal attempt at violence before the pelting'.²⁸⁶

County Inspector, C.C. Murtland, also observed that the pelting of the mounted police was the only manifestation of violence. He said: 'I saw no offence taken by the crowd against the police except this pelting'.²⁸⁷

The highest-ranked officer present, and 'virtually in command', J.S. Gamble, agreed. He added: 'I did not think that the crowd intended to surround and destroy the police'.²⁸⁸ And Ramsay himself told the Reid Inquiry that 'The crowd had not attempted to rush us till they rushed the mounted police.... I was there to stop them. I shot them because they were making a determined attack on the mounted police'.²⁸⁹ He was emphatic that he did not fire to disperse the mob.

Sergeant Major Billyeald, who was in charge of the mounted police, and was ordered by Ramsay to disperse the crowd, said that his troops were 'very heavily pelted with bottles, jugs and other missiles'. The perpetrators were those who had fled to the neighbouring houses on both sides of the road. He observed that 'several' East Indians with 'shovels, cutlasses, and one fork..... made a stand brandishing their implements'. The man with the fork made jabs at him; he struck the man with his baton; and the assailant fled. Another man knocked off the top of a bottle and hurled it. At that point, Billyeald said, he heard rifle-firing.²⁹⁰ He had not reported any incidents to Ramsay: 'I do not know if it was within his observation that we met opposition. The fork-jabbing was quite 180 yards away....'²⁹¹ But the fork-jabber had already fled. (No other witness referred to the presence of shovels and cutlasses).

In a moment of panic, Ramsay opened fire, although the situation did not warrant such extreme action and the mounted police were still in the line of fire. The Deputy Inspector General, Gamble, noted that one of the men killed was 'very close' to the mounted police. He did not try very hard to justify Ramsay's intemperance. He told the Reid Inquiry:

I would not call it necessarily bad soldiery to shoot at the crowd containing some of the police, it would be bad generalship to fire with your troops in the line of fire. It might indicate all sorts of things, bad judgment, lunacy, etc.²⁹²

Gamble also seemed to have seen no justification for firing. He said that he was 'perhaps 100 yards off when the firing began'; he was obviously in a position to see. In a spurious effort to defend Ramsay he related: 'The whole thing lasted a very short time. It was a dangerous crowd, but I am not a prophet and cannot say what they *might* have done. Any amount of missiles fell short or went right over into the far trench. Any amount went right over the police'.²⁹³ He observed, strangely, that while 'none was wounded.... many were hit'.²⁹⁴

Ramsay panicked. He acted rashly, without consulting Gamble. But Gamble recognised Ramsay's blunder immediately: he blew his whistle to cease fire 'thirty seconds or less' after the shooting started. Gamble explained: 'I merely exercised my prerogative as senior officer to give the order I thought proper at the time.... I shouted an order "Cease Fire"..... I shouted this to the whole party, Captain Ramsay and the party firing'.²⁹⁵

Ramsay, on the other hand, said that he did not regard Gamble as his senior officer: 'I was the man on the spot. I was the only officer who could appreciate the situation.... I did not regard Mr Gamble as my senior officer'.²⁹⁶ Ramsay claimed that he was 'too busily engrossed in my job' to notice Gamble's order to cease fire. In fact, he ignored it: '*I consider it was my duty to continue the firing after the cease fire had been given by Mr Gamble*' (emphasis added).²⁹⁷

Ramsay stated that although he ranked below the Inspector General of Police, his deputy, Gamble, and Inspector Murland, he did not take orders from anyone in the Police Force, except the I.G.P.; if the latter had ordered him to hand over to Gamble, he would have complied: 'Mr Gamble did not ask to take over.... I do not agree that as soon as Mr Gamble came he was in command'.²⁹⁸

The whole chain of command was a muddle. An incompetent man, with little experience of the colony, was given responsibility in a potentially explosive situation. Ramsay told the Reid Inquiry: 'I admit the lack of experience in dealing with civil commotions'.²⁹⁹ He was a soldier, who had been assigned to India, earlier in his career.³⁰⁰ He was shaped by the arrogance and racial prejudices of the military to the people of the sub-continent — an intemperance and intolerance rooted in memories of the Indian Mutiny, and rekindled by General Dyer's butchery of unarmed Indians at Amritsar in April 1919. Ramsay over-reacted, as the following exchange with A.V. Crane, a counsel at the Inquiry, establishes:

CRANE: The crowd never attempted to rush the police?
 RAMSAY: They were prepared to rush at any time!
 CRANE: Did they, at any time, attempt to rush you?
 RAMSAY: Not up to that moment.
 CRANE: I am asking how many persons were shot for attempting to unhorse the men?
 RAMSAY: Every one that was shot was for that reason. [In fact, the two women killed were in their houses.]
 CRANE: You say all the people were attempting to unhorse all your policemen?
 RAMSAY: At one time yes; that was the *intention* of the crowd.
 CRANE: I do not want any intentions. I only want you to say whether there was any attempt to unhorse the mounted police.
 RAMSAY: They were attempting to get hold of them.
 CRANE: Did they actually hold anybody?
 RAMSAY: No, they *might* have done so.....
 CRANE: Did they actually grab a horseman?
 RAMSAY: No. I was there to see that they did not.
 CRANE: Was your firing to frustrate an attempt to unhorse the policemen?
 RAMSAY: It was to save life.....
 CRANE: Did you see a number of ranges on both sides of the street?
 RAMSAY: Rows of wooden huts
 CRANE: Did you have any idea as to the kind of animals that inhabited those huts?
 RAMSAY: A good idea.... I saw people about there.
 CRANE: In directing your fire, what instructions did you give about the possibility of hitting the houses?
 RAMSAY: None. *I knew there was a likelihood of the houses being hit, but I could not tell the men to go and catch the shots.*³⁰¹

Ramsay was emboldened into recklessness by the predisposition of the Inspector General of Police, Charles Ponsonby Widdup, to act tough, after accusations of timidity, following the events in Georgetown on 1 April 1924.³⁰² Widdup told the Reid Inquiry that Ramsay was on a three-year contract, and had been in British Guiana for half that time. He conceded that Ramsay did not understand the local people as well as Gamble, who had worked in the colony for 24 years, 19 of them in the Police Force. (Gamble said that he was an overseer on a sugar estate before he joined the Force: 'I have had experience of handling natives').³⁰³ Widdup acknowledged that Gamble had a 'thorough knowledge of the people'; and observed that he had handled the disturbances in Georgetown 'admirably'³⁰⁴ — there were no shootings, although the homes of several Europeans were invaded.

To the small White community, Gamble's approach constituted a capitulation to Black violence: the Black rank-and-file policemen could not be trusted; Ramsay and his White 'Black Watch' forces were called in. Responding to suggestions that Gamble's local experience and his reputation equipped him better to manage the volatile situation at Ruimveldt on 3 April, Widdup replied: 'Perhaps Mr Gamble knows the people better, but he is not the better man from the point of view of handling a dangerous situation, simply for the reason that he is not a soldier and has not the same

military experience'.³⁰⁵ The colony was under martial law.

Ramprashad had suggested to Ramsay that the people should be allowed to remain at Ruimveldt until they became hungry; then they would 'clear out'.³⁰⁶ Ramsay insisted that they disperse immediately. H.A. Britton, a Black journalist, believed that the police should have remained there until the crowd became tired, and they would have left. If they were handled 'with the same tact as Inspector Gamble used on Tuesday' in Georgetown, delegates could have been selected to present their case, and the crisis defused.³⁰⁷ At no time, as Inspector Murland testified, did he see any attempt to break through, or surround the armed forces.³⁰⁸

The wrong man was chosen for a demanding job. But the Inspector General of Police, Widdup, bore responsibility for the tragedy: it was poor judgement to have subordinated the perceptibly level-headed and experienced, Gamble, to the command of the impetuous, arrogant, and inexperienced soldier, Ramsay. In October 1924, Widdup was replaced as I.G.P.; and his successor recommended the removal of Ramsay, in August 1925. He was frequently drunk; he often appeared 'moody and depressed', and was 'intolerant of criticism and advice'. Ramsay was also found to have pilfered from the funds of the Officers' Mess; and publicly, at the Rifle Club, he lost his temper with a Portuguese clerk, 'smacked his head and gave him a kick'.

The I.G.P. noted that after the shootings Ramsay was 'at the height of his popularity', and had 'suffered from "swollen-head"'; but that he was subject to 'virulent abuse' from 'anti-white agitators'. Ramsay claimed that this, coupled with the fact that the Government was 'down on him' for his performance at Ruimveldt, had led to his deterioration.³⁰⁹ He had apparently been lifted to the heavens, then dropped.

After the shootings, A.A. Thorne sent a memorandum to the Colonial Office, alleging that the police officers were 'as an average, men of no capabilities', who, through family influences, got promoted to 'exalted positions for which they are really unsuited and unfitted'. He also deplored the appointment of G.R. Reid, a private solicitor, as Coroner of the Ruimveldt Inquiry; and predicted that the report was 'bound to be a farce', as Reid, and the lawyers representing the police and the sugar estates, were all employees of the law firm of Cameron and Shepherd.³¹⁰

R.A. Wiseman at the Colonial Office minuted that Reid might not have been the right person for the task, but because he was appointed by the Governor, the Secretary of State should not object, even if he were satisfied that the appointment was flawed.³¹¹ In imperial affairs, one could not be seen to let the side down, whatever principles were vitiated. And Reid did not disappoint. He not only exculpated Ramsay; he eulogised him. He reported:

.... the order to fire by Captain Ramsay was given on a lawful occasion as a matter of necessity, and it was the only course open to him at the time to prevent further felonies being perpetrated and protect the lives of members of the force under his command. It was only begun at the last moment and was conducted without recklessness or negligence. If he had done less he would have been neglecting his duty and he stopped the fire at the earliest possible moment consistent with his duty.³¹²

Ramsay was destroyed by this imperial bigotry, this interminable closing of ranks to project an aura of infallibility to the 'natives'. This was what destroyed the Empire; all empires.

Indians used both accommodation and resistance to survive on the plantations of British Guiana in the 1920s. On some estates, such as Port Mourant and Rose Hall, in Berbice, rice farming, cattle rearing, and an ingenious exploitation of the environment made life comparatively easier: people had a balanced diet; much was achieved. On the East Bank Demerara and East Bank Berbice — riverine estates — the rich, alluvial coastal belt was narrower, and sugar planters monopolised most of the cultivable land. Labourers owned almost no rice land; stock rearing also, was very limited. Wage labour on the estates was crucial to their survival; alternative sources of subsistence were minimal; fewer Indian villages developed.

The success of these villages was often dependent on their proximity to the estates: rice farmers needed cash to tide them over the difficult 'slack' period, before the harvest; farmers needed to supplement their earnings from rice and cattle. When a sugar estate collapsed, not only were its workers thrown out of work; villagers in the area, on their small, inadequately empoldered plots, suffered as well.³¹³ In the county of Essequibo in particular, the closure of all sugar estates after 1928, save Hampton Court, made it an unattractive district, a backwater.³¹⁴ So also was the East Bank Berbice, noted for its neat, picturesque coffee plantations in the early — 19th century, during slavery.³¹⁵ Here, two derelict sugar estates (Mara and Friends) limped along into the 1930s. The population in these areas declined between 1891 and 1931 — by 37 and 40 per cent on Leguan and Wakenaam Islands, at the mouth of the Essequibo River, and nearly 50 per cent on the East Bank Berbice (see Table 2.16).

<i>Districts</i>	<i>Population in 1891</i>	<i>Population in 1921</i>	<i>Population in 1931</i>	<i>Per cent depletion, 1891-1931</i>
LEGUAN	5,711	4,236	3,576	37.3
WAKENAAM	6,922	5,279	4,098	40.7
ESSEQUIBO COAST	24,384	20,641	18,700	23.3
EAST BANK BERBICE	8,101	5,549	4,080	49.6

SOURCES: *Census Reports of British Guiana, 1891, 1921, 1931*; Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930], p.181.

The Sugar Planters' Association was correct in their assessment of the importance of sugar to the development of the rice industry; to the Indian villages as a whole. In 1929, they argued:

The farmers and peasants who undertook the growing of rice had no capital of their own, and planted and reaped under a precarious system whereby their earnings in the sugar industry from week to week provided the capital which took them over the period between the growing and the reaping of rice. Where an immediate sugar industry was not available, as in Leguan and large sections of the Essequibo Coast, the farmers have to depend for their carry over during crops upon moneylenders, charging usurious rates of interest... which left nothing for the farmer when his crops were reaped.³¹⁶

Despite the harshness of plantation life, and the bigotry of many planters, as an Indian correspondent argued in 1927, many Indians 'derived their competence by labouring on sugar estates'; even those who had acquired land in the villages, in times of difficulty, returned to their respective 'foster-mothers', the estates, to 'recoup their losses'. He added that most Indians still 'cherish a kind of loyalty and sacredness towards sugar estates'.³¹⁷ Abraham Jodhan was from the Port Mourant area, on the Corentyne, a happy environment to the Indian people. So one could understand if he over-stated his case. But it is true, that there persisted a certain attachment of most Indians in British Guiana to their respective sugar estates, well after the 1920s. It was social, if it was not economic. The plantation was the nursery for the development of attitudes and skills which aided their adaptation to the village environment.

Notes

1. Jay R. Mandle, *The Plantation Economy : Population and Economic Change in Guyana, 1838-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973), p.98; *Census Report of British Guiana, 1921*, p.XXVI; *Census Report of British Guiana, 1931*, pp.150-151.
2. A.J. Strachan, 'Water Control in Guyana', *Geography*, Vol. 65, Pt.4, No.289, (1980), p.297.
3. Raymond T. Smith, *British Guiana* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p.2; Peter Newman, *British Guiana: Problems of Cohesion in an Immigrant Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.3.
4. Lesley M. Potter, 'Internal Migration and Resettlement of East Indians in Guyana, 1870-1920', Ph.D. Thesis, McGill University (Montreal), 1975, pp.23-25; Michael J. Wagner, 'Structural Pluralism and the Portuguese in Nineteenth Century British Guiana: A Study in Historical Geography', Ph.D. Thesis, McGill University (Montreal), 1975, p.10; Bonham C. Richardson, 'Men, Water, and Mudflats in Coastal Guyana', *Resource Management and Optimization*, Vol.4, Nos. 3-4, (1987), pp. 588-590.
5. Potter, *op.cit.*, [1975], p.23.
6. See the following two works by J.H. Vann: *The Physical Geography of the Lower Coastal Plain of the Guiana Coast* (Louisiana State University, Dept. of Geography and Anthropology, 1959); *Landforms, Vegetation, and Sea Level Change along the Guiana Coast of South America* (Washington: Office of Naval Research, 1969); and Alexander Winter, 'Our Muddy Shores', *Timehri*, Vol.II, (1883).
7. See note 4. For a technical study of the role of coastal vegetation in the formation of the British Guiana coastlands, see Gerald O. Case, 'The Use of Vegetation for Coast Protection', *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.IX, No.1, (1938).
8. *Colonial Annual Report, British Guiana, Report for 1925* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1926), p.2.
9. Wagner, *op.cit.*, [1975], p.12.
10. Quoted in *Report of a Commission of Inquiry into the Sugar Industry of British Guiana* (J.A. Venn, chairman) (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1949), p.1; hereafter, cited as Venn, *op.cit.*, [1949].
11. This discussion of the complex process of land reclamation is based on: [The Planters' Association], *Report on the Agricultural Wants of British Guiana* (Georgetown: L. McDermott, 1876), pp.8-15; Venn, *op.cit.*, [1949], pp.8-9; Wagner, *op.cit.*, [1975], pp.15, 17; and this author's own knowledge of the plantation environment.
12. Bonham C. Richardson, 'Spatial Determinants of Rural Livelihood in Coastal Guyana', *The Professional Geographer*, vol.25, No.4, (1973), p.364. See also his 'Distance Regularities in Guyanese Rice Cultivation', *The Journal of Developing Areas*, Vol.8 (January 1974), p.237.
13. M. Shahabuddeen, *From Plantocracy to Nationalisation : A Profile of Sugar in Guyana* (Georgetown: University of Guyana, 1983), p.18.
14. David Lowenthal notes the consequences of the absence of Dutch hydraulic expertise in French Guiana — (both Surinam and Guyana were colonised by the Dutch): 'In French Guiana, empoldering was seldom attempted and hardly ever successful. Instead, planters engaged in shifting cultivation on the uplands, where soils became exhausted after a few years but life was far more pleasant; the entrepreneur had no mud or mosquitoes to contend with and was free from authoritarian control.... The situation has hardly changed since then; in 1954 a French expert explained that the inhabitants of French Guiana had not been able to cultivate their lowlands "owing to the absence of qualified technicians in hydraulic agriculture"'. — 'Population Contrasts in the Guianas', *The Geographical Review*, Vol.L, No.1, (1960), p.45.
15. Venn, *op.cit.*, [1949], p.9.
16. Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p.3.
17. Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in Guyana* (London: The Author, 1970), p.222.
18. In an interview, in May 1982, this author's grandmother, Ramdularie (1916-1985), noted that this was a common practice in the 1920s at Plantation Rose Hall, where she grew up. She was married in 1930, aged 14, and moved into her in-laws' household at Palmyra Village, six miles away. Her in-laws were cattle rearers; they owned land. This was corroborated in an interview with Joe Dhanna (1909-), in London, in July 1988. He also grew up at Rose Hall. His historical knowledge of plantation life is vast; he was an acute observer. Though educated by Canadian Presbyterian missionaries, he retains a deep emotional and intellectual attachment to India. His parents, like Ramdularie's, went as indentured labourers to British Guiana, from the United Provinces, during the first decade of this century.
19. Potter, *op.cit.*, [1975], Chapters 4-7; and her 'The Post-Indenture Experience of East Indians in Guyana, 1873-1921', in *East Indians in the Caribbean: Colonialism and the Struggle for Identity*, Bridget Brereton and Winston Dookeran, (eds.), (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus International Publications, 1982).
20. See note 18.

21. Tyran Ramnarine, 'Indian Women and the Struggle to Create Stable Marital Relations on the Sugar Estates of Guiana During the Period of Indenture, 1838-1917', Paper Presented to the 12th Conference of Caribbean Historians, U.W.I., Trinidad, 29 March-4 April 1980.
22. *Report of the West Indian Sugar Commission* (Lord Olivier, chairman) (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1930), pp.41-43; hereafter cited as Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930]. On p.43, the cost of production is quoted as the cost per ton; it is really the cost per cwt.
23. C.O. 111/689/75149 (1930): Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1929.
24. At Plantation Port Mourant, for example, well into the 1950s, residential sections retained names which evoked the experience of slavery and indentureship. See Frank Birbalsingh and Clem Shiwcharan, *Indo-Westindian Cricket* (London: Hansib, 1988), pp.97, 130.
25. Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930], Appendix 7, Vol.II, Evidence, etc., Relating to British Guiana: Memorandum by the Hon. A.E. Seeram, Member of the Legislative Council, p.200.
26. *Reports on the Scheme for Indian Emigration to British Guiana, Part I—Report by Dewan Bahadur P. Kesava Pillai and V.N. Tivary* (Simla: Government Press, 1924), p.41.
27. *Ibid.*, pp.41-42.
28. *Ibid.*, p.41.
29. *Ibid.*, Part II—Report by G.F. Keatinge, pp.197-198.
30. C.O. 114/192, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1924.
31. *Report by Kunwar Maharaj Singh on His Deputation to British Guiana in 1925*, p.6.
32. Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930], Appendix 7, Vol.II, Evidence, etc., Relating to British Guiana: Memorandum by the British Guiana Sugar Planters' Association, p.188.
33. *Report on the Condition of Indians in Jamaica, British Guiana and Trinidad by J.D. Tyson* (Simla: Government of India Press, 1939), p.47.
34. See note 32: (Evidence of the Sugar Planters' Association).
35. C.O. 111/660, Rodwell to Wilson, s.o., 31 December 1925: Sir Alfred Sherlock of the S.P.A. to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.
36. C.O. 111/689/75141 [1930], encl.: C.F. Andrews, 'Impressions of British Guiana', (mimeo.), p.35.
37. *Ibid.*, pp.66-67.
38. Port Mourant was owned by Stephen Mourant in 1820; John Kingston bought it in 1852; for the rest of the century, his family owned it. In 1880, this estate procured a Crown Land licence to dig a canal to the Canje Creek, to the south: irrigation water was obtained; a large stretch of land, 'considered the very finest cane land in British Guiana', became accessible; and safer shipping facilities on the Canje Creek were constructed. In 1883, an astute observer wrote of Port Mourant: 'A noble canal, 13 miles in length, connects the sugar works.... with the Canje Creek.... The sugar manufactory has been kept up with the spirit of the times.... The very fine mixed soils of sandy loam and shells which crop out on the coast in front of Port Mourant help to make it one of the most salubrious places in which to reside in the three counties'. See *Guyanese Sugar Plantations in the Late Nineteenth Century: A Contemporary Description from the 'Argosy'*, Walter Rodney, (ed.), (Georgetown: Release Publishers, 1979), pp.81-82, 97.
39. Andrews, *op.cit.*, [1930], p.79.
40. *Ibid.*, p.65. In late 1929, The British Guiana East Indian Association corroborated this. They noted: 'In our long experience with our people we have not found many born or living at Port Mourant desiring to leave the estate. This is due not only to the greater freedom which they enjoy, but to the opportunity given them for permanent settlement'. See Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930], Appendix 7, Vol.II, Evidence, etc., Relating to British Guiana: Memorandum by the British Guiana East Indian Association, p.198.
41. Andrews, *op.cit.*, [1930], p.36.
42. C.F. Andrews, *An Interim Statement concerning East Indian Conditions in British Guiana* (Georgetown: The Daily Chronicle Ltd., 1929).
43. C.O. 111/689/75141 [1930], Minute, G. Grindle, 30 July 1930.
44. Interview with Ramdularie, May 1982, (see note 18); Peter Ruhomon, *Centenary History of the East Indians in British Guiana, 1838-1938* (Georgetown: the East Indians 150th Anniversary Committee, 1988; [1947]), p.113.
45. *Ibid.*, p.114.
46. Interview with Joe Dhanna, July 1988, (see note 18).
47. *Ibid.*
48. Leo A. Despres, *Cultural Pluralism and Nationalist Politics in British Guiana*. (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1967), p.98.
49. Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930], p.198
50. *The Royal Commission in British Guiana, 1939* (Georgetown: The Daily Chronicle Ltd., 1939), pp.157-158.

51. Venn, *op.cit.*, [1949], p.122.
52. E.P. Minett, 'The Health Problem in British Guiana', *Journal of the Board of Agriculture of British Guiana*, Vol.XIII, No.1, (1920), p.21; see also *The Daily Argosy*, 13 January 1920.
53. C.O. 111/645, Collet to Churchill, no.408, 4 October 1922, encl.
54. C.O. 114/172, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1919: 'Report on the Sanitary Conditions on the Sugar Estates' (Dr A.T. Ozzard, ag. Surgeon General).
55. C.O. 114/167, Report of the Surgeon General, 1918.
56. C.O. 111/622, Collet to Milner, no.109, 6 March 1919.
57. A.R.F. Webber, *Centenary History and Handbook of British Guiana*(Georgetown: The Daily Chronicle Ltd., 1931), p.344.
58. Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930], Appendix 7, Vol.I, Evidence, etc., Relating to British Guiana: Memorandum by the Hon. A.R.F. Webber, pp.194-195.
59. See note 55.
60. Edgar Beckett, 'Some Home Truths', *Timehri*, Vol.VI, (third series), (1919), p.190.
61. A.T. Ozzard, 'Some of the Preventable Diseases of British Guiana and What We Can Do to Prevent Them', *Timehri*, Vol.I, (third series), (1911), pp.142-143.
62. See note 54.
63. C.O. 114/184, Report of the Surgeon General, 1922.
64. *Ibid.* [Appendix F: Report of the Public Health Department, 1922].
65. Quoted in Pillai and Tivary, *op.cit.*, [1924], pp.18-19; see also the quote by sugar planter, Sir Edward Davson, at the head of this section.
66. See note 31.
67. Tyson, *op.cit.*, [1939], p.48.
68. Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930], pp.98-99.
69. C.O. 114/199, Sessional Papers, 1926: Combined Court, No.2 of 1926.
70. Beckett, *op.cit.*, [1919], p.191.
71. C.O. 111/652, Thomson to Thomas, no.115, 3 March 1924, encl.
72. See Ozzard, *op.cit.*, [1911].
73. A correspondent from the West Coast Berbice wrote in February 1926: 'I saw myself this morning people from Seafield, No.42, and Weldaad skimming some dirty water to drink. It was not even clean enough for human beings to wash their feet in, much less to be drunk'. - *The New Daily Chronicle*, 4 February 1926.
74. Beckett, *op.cit.*, [1919], p.189.
75. *Ibid.*, p.190.
76. Keatinge, *op.cit.*, [1924], p.182.
77. Leader, *The New Daily Chronicle*, 23 September 1928.
78. *The Royal Commission in British Guiana, 1939*, *op.cit.*, [1939], p.154.
79. Giglioli's preliminary findings on *A. darlingi* were reported in four articles published in 1938-1939: 'Malaria in British Guiana, Part I: The Anopheline Mosquitoes of the Colony', *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.IX, No.2, (June 1938); 'Malaria in British Guiana, Part II: Which of the Local Anopheline Species Are Responsible for the Transmission of Malaria?', *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.IX, No.3, (September 1938); 'Malaria in British Guiana, Part III: Breeding Habits of *A. darlingi*. Natural Factors which Limit the Distribution of This Species and of Malaria', *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.IX, No.4, (December 1938); 'Malaria in British Guiana, Part IV: The Distribution of Malaria on the Coastlands. Genesis of Malarial Epidemics', *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.X, No.1, (March 1939).
80. G. Giglioli, 'Malaria and Agriculture in British Guiana', *Timehri*, No.27, (fourth series), (1946), pp.49-50.
81. G. Giglioli, 'The Influence of Geological Formation and Soil Characteristics on the Distribution of Malaria and Its Mosquito Carrier in British Guiana', *Timehri*, No.30, (fourth series), (1951), pp.50, 53.
82. G. Giglioli, 'Immediate and Long-Term Economic Effects Accruing from the Control of Mosquito-Transmitted Diseases in British Guiana', *Timehri*, No.28, (fourth series), (1948), p.5.
83. *Ibid.*, pp.7-8; see also G. Giglioli 'D.D.T. Defeats Mosquitoes in British Guiana', *The Crown Colonist*, Vol.19, No.211, (1949).
84. G. Giglioli, 'Medical Services on the Sugar Estates of British Guiana', *Timehri*, No.35, (fifth series), (1956), p.9.
85. Giglioli, *op.cit.*, [1948], p.6.
86. *Ibid.*; see also 'Time When Malaria Wreaked Great Havoc in Guyana', *Guyana Graphic, Independence Souvenir*, May 1966.

87. Mandle, *op.cit.*, [1973], p.88.
88. C. Clementi, 'Colonisation in British Guiana', *United Empire*, Vol. XIII, No.7, (1922), p.448.
89. Giglioli, *op.cit.*, [1948], pp.5-6.
90. *Ibid.*, p.6.
91. Nath, *op.cit.*, [1970], pp.250-251.
92. *The West India Committee Circular*, 27 June 1929.
93. Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930], Appendix 7, Vol.I, Evidence, etc., Relating to British Guiana: Evidence of Dr P.M. Earle, pp.112-113.
94. K.S. Wise and E.P. Minett, 'Drinking Water Supplies: A chemical and Bacteriological Study of the Drinking Water Supplies on Estates from a Hygiene Point of View', *Timehri*, Vol.II, (third series), (1912).
95. Ozzard, *op.cit.*, [1911], pp.137-138.
96. *Ibid.*, p.138.
97. Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930], p.198.
98. *Ibid.*, pp.21-22: Evidence of the Sugar Planters' Association.
99. Ozzard, *op.cit.*, [1911], pp.138-139.
100. See note 84.
101. Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930], p.2: Evidence of the Sugar Planters' Association.
102. *The Daily Argosy*, 10 May 1889, quoted in Tyrann Ramnarine, 'The Growth of the East Indian Community in British Guiana, 1880-1920', D.Phil. Thesis, University of Sussex, 1977, p.90.
103. Ramnarine, *op.cit.*, [1977], pp.90-91.
104. *Census Report of British Guiana, 1921*.
105. Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930], Appendix 7, Vol.II: Memorandum of the Immigration Agent General, p.130.
106. *Ibid.*, p.21: Evidence of Col. Davson.
107. *Ibid.*, p.186: Memorandum of the Sugar Planters' Association.
108. Pillai and Tivary, *op.cit.*, [1924], p.41.
109. Webber, *op.cit.*, [1931], p.348.
110. *Ibid.*
111. Keatinge, *op.cit.*, [1924], p.174.
112. Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930], p.133.
113. Maharaj Singh, *op.cit.*, [1925], p.6.
114. Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930]: Report, p.94.
115. Pillai and Tivary, *op.cit.*, [1924], p.156.
116. Venn, *op.cit.*, [1949], p.55.
117. Interviews with Ramdularie and Joe Dhanna (see note 18).
118. *Ibid.*
119. See Robert J. Moore, 'East Indians and Negroes in British Guiana, 1838-1880', D. Phil. Thesis, University of Sussex, 1970, Chapter IX. Moore writes: 'Where Negro spending provoked contempt from the Whites, Indian thrift evoked admiration. The Coolie under indenture on the estate had proved himself something of a Victorian.... (p.311) He had the instincts of an economic man... The image of the coolie as being foreign and alien, even of those who opted to remain in the colony, was in the educated Negro mind frequently associated with his being an "infidel". His miserliness and refusal to spend like the Negroes were also traced to the same source. (pp.327-328)...In British Guiana the articulate Negroes were arguing that Christianity and conspicuous consumption went hand in hand. They were evidences that the Negro was a civilised being..... This stereotype of the East Indian as too mean to eat a proper diet... lasted right down to the 1930s.... The Negroes regarded it not as thrift but avarice' (p.319). See also Bridget Brereton, 'The Foundations of Prejudice: Indians and Africans in 19th Century Trinidad', *Caribbean Issues*, Vol.1, No.1, (1974).
120. C.O. 111/622, Collet to Milner, No.109, 6 March 1919.
121. A.A. Thome, 'The Negro and his Descendants in British Guiana, Part II: The Political and Economic Conditions in British Guiana, and Their Effect upon the Negro and His Descendants', in *Negro Anthology*, Nancy Cunard, (ed.), (London: The Author, 1934), p.508.
122. Maud Going, 'British Guiana: A Land of Opportunity....', *The Canadian Magazine*, Vol. LII, No.6, (1919).
123. Interviews with Ramdularie and Joe Dhanna (see note 18).
124. *Ibid.*; E.A.V. Abraham, 'The East Indian Coolie in British Guiana', *The West Indian Quarterly*, Vol.II, (1886-1887), pp.400-401; Robert J. Moore, *op.cit.*, [1970], p.129.

125. Keatinge, *op.cit.*, [1924], pp.173-174.
126. *Ibid.*, p.174.
127. Potter, *op.cit.*, [1975], p.116; Potter, *op.cit.*, [1982], p.73; Ramnarine, *op.cit.*, [1977], pp.155-157; Brian L. Moore, *Race, Power and Social Segmentation in Colonial Society: Guyana after Slavery, 1838-1891* (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1987), pp.166-167.
128. D.W.D. Comins, *Note on Emigration from India to British Guiana* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1893), p.26.
129. *Ibid.*, p.28.
130. Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930], Appendix 7, Vol. II, Evidence, etc., Relating to British Guiana: Memorandum of the Immigration Agent General, pp.134-135.
131. Interviews with Ramdularie and Joe Dhanna (see note 18); Comins, *op.cit.*, [1893], pp.31-32; *The Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol. III* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), pp.75-76.
132. *The Daily Argosy*, 15 May 1920.
133. Comins, *op.cit.*, [1893] p.32.
134. Royal Commonwealth Society — British Guiana Pamphlet: *Agriculture, Leaflet no.4, British Guiana — The Rice Industry* (Issued by the Permanent Exhibitions Committee, 1911).
135. For the role of Indians on sugar plantations in the birth and development of the rice industry, see: W. Russell, 'Rice', *Timehri*, Vol. V, (1st series), (1886); A.R. Gilzean, 'Rice Cultivation in British Guiana', *Timehri*, Vol. I, (new series), (1887); A.R. Gilzean, 'Rice Industry on North Coast of Essequibo', *Timehri*, Vol. II, (new series), (1888); Jay R. Mandle, 'Population and Economic Change: The Emergence of the Rice Industry in Guyana, 1895-1915', *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol.30, No.4, (1970); Potter, *op.cit.*, [1975], Chapters 7-8; Ramnarine, *op.cit.*, [1977], Chapter V. In April 1910, the Director of Science and Agriculture in British Guiana published an article which covered the history of rice cultivation in the colony, while giving a detailed account of methods of husbandry. It was later updated and republished. See 'Rice Cultivation in British Guiana', *Journal of the Board of Agriculture of British Guiana*, Vol. XII, No.4, (1919).
136. Comins, *op.cit.*, [1893], p.30.
137. Mandle, *op.cit.*, [1970]; Comins, *op.cit.*, [1893], p.30.
138. C.O. 114/177, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1920.
139. *Ibid.*
140. *The Daily Argosy*, 21 August 1920.
141. *The Daily Argosy*, 30 October 1920.
142. *The Daily Argosy*, 14 November 1920.
143. *The Daily Chronicle*, 2 December 1916.
144. *The Daily Chronicle*, 3 November 1916.
145. *The Daily Chronicle*, 8 November 1916.
146. *The Daily Chronicle*, 16 November 1916.
147. Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930], Appendix 7, Vol II: Memorandum of the Immigration Agent General, p.135.
148. *Ibid.*
149. Ramnarine, *op.cit.*, [1977], p.181; Interview with Latchman Sohan (1908-1989), Palmyra, Guyana, December 1985.
150. Interview with Ramdularie (see note 18).
151. C.O. 114: Reports of the Immigration Agent General, 1920-1929.
152. C.O. 114/184, Report of the Department of Science and Agriculture, 1922.
153. C.O. 114/187 and C.O. 114/192, Report of the Department of Science and Agriculture, 1923, 1924 respectively.
154. C.O. 114/200, Report of the Department of Science and Agriculture, 1926.
155. C.O. 114/205A, Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1928.
156. Tyson, *op.cit.*, [1939], p.89.
157. *Leader, The Daily Argosy*, 30 January 1929.
158. Tyson, *op.cit.*, [1939], pp.21-22.
159. For a discussion of how the 'social and cultural resources' of the Indians enabled them to exploit a variety of niches within the plantation environment, see Leo A. Despres, 'Differential Adaptations and Micro-Cultural Evolution in Guyana', in *Afro-American Anthropology: Contemporary Perspectives*, Norman E. Whitten and John F. Szwed, (eds.), (New York: The Free Press, 1970), pp.276-279.
160. See article by the Editor [A.R.F. Webber], *The New Daily Chronicle*, 27 March 1927.
161. Interviews with Ramdularie and Joe Dhanna (see note 18).

162. Rodney, *op.cit.*, [1981], p.151.
163. Nath, *op.cit.*, [1970], Chapter XIII; Rodney, *op.cit.*, [1981], Chapter 6.
164. Rodney, *op.cit.*, [1981], pp.157-158.
165. Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), Chapter v: 'The Indian Empire'; Bridget Brereton, *op.cit.*, [1974], pp.22-23.
166. Nath, *op.cit.*, [1970], pp.135-136.
167. C.O. 114/172 and C.O. 114/177, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1919, 1920 respectively.
168. C.O. 114/177, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1920.
169. C.O. 111/631, Collet to Milner, no.338, 19 July 1920; C.O. 111/631, Collet to Milner, no.376, 14 August 1920.
170. See note 168.
171. *The Daily Argosy*, 11 August 1920.
172. *Ibid.*
173. C.O. 111/631, Collet to Milner, no.418, 26 August 1920.
174. *The Daily Argosy*, 13 August 1920.
175. *The Daily Argosy*, 19 August 1920.
176. Governor Collet wrote: 'The Union has been endeavouring to get labourers of every description to join it and subscribe to its funds. Critchlow himself seems to be not an unreasonable man, but the members of the Union are not always willing to take his advice, and in order to retain his position he is occasionally compelled to do what I think his better judgement would disapprove'. — C.O. 111/631, Collet to Milner, no.338, 19 July 1920.
177. This dispute stemmed primarily from the fact that several Black middle class men considered Critchlow ill-equipped to manage the Union. (A.A. Thome was a principal opponent of Critchlow). Critchlow eventually won; but the educated elite continued to have a major impact on the B.G.L.U. : Critchlow did not have much formal education. See *The Daily Argosy*, 11, 15, 23, 24, 25, 27, 30, 31 January, 2 and 5 February 1920; Ashton Chase, *A History of Trade Unionism in Guyana, 1900 to 1961* (Ruimveldt, Guyana: New Guyana Co. Ltd., [1964]), pp.51-53.
178. C.O. 111/631, Collet to Milner, no.338, 19 July 1920.
179. *The Daily Argosy*, 2 July 1920.
180. C.O. 114/177, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1920.
181. See note 178.
182. The local press gave considerable space to developments in India.
183. *The Daily Argosy*, 25 July 1920.
184. *The Daily Argosy*, 6 October 1920.
185. *The Daily Argosy*, 8 October 1920.
186. *The Daily Argosy*, 6, 10 October 1920.
187. *The Daily Argosy*, 10 October 1920.
188. C.O. 114/182, C.O. 114/184, Reports of the Immigration Agent General, 1921, 1922 respectively.
189. C.O. 114/187, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1923.
190. Chase, *op.cit.*, [1924], pp.66-67.
191. C.O. 111/652, Thomson to Thomas, confidential, 13 April 1924, encl. no.1.
192. *The Daily Argosy*, 2 April 1924.
193. *The Daily Argosy*, 3 April 1924.
194. C.O. 111/652, Thomson to Thomas, confidential, 13 April 1924.
195. G.R. Reid, *Ruimveldt Inquiry, 1924 — Minutes of an Inquiry*, p.72.. Hereafter cited as Reid, *op.cit.*, [1924].
196. *Ibid.*, pp.84-85.
197. *Ibid.*, p.9.
198. *Ibid.*, p.22.
199. *Ibid.*, p.76.
200. C.O. 114/192, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1924.
201. Reid, *op.cit.*, [1924]. pp.75-76.
202. *Ibid.*, p.77.
203. *Ibid.*, pp.76, 77-78.

204. *Ibid.*, p.76.
205. *Ibid.*, pp.77-78.
206. *Ibid.*, p.23.
207. *Ibid.*
208. *The Daily Argosy*, 1 April 1924.
209. Reid, *op.cit.*, [1924], p.22.
210. *Ibid.*, p.21.
211. Ann Spackman, 'Official Attitudes and Official Violence: The Ruimveldt Massacre, Guyana, 1924', *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol.22, No.3, (1973), p.320.
212. *Ibid.*, p.318.
213. This report was obviously being discussed throughout the colony. The Indian journalist, Joseph Ruhoman, said in New Amsterdam that it showed 'a full grasp of conditions' and that its findings 'cannot be successfully disputed' — *The Daily Argosy*, 1 April 1924.
214. Pillai and Tivary, *op.cit.*, [1924], pp.40-41.
215. *The Daily Argosy*, 4 March 1924.
216. *The Daily Argosy*, 26 January 1924.
217. *The Daily Argosy*, 15 January 1924.
218. In a letter from the N.P.C. to the Governor, dated 26 November 1923, Critchlow was named as a member of the N.P.C. delegation to discuss with the Governor the Colonisation question 'as affecting the African of this colony'. Among the items on the agenda were: '1. The right of Africans in this colony to equality of treatment with regard to the introduction of new settlers; 2. The method of securing new African settlers; 3. The necessity for a deputation of Negro representatives from this colony to visit West African colonies'. — C.O. 111/652, Thomson to Thomas, confidential, 9 April 1924, encl. no.1.
219. Spackman, *op. cit.*, [1973], p.318.
220. C.O. 111/652, Thomson to Thomas, confidential, 9 April, 1924, encl.: Memorandum of 'Reasoned Statement' Submitted by the Negro Progress Convention. [This was sent to the Governor on 20 February 1924]. E.F. Fredericks, the President of the N.P.C., was an adviser to the B.G.L.U.
221. Leader, *The Daily Argosy*, 28 February 1924.
222. C.O. 111/656, (Individuals, A.A. Throne), 6 March 1924.
223. Francis X. Mark, 'Organised Labour in British Guiana' in *The Caribbean in Transition: Papers on Social, Political, and Economic Development*, F.M. Andic and T.G. Mathews, (eds.), (Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico: Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Puerto Rico, 1965), p.226.
224. Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow, 'History of the Trade Union Movement in British Guiana', in *Youth: A Destiny to Mould* (Georgetown: The Ministry of Co-operatives and National Mobilisation, 1974), p.27.
225. *Ibid.*, p.28.
226. *Ibid.*
227. Reid, *op. cit.*, [1924], pp.42-43.
228. *Ibid.*, p.43.
229. *Ibid.*, pp.84-85.
230. *Ibid.*, p.13. Siri Paul, a worker at Farm, corroborated this: 'On Wednesday, 2nd April, a number of boys came while we were working aback and said we must stop work and come out. They do not work at Farm and are strangers, 5 or 6 of them, black and coolie mixed. We all stop work and come home. They say they will lick us and we get afraid' (*ibid.*; p.43). So did Badoo, a colleague of Siri Paul (*ibid.*, p.43).
231. *Ibid.*, p.12.
232. *Ibid.*, p.41.
233. *Ibid.*, p.85.
234. *Ibid.*, p.72.
235. *Ibid.*, p.37.
236. *Ibid.*, p.21.
237. *Ibid.*, p.37; C.O. 111/652, Thomson to Thomas, confidential, 13 April 1924, encl. no.12: Précis of verbal report made by Mr. C.H.E. Legge, Stipendiary Magistrate, 3 April 1924, 12.45 p.m. The report says: 'One of the ringleaders, a negro from Providence, was pointed out by Mr Legge to District Inspector Jones who took his name. Mr Legge recognized him from yesterday'.
238. *The Daily Argosy*, 4 April 1924.

239. *Ibid.*
240. *Ibid.* For Kawall's deposition on the shootings, see Reid, *op.cit.*, [1924], pp.20-23.
241. Reid, *op.cit.*, [1924], p.22.
242. *Ibid.*, pp.21, 23.
243. Chase, *op.cit.*, [1964], p.72.
244. *The Daily Argosy*, 5 April 1924.
245. *Ibid.*
246. Reid, *op.cit.*, [1924], p.22.
247. *Ibid.*, p.21.
248. *Ibid.*, p.22.
249. *Ibid.*
250. *Ibid.*
251. C.O. 111/652, Thomson to Thomas, confidential, 13 April 1924, encl. no.29.
252. Reid, *op.cit.*, [1924], p.72.
253. *Ibid.*, p.37; see note 257.
254. *Ibid.*, p.18.
255. *Ibid.*, pp.15, 17.
256. *Ibid.*, p.78.
257. Staff Officer to the Local Forces, Robert Ramsay, also noted the prominence of this man, when he stopped the crowd at Ruimveldt: 'I called on the crowd to halt... I told them that their own Magistrate [Legge] was present, and if their leaders would come forward and tell him what they wanted, he would do his best... The first man that came forward Mr Legge spoke to, and said, "What, you here again after my warning you yesterday?" He replied nothing, but afterwards said he was "going home to Barbados"' — *Ibid.*, p.62. There is no evidence of what became of him.
258. *The Daily Argosy*, 6 April 1924.
259. C.O. 111/652, Thomson to Thomas, confidential, 13 April 1924, encl. no.8. The proclamation was published in the *Official Gazette*, 2 April 1924; it was also circulated on the East Bank.
260. C.O. 111/652, Thomson to Thomas, confidential, 13 April 1924.
261. *The Daily Argosy*, 16 December 1923.
262. The view that the events on the East Bank represented an early example of Black-Indian unity has been expressed by several commentators; but it has never been developed. See Walter Rodney, 'Masses in Action', *New World*, Guyana Independence Issue, (1966), p.34; Paul Singh, *Guyana: Socialism in a Plural Society*, Fabian Research Series 307, (London: Fabian Society, 1972), p.5; Ram Karran, 'Race and Politics', *Thunder*, (January-March 1974), p.10; Cheddi Jagan, 'Race, Class and Nationhood', *Thunder*, Vol.20, No.3, (1988), pp.6-7.
263. Maharaj Singh, *op.cit.*, [1925], p.14.
264. See note 244.
265. Reid, *op.cit.*, [1924], p.78.
266. Chase, *op.cit.*, [1964], pp.50, 56.
267. Critchlow, *op.cit.*, [1974], p.27.
268. C.O. 111/629, Collet to Milner, no.127, 8 March 1920.
269. Chase, *op.cit.*, [1964], p.56.
270. *The Daily Argosy*, 3 May 1923.
271. *The Daily Argosy*, 4 May 1923.
272. Reid, *op.cit.*, [1924], p.85.
273. *The Daily Argosy*, 17 November 1925.
274. Maharaj Singh, *op.cit.*, [1925], p.14.
275. C.O. 111/652, Thomson to Thomas, confidential, 13 April 1924, encl. no.29.
276. *The Daily Argosy*, 18 August 1927.
277. C.O. 114/217, Minutes of the Executive Council, 11 August 1933.
278. C.O. 114/217, Minutes of the Executive Council, 14 August 1933.
279. *Ibid.*
280. Reid, *op.cit.*, [1924], p.52.

281. *Ibid.*, p.64.
282. *Ibid.*, p.65.
283. *Ibid.*, p.69.
284. *Ibid.*, p.24.
285. *Ibid.*, p.25.
286. *Ibid.*, pp.49-50.
287. *Ibid.*, p.61.
288. *Ibid.*, p.54.
289. *Ibid.*, p.69.
290. *Ibid.*, p.26.
291. *Ibid.*, p.27.
292. *Ibid.*, p.54.
293. *Ibid.*
294. *Ibid.*, p.52.
295. *Ibid.*, p.54.
296. *Ibid.*, p.68.
297. *Ibid.*, p.66.
298. *Ibid.*, pp.64, 68.
299. *Ibid.*, p.65.
300. *Ibid.*, p.64. Ramsay said: 'I came through the ranks. I spent several years in India in the Army.... I was not concerned with large civil commotions in India. This is the first I have dealt with as being in command'.
301. Quoted in Dewan Bahadar P. Kesava Pillai, 'Indian Emigration to British Guiana: the Case Against', *The Indian Review*, Vol. XXV, No.9, (1924).
302. *The Daily Argosy*, 2, 3 April 1924.
303. Reid, *op.cit.*, [1924], p.51.
304. *Ibid.*, p.34.
305. *Ibid.*
306. *Ibid.*, p.15.
307. *Ibid.*, p.48.
308. *Ibid.*, p.60.
309. C.O. 111/658, O.A.G. to Amery, confidential, 7 August 1925.
310. C.O. 111/656, (Individuals, H.S. Lindsay), June 1924: Memorandum from A.A. Thorne, 1 May 1924.
311. *Ibid.*, Minute by R.A. Wiseman, 26 June 1924.
312. Reid, *op.cit.*, [1924], p.89.
313. The British Guiana Labour Union observed: 'The peasant proprietors of British Guiana who cultivate rice, regard the sugar industry as their mainstay for providing means of livelihood, between the sowing of their rice crops and the milling of the produce....' - C.O. 111/687/75080 (1930): Memorandum of the B.G.L.U. to the British Commonwealth Labour Conference, 1930, p.1.
314. The British Guiana Farmers' Conference pointed out in 1929 that 'the smallness of the population of certain districts may be traced to the going out of cultivation of neighbouring sugar estates'. — Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930], Appendix 7, Vol. II, Evidence, etc., Relating to British Guiana: Memorandum of the British Guiana Farmers' Conference.
315. See Alexander Winter, 'Coffee Cultivation in Berbice, 50 Years Ago', *Timehri*, Vol. I, (first series), (1882). In 1831, there were 31 sugar estates and 40 coffee estates in Berbice. Of the latter, 34 were on the lower reaches of the Berbice River, and 6 were on the Canje, its tributary (p.272).
316. Olivier, *op.cit.*, [1930], Appendix 7, Vol. II, Evidence, etc., Relating to British Guiana: Memorandum of the Sugar Planters' Association.
317. *The Daily Argosy*, 18 August 1927.

CHAPTER 3

ECONOMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT: INDIANS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RICE INDUSTRY, 1919-1929

The rice industry has been created by the industry and thrift of the small East Indian cultivator, and he alone is entitled to all the credit.

Leader, *The Daily Argosy*, 2 February 1927.

..... the kinship patterns [of the Indians] facilitated their adaptation to village environments. As corporate economic units, patrilocally extended households provided a relatively efficient basis for capital formation under the circumstances of peasant agriculture.

Leo A. Despres, 'Differential Adaptations and Micro-cultural Evolution in Guyana', in *Afro-American Anthropology*, Norman E. Whitten and John F. Szwed, (eds.), (New York: The Free Press, 1970), p.282.

I

Land Acquisition in the Villages and the Emergence of the Rice Industry, 1890s to 1918

The development of the rice industry in British Guiana, from the 1890s, was the single most important achievement of the Indians in the colony. It was a rare milestone in Caribbean economic history — a section of the peasantry, with little official encouragement, often in the face of vigorous official discouragement, created and sustained an economically viable industry in an environment dominated by sugar monoculture. It was primarily on the basis of rice cultivation that many Indians in the villages were able to minimise their dependence on the sugar plantations: each acre under rice on the ecologically hazardous, malarial coastland, constituted a small victory on the road to economic and cultural self-confidence. Indian success with rice contrasted sharply with the chronic depression and resignation of Black farmers, who did not develop a crop of major commercial importance, in spite of their admirable success in acquiring land immediately after emancipation.¹ Rice sustained Indian villages, and spawned a sense of community.

Between 1898-1902 and 1918-1922, the acreage under rice rose meteorically from about 6,700 to about 58,000 per year. The rice produced during this period increased from an annual average of

about 4,000 tons to around 36,000 tons during the First World War, then fell to about 28,500 tons in 1918-1922. Meanwhile, rice exports registered an astronomical expansion: 5 tons in 1903; 14,000 tons in 1917. In 1903 export earnings were \$288; in 1917 they were \$1,422,806. Imports declined from an average of 19,000 tons in 1884-1888 to virtually nothing by 1914.²

What precipitated this amazing expansion in rice production? The development of the rice (and cattle) industries by the Indians was largely a consequence of the prolonged depression of sugar prices in the 1880s and 1890s, and the emergence of the gold and timber industries in the interior of the colony, during this period.³ This peculiar confluence of economic factors opened the way for a radical critique of oppressive land regulations, and a progressive relaxation of the terms of sale of crown lands: vast tracts on the coastland, amenable to rice culture, became accessible to Indian land buyers.

International as well as local developments made this possible. As a result of a massive expansion of beet sugar production in Europe — from 1.2 million tons per year in the 1870s to 2.5 million tons per year in the 1880s⁴ — the price of cane-sugar slumped from £22.4s per ton in 1883 to £14.11s per ton in 1884, reaching an abysmal £9.12s in 1896. (The prices of the late-1870s and early-1880s were not regained until the First World War).⁵ In response to this dismal situation, sugar planters in British Guiana released marginal lands on the plantations for their Indian labourers to rear cattle and sheep, and grow rice (see Chapter 2).⁶ This, as noted earlier, was designed to provide subsistence, while anchoring the Indian labour force on the estates; but it also contributed to the adaptation, the refining of their dormant skills in these two activities, which many had pursued, under oppressive conditions, in the eastern U.P. and western Bihar, in India. These embryonic efforts on the estates resuscitated the ancient skills, and boosted their self-confidence; their thrift, industry, and profound commitment to their families made small savings possible. These were used to buy lands in the villages.

But the sugar depression itself did not produce the mushrooming of Indian villages. The decisive force behind the relaxation of the Government's reactionary land regulations, was the unprecedented challenge to the supremacy of the plantocracy, spawned by the rise of the gold and diamond industries. Gold production rose from a meagre 406 ounces around 1884 to 12,880 ounces in 1886-1888, climbing impressively to 126,000 ounces in the 1890s.⁷ This new enterprise was controlled primarily by local merchants and professionals, who perceived the hitherto hallowed

interests of the planters as antagonistic to theirs, in at least one crucial area. They demanded access to vast tracts of crown land, in the interior of the colony, for prospecting. The sugar planters, however, traditionally opposed any relaxation of the terms of land purchase or land lease, whether on the coast, or in the interior; they saw such a step as conducing to the siphoning off of their labour supply; and through their control of the local legislature had, up to the late-1880s, 'determined the shape of private and public land policy'.⁸

In order to exert some control over the production of gold, the colonial administration, under pressure from the Colonial Office, relaxed the terms of crown land grants, in the hinterland, in 1887. Meanwhile, the gold miners, several of whom were of Portuguese extraction, recognising that the lower classes also hungered for the elimination of the oppressive terms of land purchase, brought a new element into local politics.⁹ Many middle class and working class Blacks and Coloureds were mobilised in the fight to reform the constitution, in order, as Rodney observes, 'to break the plantation monopoly of land and labour which strangled so many of the alternative industries that were promoted by small capital'.¹⁰ Partial success was achieved in 1891, with the moderate reform of the constitution, thus opening up possibilities for the repeal of the backward crown land regulations.¹¹

Before 1890, crown lands could be purchased only in lots of a minimum of 100 acres, at the prohibitive price of \$10 per acre. In 1890, the price was reduced to \$1 per acre; but the minimum, statutory, purchasable acreage remained unchanged. Crown lands were still inaccessible to the small cultivator with limited capital. But the deepening of the depression in the sugar industry in 1896, and the dismal conditions throughout the West Indies, precipitated the appointment of a Royal Commission to examine the economic prospects of the region. N. Darnell Davis, the chairman of the Select Committee to consider Crown Lands Regulations in British Guiana, told the Commission that the existing regulations in the colony were 'originally framed to keep the people on the sugar estates, or at all events to keep them from settling the lands of the colony'.¹² The Commission obviously concurred with this assessment; they observed: 'No reform affords so good a prospect for the permanent welfare in the future of the West Indies as the settlement of the labouring population on the land as small peasant proprietors ...'¹³ With respect to British Guiana, they added: 'Rice to the value of £180,000 was imported in 1895-96 for consumption in the Colony. Rice of an excellent quality is already grown in British Guiana, and every effort should be made to produce locally all that is wanted of this article'.¹⁴

Shortly after the publication of this report, further liberalisation of the Crown Land regulations was enacted in British Guiana, through Ordinance 10 of 1898. This measure introduced the concept of 'Homestead Grants', and reduced the minimum purchasable allotment to 25 acres at 10° per acre'; 'Grants by Purchase' remained at 100 acres, but the price was reduced from \$1 to 15° per acre. Ordinance 23 of 1903 was a revolutionary measure; it was the basis for the emergence of a substantial landed element among the Indians: the minimum 'Grants by Purchase' were reduced from 100 to 25 acres at 15° per acre; while minimum 'Homestead Grants' were reduced from 25 to 5 acres at 10° per acre. Lesley Potter notes the consequences of these liberal regulations among the Indians, at the turn of the century:

The result of the regulations of 1898, and more specifically those of 1903, was a rash of applications for grants by purchase, especially among East Indians. The lands released were all along the banks of various streams, which provided the means of access. Those on the Mahaica, Mahaicony, and Abary creeks, and parts of the Berbice and Corentyne rivers were most popular with the East Indians.¹⁵

The poorer Indians, including many who continued to live on the estates, benefited from the availability of 'homestead grants' of 5 acres at a minimal cost of 50°. Before 1900, the main districts where Indians bought land were the relatively malaria-free Corentyne Coast, the Canje District in Berbice, and the wetter Essequibo Coast. After 1900, the Corentyne remained a popular area of settlement, while East Coast Demerara, West Bank Demerara, and the Mahaica-Abary District also attracted many Indian settlers.¹⁶ It is interesting that most Indians showed a preference, initially, for villages which were within commuting distance of a sugar estate. In the absence of drainage and irrigation, Indian settlers hedged against the hazards of agriculture by maintaining their links with adjacent estates. They did not burn their bridges. As Potter argues:

At least part of the explanation lies in the strategy of non-development and its impact on rice growing. Because there was no system of water control over much of the area devoted to peasant rice production, many East Indians believed it unwise to rely entirely on this crop. If the lands were located not too far from a sugar estate, there was always a possibility of earning money there, especially if the season was bad. Because most people would have to walk the intervening distance, ten miles would be about the physical limit they could handle.¹⁷

The sugar planters benefited from the rise of Indian villages in the neighbourhood of their estates. During the harvesting season, they could rely on these reservoirs of labour, while having no responsibility for their housing, or their survival during the 'slack' season. It is true that the rice harvest often clashed with the cane harvest in October-November; but the prevalence of the extended family in Indian villages, meant that some members could be delegated to plantation work while others attended to the rice fields.¹⁸

It is noteworthy that the liberal Crown Land regulations evolved in the 1880s-1890s, when many Indians were claiming their right to repatriation, with its attendant financial demands on the state. Repatriates to India rose from 8,889 in the 1870s to 16,749 and 17,070 in the 1880s and 1890s respectively. These declined to 6,344 between 1911 and 1920.¹⁹ The acquiring of cheap land and the establishment of Indian villages, based principally on rice and cattle farming, stemmed the tide of repatriation. But official and planter antipathy to a comprehensive drainage and irrigation scheme for the villages rendered agriculture hazardous; perennially susceptible to the vagaries of the weather. Much Indian village labour remained available to the planters, their paranoia over the flight of labour from the estates notwithstanding.²⁰

In spite of the constraints, the agricultural achievements of the Indians were impressive. The Corentyne Coast, in Berbice, became the Indian heartland. This district, extending for 50 miles by about 20 miles, had little forest; but the coastline was protected by a resilient band of mangrove and courida. It was windy, drier, and less malarious. Its open savannahs of rich, alluvial soils, interspersed with narrow, elongated sand reefs, were attractive to rice cultivators and cattle rearers. Rice thrived on the extensive clay lands; the better, naturally-drained sand reefs were ideal for homesteads and the cultivation of certain vegetables; these also provided dry resting-places for cattle, during heavy rains, when pastures were flooded. Labour on the four sugar estates on the Corentyne — Albion, Port Mourant, Springlands, and Skeldon — offered a margin of safety before the rice harvest, or when, as was often the case, flood or drought diminished the rice crop.²¹

But as the rice industry expanded, immediately before and during the First World War, Indians tended to settle in areas where there were no sugar estates in the neighbourhood. On the Upper Corentyne, between No. 55 Village and Crabwood Creek, a distance of about 25 miles, there was a significant concentration of Indians: about 30 villages sprung up. In 1911, of the 3,000 inhabitants between No. 64 and No. 75 Villages, 2,700 were Indians. While lands near to sugar estates were increasingly difficult to obtain, there was a genuine interest in these sparsely populated areas, where they were free to create independent communities, based on rice and cattle. Preference for these areas was enhanced because there were few Blacks there. They were also free from Government's 'designs to set them up as sanitary districts', with the accompanying taxation and inevitable meddling by officials.²² Indians were deeply suspicious of their motives; and often endured insanitary conditions, instead of incurring what they deemed burdensome intervention.

By 1920, the Indians had become 'a significant land-holding community' in British Guiana. They had even been settling in several, traditionally Black villages, buying or renting land to grow rice and rear cattle.²³ This was possible because of the generally depressed state of these villages: unlike rice, the patches of ground provision kept by the Blacks were less resistant to the frequent floods; while a looser family structure, and a failure to exploit a variety of niches in the village environment, as the Indians were doing, undermined the economy of these villages. The depression in the sugar industry in the 1880s-1890s had exacerbated the situation: low wages and unemployment drove many young Black men into the interior, to the more remunerative balata, gold, and diamond fields. Many Black villages, by the 1920s, were gravely impaired, socially and economically. In November 1927, an astute observer of Guianese society, the journalist and legislator, A.R.F Webber, depicted an atmosphere of considerable dereliction among rural Blacks. He observed:

The weaning away from the villages of the progeny of the original holders, has had its effect on the village proprietary Owing to the lack of railway communications available to the balata and diamond fields, these men have severed their home ties and home connexions; they live in the forests like lone whales in the ocean, sequestered from the female of their species; and when they do return to civilisation they move about like wide-eyed buffaloes, and imitate the antics of one in a crockery shop Those that remained at home were the women, the children, and the old men; all of whom wisely kept out of the rice fields. What little remained of the market gardens and 'provision grounds' were kept alive by them.²⁴

Black leaders were deeply distressed by a growing tendency for Indians to acquire lands in the Black villages; and often expressed the pain which this caused. The Negro Progress Convention (N.P.C.), the principal Black cultural and political organisation in the 1920s, constantly exhorted Black villages to make a greater effort to prevent the loss of their properties to Indian farmers. In November 1928, Dr T.T. Nichols, the vice-president of the N.P.C., in an address to villagers at Manchester, on the Corentyne, reportedly said:

It must strike everyone forcibly, that the lands given to them by their forefathers were getting away from them, and their East Indian brethren were fast taking hold of those lands it was to their shame to lose those valuable lands which had been given them by their forefathers Their race was the only set of people who were prepared to stay in the majority with folded arms and expect others to do everything for them. They had got that idea of sitting down too much²⁵

Another leader of the N.P.C., G.H.A. Bunyan, expressed similar sentiments to a Black audience at Friends, East Bank Berbice. He noted that they did not belong to the race 'which had been spoken of as being thrifty' (a reference to the popular perception of Indians in the colony); but implored them to 'arise out of the state of slumber', to stem the process by which they were being 'dispossessed' of their lands. Bunyan advised them to grow 'economic crops', to revive the village

economy.²⁶ J.H. Bristol, a N.P.C. leader from Berbice, said that they needed to make a greater effort, to beat back a chronic lethargy. He reportedly remarked: 'It was only in British Guiana that they found people sleeping all the time and feeling content They had all along expected other people to work out their own salvation and to do for them the things they should do for themselves'.²⁷

Throughout the 1920s, the leaders of the N.P.C. reiterated these stern admonitions to their people, with apparently little success. As noted earlier, the failure of the village economy, and the massive exodus of young Black men to the interior, had a profoundly negative effect on the Black family. In March 1921, *The Daily Argosy* bemoaned what it saw as a lack of family life: 'The men lack the steadying influence of marriage and fatherhood children [are] from birth deprived of the benefit of a father, and depend entirely upon one parent, the weaker wage-earner'²⁸

In May 1929, the same newspaper commented on the sad state of Black agriculture. It noted that the Victoria-Belfield Agricultural Society, a Black organisation on the East Coast Demerara, 'seems now to have degenerated into a society for the academic discussion of agricultural questions,' a mere 'talk-shop'. And it contrasted the agricultural achievements of the Indians with what it discerned as a tendency to exhibitions of rhetoric among Black leaders, conducing to 'race prejudice' rather than 'race consciousness'. The latter, it argued, could promote economic progress and a deeper sense of social responsibility. *The Daily Argosy* concluded:

We have too vivid a recollection of abortive proposals for an infinity of co-operative measures On the one hand, there is one class of farmer who persists invariably in endless and unprofitable discussion. On the other, there is the East Indian who, handicapped at the beginning, is steadily and consistently plodding forward, amassing a competence and in many instances acquiring from the villagers [the Blacks], the lands possessed by their forefathers. ... the East Indian is fast outstripping his brother competitor as a farmer in the colony.²⁹

The Indians had found an 'economic crop' — rice. The many natural advantages on the flat coastland were conducive to 'wet rice' cultivation. The rich, alluvial clay, with an impermeable sub-soil, aided the retention of water for a longer period;³⁰ an abundance of water was provided by the copious seasonal rains. In May and June, the planting season for the big, autumn crop, an average of 12.5 and 11.9 inches respectively were recorded between 1880 and 1925. The average rainfall for July and August, when the padi grains were filling out and the plant required much water, was also invariably high — 9.2 and 6.7 inches respectively. Between 1880 and 1924, the average rainfall per year in the driest county, Berbice, was 80.06 inches; in Demerara 92.86 inches; and Essequibo 102.41

inches.³¹ The latter county was most likely to withstand periodic droughts, or unseasonably low rainfall. Two crops of rice were usually grown there.

A high and reasonably constant temperature was an essential prerequisite for 'wet rice' culture. Between 1846 and 1925, the mean temperature on the coastland of British Guiana was 80.4°F, with September and October generally averaging the highest, while the rainfall was lowest, about 2.8 and 2.6 inches respectively.³² This dry, sunny condition was ideal for the ripening, harvesting, and milling of padi, the unhusked rice grain.

Meanwhile, the coastland was 'dead flat': there was no need for terracing, as in Japan and Java; and the yield was 'remarkably high', compared with Japan, Spain and Egypt. It was also well in excess of the output per acre in India.³³

But the flatness of the land in British Guiana, as seen in Chapter 2, brought its own hazards. It demanded considerable expenditure on drainage and irrigation, as well as centralised control of the operation and maintenance of such complex hydraulic systems. This was well beyond the capability of the small rice cultivator;³⁴ and the diffused character of decision-making, engendered by the prevalence of numerous small rice-plots, subverted collective effort in manning even rudimentary water systems.³⁵ Unseasonal weather aggravated the situation. And, as will be seen later, the failure of the Government to devise a long-term policy of land reclamation, coupled with an erroneous tendency to give priority to drainage *over* irrigation (as in 1924-1926), although the two were clearly indivisible,³⁶ rendered rice cultivation beyond the empoldered sugar estates, a risky business. Yet the Indian rice grower was obstinate; he persevered; he adapted his ancient tradition of 'wet-rice' husbandry from the United Provinces and Bihar, where the cultivation of *jhils* (swamps) was a common practice. In Basti, the most important source of North Indian immigrants to British Guiana, between 70 and 80 per cent of the land cultivated in the *kharif* or autumn crop, around 1905, was under rice; and the rhythm of cultivation was essentially the same in both places.³⁷

In Azamgahr District, in the eastern U.P., the second most important source of North Indian immigrants to the colony, about 51 per cent of the land cultivated in the autumn crop, between 1905 and 1907, was under rice. About 58 per cent of the rice crop was of the transplanted or 'wet rice' variety,³⁸ as opposed to the 'broadcast' type, which was less labour-intensive, but substantially less

remunerative. The following method of 'wet rice' husbandry, practised in their ancestral villages in eastern U.P. and western Bihar, was virtually reproduced by Indian farmers in British Guiana:

Rice which is reserved for transplanting is first raised in a nursery or *behnaur*, generally a small patch of ground near the hamlet which is specially reserved for this purpose and is well manured. As soon as the rains have come and filled the *behnaur* with water, the rice seed is soaked and then sown broadcast The young rice is ready for transplanting in about 20 days The field which is to receive the transplanted rice is ploughed between three and five times while it is soaked with water; and the plants are dribbled in, two to six together. From the time of transplanting out up to the end of October, the field is kept flooded the crop is generally ready for cutting by the end of October.³⁹

To retain water on the rice bed, low embankments or meres were thrown up around the field. This device was effective if the monsoons were good; it was inadequate during droughts.⁴⁰ The average annual rainfall in the eastern U.P. was 40.5 inches; in British Guiana it was about 89 inches. The temperature in the former varied between 75 and 95°F;⁴¹ in the latter it averaged about 80°F.

In British Guiana, the long narrow strips of land often used for growing rice were also surrounded with meres or dams, 2 to 3 feet wide and 2 feet high. The absence of drainage and irrigation, in most areas outside the sugar estates, meant that these meres were crucial to the retention of water throughout the growing period, until the grains begin to ripen.⁴² As in the United Provinces, they were effective, providing the rainfall was ample. At times of drought, or unseasonably low rainfall, they were virtually useless: the rate of evaporation was very high during dry spells. Between 1915 and 1925, it consumed approximately 65 per cent of the total rainfall in the colony.⁴³ It was therefore imperative to reinforce these meres regularly in order to avoid seepage. However, where the village council, or farmers had dug a small canal through the cultivated area, Indian farmers devised a rudimentary, but efficient, form of irrigation. A contemporary observer noted: 'Water is let on from a navigation canal at stated intervals, and when the water runs low, recourse is had to the basket with double strings, which is operated by two men. The lift being next to nothing, it is astonishing how soon these men can lay an acre under water'.⁴⁴

The rice bed was ploughed with oxen, four or five weeks before planting; while great care was taken in the preparation of the nursery or *beyari*, located in a small section of the field. It was flooded soon after ploughing; it was then levelled, and all weeds were scrupulously removed. When the nursery was thoroughly puddled, the seedlings were placed in a jute bag, soaked in a shallow ditch for 48 hours, after which they were taken out, spread evenly on a flat surface, covered, and allowed to germinate for a few days. The germinated grains were then broadcast in the nursery. About four

weeks after sowing, the young rice plants or *beya* were skilfully uprooted and distributed in small bundles in the rice bed, ready for transplanting.⁴⁵

The preparation of the rice bed was a demanding task, requiring patience and considerable skill in the handling of a pair of oxen. The bed was ploughed several times, raked (harrowed), and levelled with a flat board or *henga*,⁴⁶ in order to produce a level puddle of thin mud, thus facilitating an even distribution of water.⁴⁷ This was done by men. The transplanting of the rice plants was usually the work of women — a back-breaking exercise, extending for several days, in the slush. Two or three plants were implanted in the mud, 4 or 5 inches deep and 9 to 12 inches apart, 'by a judicious turn of the hand'.⁴⁸ These took root in about seven days.

As noted earlier, it was absolutely necessary to impound the water in the field, to a depth of 5 or 6 inches, until the padi started to ripen. This supply of water was especially crucial when the grains started to 'draw milk', when they began to fill out. The prevalence of 'wind' grains was a consequence of water shortage during this critical period. Two weedings of the beds were required to remove superfluous growth (weeds and grasses), which tended to choke out the young plants.⁴⁹ Harvesting took place about 5 months after planting. This was done with a sickle or grass-knife, an equally back-breaking task, in the hot, October sun. Family labour was central to the whole operation among the small rice farmers.⁵⁰

Cattle were allowed to graze in the harvested fields, which remained fallow until the next crop. (In Essequibo, where the rainfall was heavier, a 'second' or spring crop was sown in November-December). These animals deposited manure, while working some of the stalks into the soil, further enriching it.⁵¹ While rice husbandry was essentially similar to that in the United Provinces, an important local departure was the almost universal use of oxen in the preparation of the beds, and the transporting of the rice bundles in a small, wooden punt or *draga*, to the threshing floor or *kharian*, located on higher ground. Threshing was also done by oxen, though less so in Essequibo, where fewer cattle apparently led to the retention of hand-threshing, a process which involved the beating of the sheaves on a slatted structure, placed over mats.⁵² Of the more common practice of 'bull-mashing', a knowledgeable observer noted that a stake was driven into the ground in the centre of a threshing floor, which was about 12 feet in diameter. The sheaves were laid out in a circular fashion around the stake, while the bullocks, yoked closely together and tethered to the

stake, were driven around it, trampling on the sheaves until the padi was separated, accumulating under the straw.⁵³

Ramnarine argues that among the Indians of British Guiana 'a complementary relationship developed between the cattle and rice industries. The ox was indispensable in every aspect of rice cultivation'.⁵⁴ It is, therefore, understandable why bullocks were 'becoming part of the household', and were 'played with and caressed by the women and children'.⁵⁵ Rice culture and a certain reverence for the cow had survived the crossing.

When the threshing was completed, the padi was winnowed with a sieve, bagged, and stored in a *bakhar* or granary, awaiting milling. However, if the planter was indebted to the miller, the padi was taken immediately to the mill. Parboiled or brown rice was the most popular variety milled in the colony; but its preparation entailed a laborious process of soaking, steaming, and drying of the padi before milling. It was felt that this aided the easy removal of the husk, toughened the grain, and reduced breakage, and that parboiled rice retained its quality longer than white rice.⁵⁶

Rice cultivation required hard, systematic work; and many contemporary observers appreciated the efforts of the Indians. As Walter Roth, the Commissioner of the Pomeroon District, reported in 1915:

The high opinion expressed by me in previous years concerning the East Indian continues to be more and more confirmed: on the whole, they are a thrifty, persevering, and hardworking lot of fellows, and set an admirable example to many of those coloured people who, though owning comparatively large areas of excellent agricultural land, are too lazy to work it, and too selfish to lease or sell it.⁵⁷

In 1919, the Indian lawyer and legislator, J.A. Luckhoo, wrote picturesquely of his people's love for the land. He suggested a reverence for it, rivalling their enduring communion with their cattle: 'To the East Indian the earth is the bountiful mother ever ready to yield her rich stores of treasures to those who approach her in the right spirit ... as soon as his term of indenture has expired and he once more breathes the air of freedom, he turns with glad heart to mother earth to wrest some of the treasures from her beneficent keeping'.⁵⁸ Luckhoo was not exaggerating: to landless labourers from the impoverished villages of the eastern U.P., owning a piece of land was magic, a gift from the Gods.

In 1921, the *Journal of the Board of Agriculture* gave credit to the pioneers of the rice industry for their 'enterprise, energy, and independence'. It observed perceptively:

Within a short space of years they have developed the resources of the colony in an unexpected direction and to a phenomenal extent. They have left a permanent mark on its history and enlarged its prospects: and that without any aid but that afforded by a series of congenial seasons and favourable markets.⁵⁹

The area under rice was between 2,500 to 3,000 acres in the 1880s and 1890s — much of this was land used by Indians on the sugar estates. Between 1896 and 1903, the rice acreage rose from 3,000 to 17,500, following the liberalisation of the Crown Lands regulations in 1898 and 1903. By 1908, 29,764 acres were under rice; in 1914, 47,037, climbing progressively during the First World War to 60,432 acres in 1918. Between 1896 and 1918, the acreage increased by 2,000 per cent⁶⁰ — a phenomenal achievement, indeed. And this was probably a conservative estimate, as rice growers tended to give 'erroneous' information for fear of taxation.⁶¹ Moreover, it was virtually impossible to collect data on numerous small patches, scattered over 200 miles along the coastland and several miles up the creeks and rivers.

The rapid expansion of the rice industry, despite Government's indifference, underlined the independence and tenacity of the Indian farmer;⁶² and his systematic adaptation of his painstaking husbandry, brought from the United Provinces and Bihar, to the coastal environment of British Guiana, ensured the survival of the industry. The recurring famines in India during the first decade of this century, in conjunction with the reduced supplies of Eastern rice during the War, created a market for this commodity in the colony, and in the West Indies. There was a 'very sharp' rise in the price of rice. Meanwhile, an increase in the duty on imported rice in 1895, from 25 to 35 cents per 100 lbs., gave a competitive advantage to the fledgling industry.⁶³ And cheap land, after 1898 and 1903, as noted earlier, made it possible for rice growing to expand, away from the sugar estates, in what became predominantly Indian villages. Rice and cattle gave a degree of security and independence; they answered a deep need which Indians harboured for release from plantation labour. Rice was their principal food; that alone was a compelling reason for persisting with this activity, whatever the hazards.

The colony benefited from their tenacity: the import bill for rice was reduced rapidly; while exports rose impressively, although the Government and the plantocracy opposed drainage and irrigation for the villages. Rice imports declined from around 19,400 tons per year in the late-1880s to about 14,700 tons per year between 1899-1903; by 1909-1913, only 2,500 tons per year were imported.

From 1914, virtually no rice was imported; while exports earned over \$1 million and \$1,400,000 in 1916 and 1917 respectively (see Table 3.1).

<i>Year</i>	<i>Acreage cultivated</i>	<i>Quantity exported (tons)</i>	<i>Value (\$)</i>
1903	17,500	5	288
1908	29,746	3,120	283,200
1913	33,888	7,710	509,544
1914	47,037	9,374	512,736
1915	50,737	9,227	647,842
1916	57,022	13,124	1,052,693
1917	58,090	14,367	1,422,806
1918	60,432	8,018	854,693

SOURCE: Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in Guyana* (London: The Author, 1970), p.256.

The rise of this 'minor' industry also owed something to Black labourers who were recruited by Indian farmers, especially for harvesting. Edgar Beckett, an agricultural supervisor, observed in 1912: '.... just a few years ago the black peasant thought it beneath his dignity to plant this cereal we have lived to see the East Indian hiring black men and women to work in his rice fields'⁶⁴ And Governor Hodgson praised Indian rice farmers 'for giving an excellent object lesson to those of the African race in the advantages to be derived from thrift, energy, and continuous work — a lesson not without effect'.⁶⁵ Some Blacks, in the neighbourhood of Indian villages, especially in Berbice, started to grow rice, egged on by the demonstrably impressive expansion undertaken by the Indians at the start of the War. However, their ability to sustain this labour-intensive activity was constrained by the deflection of much of their labour force to the interior of the colony.

In 1915, the Lands and Mines Department reported that along the Mahaica and the Mahaicony creeks 'almost every available area of valuable savannah was already taken up by the East Indians'; in many cases, up to the fourth depth, the limit of the coastal clays. On the right bank of the Mahaicony, solid front dams had been built for about 20 miles up the river; and Indians were empoldering the whole area, throwing up smouses and light dams.⁶⁶ In 1916, District Officers reported 'considerable improvement' in methods of husbandry: '.... teams of oxen and ploughs are now obtainable even by those who do not themselves possess such conveniences, thanks to the co-operative spirit which happily characterises the agricultural work of the East Indians of this colony'.⁶⁷

A constant increase in demand for crown lands by Indians was also reported in other parts of the colony, as the export trade boomed, and as rice became, increasingly, the staple food of Blacks, with the rise in the price of flour during the War.⁶⁸ Indian rice growers earned hard cash for the colony; they also provided food for the local population. Many also supplied milk, beef, fish, eggs, and vegetables to the local market.

But farmers were always vulnerable to the vagaries of the weather: 1918, for example, was an especially dry year. Normal rainfall was recorded in March, April, and May; but the crucial month for rice planting, June, received only 8.7 inches, compared with a mean of 11.8 inches. July was normal; however, from 24 August to 17 November, a period of 12 weeks, a paltry 1.2 inches of rainfall were recorded; August was 3 inches below normal.⁶⁹ Consequently, in 1918, 69,815 acres yielded only 36,921 tons of padi (unhusked rice) or 23,735 tons of rice. In 1917, when favourable weather prevailed, 64,804 acres had yielded 70,067 tons of padi or 42,040 tons of rice. Because of inadequate rainfall in 1918, the yield was only 56 per cent of that of 1917, although cultivation had risen by 5,000 acres (see Table 3.2).

<i>Year</i>	<i>Acreage reaped</i>	<i>Padi (tons)</i>	<i>Cleaned rice (tons)</i>	<i>Exports (tons)</i>
1913	39,167	43,170	25,902	7,709
1914	53,661	66,268	39,760	7,089
1915	53,374	65,700	39,420	9,057
1916	61,488	67,001	40,200	13,009
1917	64,804	70,067	42,040	14,367
1918	69,815	36,921	23,735	7,963

SOURCES: Peter Ruhomon, *Centenary History of the East Indians in British Guiana, 1838-1938*; C.O. 114/167, Report of the Department of Science and Agriculture, 1918.

The drought of 1918 underlined the necessity for drainage and irrigation; it also dramatised the hazards of peasant agriculture, in an environment where the empoldered lands were monopolised by the sugar plantations. In Berbice, where droughts tended to be more frequent and severe, the contrast was stark: in 1918, on unempoldered village farms, the yield per acre was 4.9 bags; on watered plots, cultivated by Indians on the sugar estates at Port Mourant and Albion, the high yield was sustained at 21.4 bags per acre. On the West Coast Demerara, the output in the villages fell to 7.6 bags per acre; on the plantations, it was 22.2 bags.⁷⁰ This problem recurred throughout the 1920s: droughts and alternating floods vitiating the efforts of the Indian farmers. But the colonial rulers and their allies,

the plantocracy, were an equally menacing foe as the fickle weather and the dreaded anopheles mosquitoes. Yet the Indian cultivators persevered.

In late-1917, the new Governor, Sir Wilfred Collet (1856-1929), prohibited the export of rice, save for small concessions approved by the Comptroller of Customs. This measure was designed partially to lessen the impact of a steep rise in the prices of several commodities of popular consumption (see Table 3.3.). A sharp increase in the price of flour, from 5^c to 9^c per pound, between 1916 and 1917, and the possibility of the curtailment of suppliers from Canada and the U.S.A., apparently precipitated Collet's action. (Bread was especially important to the diet of the urban, Black working class).

	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918
Rice (per gal.)	23-24	29-30	23	28-30	36-38	40-44
Dal (per lb.)	3	3 ¹ / ₂ -4	6	6	12	10
Flour (per lb.)	3 ¹ / ₂	3	4 ¹ / ₂	5	9	8
Sugar (per lb.)	3	2-3	5	5	5	6
Curry ingredients (per lb.)	12	12	16	16	32	32
Coconut oil (per pt.)	12	14	9	9	12	20

SOURCES: C.O. 114/154, 158, 162, 167, Reports of the Immigration Agent General, 1915-1918.

In early-1918, however, the Governor allowed exports to the West Indies, having negotiated a price of \$10 per bag of 180 pounds. As there was very little rice from the East on the West Indian market, fixing the price of exports was foolhardy: the supply and demand mechanism would have yielded a much higher price. This strange transaction, the forerunner of many during Collet's rule, was devised to diminish profiteering by local merchants, who were the sole exporters of rice; they had prospered during the War, at the expense of the producers.

While the desire to curb profiteering was laudable, Collet's failure to capitalise on an excellent market, and his lack of vision in constructing a better system of export to ensure that rice producers got a reasonably larger proportion of the profits, suggested a lack of imagination, a mediocre intellect. (The Governor's previous assignment was in British Honduras, a quintessential backwater; presumably much vision or intellect was not required there). He was determined to cripple the exporters, even if the small cultivators, the back-bone of the rice industry, were crushed in the

process. Even *The West India Committee Circular*, the organ of the plantocracy, in London, detected the folly of the Governor's price-fixing. In May 1918, it observed:

..... the Governor's avowed object in fixing this maximum being to check undue profiteering through what he deemed to be exorbitant prices charged on recent shipments of rice to French and Dutch Guiana. This new policy, specifically designed to meet the pressing wants of neighbouring colonies, whilst generally acceptable to them, has not, apparently, succeeded in restoring confidence among interested parties in Demerara⁷¹

Although the export system was severely flawed, and subject to manipulation by merchants, it was absurd not to recognise their contribution to the expansion of the industry. These merchants advanced the millers, who in turn, advanced the rice growers: their capital made it possible for the rice farmers to boost production during the War. The Government's record in providing capital for 'minor' industries was dismal.

The Daily Argosy also, condemned Collet's price-fixing agreement, on two counts: the ordinary forces of supply and demand should operate, unimpeded by a price ceiling in the overseas market — a patently logical argument given the serious rice shortage in the West Indies. It also deprecated the omission of a reciprocal agreement to ship ground provisions to British Guiana. This would have alleviated the cost of living problem: plantains, eddoes, dasheens, etc., were an acceptable substitute for flour, in the short-run. The paper concluded with an astute assessment of the Governor: 'He would persist against competent advice, in formulating elaborate regulations for the control of the industry, which have not only failed to accomplish their purpose, but have served to alienate the sympathies of a most important section of the population'⁷²

The West India Committee Circular stated that it was wrong to obstruct the development of the rice industry, directly or indirectly, by restricting exports, or by other means.⁷³ Faced with a substantial fall in the rice crop of 1918, purely because of a lack of irrigation, Collet again placed an embargo on exports — between 1 September 1918 and 8 March 1919. Cheap rice was identified by him as an important instrument for placating the urban, Black working class, many of whom were becoming restive, with the cost of living escalating. Collet spent five years in British Guiana — 1917 to 1922. He was no friend of the rice farmers: his implacably bigoted tinkering with the industry led to its decline for much of the 1920s. He was certainly not considered by Indian farmers as one who was 'zealous of the welfare of the people' as Peter Ruhomon, the writer of a history of the Indians in the colony, wrote.⁷⁴

II

Governor Collet and the Crippling of the Rice Industry, 1919-1922: Price Control and the Export Embargo

It is the East Indian coolie, that model of diligence and perseverance, who has made the rice industry what it is. He is by nature a capitalist, for capital stands always for self-denial and abstinence. He can postpone a present pleasure in anticipation of the felicities to come he is carving out for himself a secure and enviable place in the social economy. Instinctively he realises that there is a perennial nobleness, even sacredness, in work. J.A. Van Sertima, 'The Rice Industry: A Remarkable Expansion', *The Daily Argosy*, 5 September 1919.

You seem to think that the whole world depended on your growing rice.
Collet to Indian rice farmers at Whim, Corentyne, Berbice. — *The Daily Chronicle*, 14 January 1921.

Prior to Collet's embargo on rice exports in September 1918, 8,018 tons, valued at \$854,693, were exported during the first eight months of that year; 6,940 tons, valued at \$951,485, were exported in 1919, after the embargo was lifted in March.⁷⁵ The more lucrative earnings of 1919 were a result of higher prices, due to poor harvests in India in 1918-1919, the cutting off of supplies to the West Indian market, and the lapse of the price agreement of 1918. But the Governor continued to tinker with the rice industry. In September 1919, he fixed the local retail price at 6¢ per pint and \$9.75 per bag. This was unconscionable: these prices could not cover the cost of production, estimated at \$11 per bag, exclusive of milling fees. However, rice producers did not protest because the export trade was still permitted; it subsidised local prices.⁷⁶

In April 1920, Collet suspended exports after 8,000 tons of rice, valued at \$1,130,736, had been shipped to the West Indies.⁷⁷ A further increase in the cost of living apparently precipitated this action. The Governor was especially fearful of the Black workers in Georgetown, particularly the stevedores, who had struck in January 1917, June and September 1918, and April 1919; they were becoming restive again in April 1920. His apprehensions were correct: these workers, organised by the British Guiana Labour Union (B.G.L.U.) since early-1919, went on strike several times, in May, June, and July 1920. Of the many unemployed Blacks in Georgetown, Collet observed in June: 'They are an element of danger to law and order'.⁷⁸ Cheap rice was his principal instrument for appeasing what he saw as a potentially volatile Black urban population, whatever the consequences for the rice industry.

The Daily Chronicle, which invariably empathised with the Black working class (it was edited by the progressive, Coloured journalist, A.R.F. Webber), deprecated the reimposition of the embargo; and accused Collet of clinging to the 'shibboleths of war time policies': he had forfeited trade with Surinam, estimated at \$800,000 per annum, and it felt that the Trinidad rice market was being jeopardised. The newspaper argued for an end to the tinkering with the export trade: 'It is impossible to convince His Excellency that Government interference with trade spells disaster. Government interference during the war had to be tolerated for obvious reasons; but with the end of the war it is foolhardy to pursue the same policy'.⁷⁹ The paper concluded that the 'breath' of the rice industry was dependent on the export trade.⁸⁰

The ban on exports and the retention of the statutory retail price of 6¢ per pint led, almost immediately, to the virtual disappearance of rice from the local market. Producers had resorted to hoarding; while shopkeepers refused to sell above the fixed price because of a spate of prosecutions; they also, were hoarding. The shortage was transparently artificial; and consumers, growers, and merchants concurred. They all demanded the removal of price control. Ramdas, an Indian consumer from Berbice, underlined the extent to which Collet's policy pained everyone, consumers and producers alike. He wrote in June 1920:

I went into 23 shops in Berbice to buy 5 gallons of rice I did not get any. Two or three shopkeepers told me to go to the Governor. For seven days my children have not eaten a good breakfast. I went to Plantation Port Mourant and I saw five East Indians. They told me that they had padi, but they cannot mill it unless the Government removes the restrictions. Why does not the Government remove the restrictions until the new crop and let the people get rice to eat?⁸¹

The merchants in Georgetown agreed. They noted that many shopkeepers had stocks of rice, but were precluded from selling because the police were harassing those who, of necessity, sold above Collet's unremunerative price.⁸² They also, demanded an end to price-control, pointing out that growers refused to sell padi for less than \$5.50 per bag; and since it cost \$11.00 to produce one bag of rice, exclusive of milling fees, it was impossible to sell at \$9.75 per bag, the controlled price. Dealers were buying rice at \$11.75 per bag.⁸³ But the Governor was immovable. As *The Daily Argosy* observed succinctly in October 1922, towards the end of his rule: 'The present Administration has been notoriously impenetrable to external counsel'.⁸⁴

By August 1920, consumers in Berbice, where the 'shortage' was most acute, were reported to be desperate. They could not comprehend Collet's obstinacy. Rice practically disappeared from the

New Amsterdam market; and consumers offering as much as 10[¢] per pint — 4[¢] above the controlled price — could not get any. An increase in prosecutions, coupled with apprehensions of a substantial short-fall in the autumn crop of 1920, because of inadequate rainfall, seemed to have aggravated the hoarding. The despair of consumers in New Amsterdam was dramatised in a dark incident from that town, in August: 'A poor beggar woman who managed to collect a fair quantity from members of her own race, was followed for a long time by cooks and others, who practically besought her to sell them the rice she owned. The woman refused to sell'.⁸⁵

On the Essequibo Coast as well, the rice situation was depressing. J.W. Gallienne, a popular merchant, spoke of the 'pitiful appeals of the people day after day, for miles away, coming to seek supplies' And he related an incident which underscored the despair: 'I had about 5 dozens [breadfruit] picked from many trees yesterday afternoon, and in less than half an hour, they were all bought up, an unparalleled occurrence'. He appealed to Collet, on behalf of the consumers, to adjust the scheduled price of rice in line with the cost of production.⁸⁶ The Governor was unmoved.

On 21 August 1920, J.A. Viapree, Francis Kawall, and Abdool Rayman of the British Guiana East Indian Association met Collet. They requested an increase in the price of rice from the statutory \$9.75 per bag to \$11.00 wholesale, and \$11.50 per bag retail, as well as a nominal increase of 1[¢] per pint. The B.G.E.I.A. submitted that 'a large stock of padi' was stored in the mills, and that the measure suggested would bring the reserves onto the market.⁸⁷ Rayman said that the cost of producing a bag of rice was \$11.00; it was uneconomical to produce rice at the controlled price.⁸⁸

Collet rejected their arguments; and, for the first time, claimed that the Commissaries Department had misled him as to the quantity of rice available for export — padi was represented as rice — and had he known this, he would not have allowed 'any export'. He was not prepared to be 'led into another mistake'. Kawall then asked the Governor why the people should be penalised for an error presumably committed by his officers. Kawall added: '.... the people are starving, your Excellency'. Collet retorted 'petulantly': 'Let the people starve, and if you will, starve too, but I will not increase the price of rice'. In dismissing the delegation, he remarked that whoever wished to discuss the rice question should see him in November, when the autumn crop was harvested.⁸⁹

The B.G.E.I.A. delegates told *The Daily Argosy* that in November the market would have been

glutted; producers would be forced to sell at the scheduled prices, thus incurring a loss. Kwall repeated that there was no shortage of padi: he knew of one factory with stocks of 4,000 bags; many more held padi which could not be milled because of the unrealistic prices.⁹⁰ He argued that one section of the community could not be expected 'to supply cheap food to another section at a loss to themselves. That was what His Excellency was forcing them to do'.⁹¹ In other words, Collet was using price-control in order to get Indian producers to supply cheap rice and milk to predominantly Black consumers. (The retail price of milk was fixed at 8° per unit; the B.G.E.I.A. were asking for a hike to 10°).⁹²

Viapree was deeply incensed. He noted that Collet, in a letter to the Association, said that he had been 'fooled' by the Rice Committee into exporting more rice than the colony could spare; whereas, at their meeting with him on 21 August, he reported that he was 'fooled' by the Commissaries Department. Viapree asserted that the conflicting statements demonstrated how 'incompetent' the Governor was to deal with the matter.⁹³ On 27 August 1920, the B.G.E.I.A. passed a resolution, reaffirming their position that there was a 'sufficient' quantity of rice to meet local demands; but 'owing to the high cost of production it could not be placed on the market at the Government's scheduled price without a loss to the dealers'. They deemed Collet's rice policy 'reactionary': it was 'throttling' the rice industry, which 'has been established by the energy and devotion solely of the East Indians'.⁹⁴ In September, *The Daily Argosy* confirmed that in the Mahaicony District alone, 9,000 bags of rice were stored in the factories; much was also being hoarded in Berbice.⁹⁵

In June 1920, *The Daily Chronicle* had labelled the Governor's rice policy 'mischievous and unsound'; observing that while it was originally designed to protect the working man and 'obviate any demand for increased wages, or any provocation of strike', it had failed. The paper proceeded to accuse Collet of wanting to cripple the rice industry: '.... behind it all we cannot help feeling His Excellency's conviction that the rice industry can be over-expanded for the good of the colony'.⁹⁶ In July, 'Junius Junior', a regular contributor to *The Daily Chronicle*, concurred. He also, was certain that there was no rice shortage. He addressed the Governor: 'Your rice policy, you avowed, was to prevent strikes and secure cheap food for the people. It has secured neither, and as a bankrupt policy it should be forsaken'.⁹⁷ Viapree was less circumspect: Collet's rice policy was designed 'to crush the rice industry for the benefit of the sugar industry'.⁹⁸

Collet could see no point in growing rice, in siphoning off Indian labour from the plantations, when sugar prices were escalating: they rose from £29.16s per ton in 1919 to £50.1s per ton in 1920; while the area under cane had contracted by 4,000 acres since 1918.⁹⁹ To him it was sugar or nothing. On 29 August 1919, in a flight of grandiloquence, Collet told the West India Committee, the sugar planters' powerful lobbying organisation in London, that British Guiana could accommodate 15,000,000 people; and that it was capable of supplying all the sugar required in Britain.¹⁰⁰

Buoyed by the inflated prices, the planters raised their perennial lament over labour shortage. The expansion of the rice industry was seen as a threat to sugar. A correspondent to *The Daily Argosy* argued in August 1920: 'With the decrease in our sugar areas has come a sympathetic increase in our rice areas the one industry cannot develop unless it does so at the expense of the other'.¹⁰¹ The imperial mind could not countenance any worthwhile development in British Guiana away from sugar monoculture. *The Daily Argosy* also, dazzled by the high prices of 1920, argued that a market could be found for 2½ million tons of the colony's sugar: 'The U.K. could take all it could produce, and it could go in at a preferential rate'¹⁰²

It was in this context of gargantuan expectations for sugar, that Collet's 'timorous short-sightedness'¹⁰³ with respect to an expanding rice industry was framed. (Sugar prices collapsed in 1921-1922). But the rice growers had to face sturdier blows. On 26 October 1920, the Governor decontrolled rice on the local market; however, he retained the embargo on exports until the end of October 1921, 'at the earliest'. He defended his action on the patently false premise that 'the harvest of 1919 was practically exhausted before that of 1920 was ready for gathering'; and since he anticipated a short-fall in the 1920 crop, it was imperative to secure 'a margin of safety'. The embargo was also considered a hedge against what he termed an 'apprehension of a possible shortage of flour'.¹⁰⁴

What Collet did not say was that the 1919 crop, on which the supposed over-export in 1920 was based, was, in fact, a record in the history of the rice industry: from 61,400 acres, 72,266 tons of padi or 46,360 tons of rice were obtained, a rise of over 100 per cent on the 1918 output. And even if one took the extravagant, and erroneous, step of deducting the total exports of 1919 and 1920 — 14,950 tons — from the 1919 output (a portion of the exports in 1919 were, in fact, made from the 1918 crop), there was still a surplus of 21,000 tons, or the same as the 1918 output. Yet there was

no shortage in the latter year; and 8,018 tons of rice were exported.¹⁰⁵ The 'shortage' in 1920 was artificial; and it cropped up only after exports were suspended in April. Moreover, Collet's facile assertion that he was 'fooled' by the Commissaries Department or the Rice Committee (he was not sure which), came later, in August, after his efforts to placate the consumer had back-fired. At a time of rising cost of living, and potential unrest, Indian rice growers (and milk-vendors) were being squeezed so that wage demands could be deflated; in short, to subsidise employers of labour.¹⁰⁶

The crop of 1920 was estimated at 20,800 tons of cleaned rice, or about the same as in 1918. In spite of the prolonged dry spell, especially on the Corentyne, 55,000 acres were cultivated, compared with about 61,000 in 1919.¹⁰⁷ The absence of irrigation, not the lethargy of the farmers, was responsible for the reduced harvest. But the throwing onto the market of rice hoarded from the previous crop, with the end of price control in October 1920, more than compensated for the short-fall. The retail price rose sharply, initially, to \$13.50 per bag (68 to 72¢ per gallon), then declined equally rapidly to \$8.50 per bag (64¢ per gallon).¹⁰⁸ By mid-November, Collet was pleased to report that rice was being sold at 6¢ per pint, though he expected it would soon settle at 7¢ per pint. He felt vindicated: 'The present fall in the price shows that that which I had fixed was an adequate one'. Yet, in the same despatch, he conceded that 'in many cases the cost of producing rice will not allow of a commercial success'. In fact, the inadequate prices stemmed from a glut, brought on by Collet's embargo.¹⁰⁹

While Collet gloated over the low prices, rice producers in Berbice were making 'violent criticisms' of the embargo. That such protests were coming from an area where 'the rice crop in nearly every district had failed',¹¹⁰ confirmed that a substantial quantity of old rice, from the crop of 1919, had flooded the market; it also bolstered the argument that the presumed shortage, between April and September, was indeed brought on by the Governor's flawed rice policy, rather than by excessive export.¹¹¹

The Daily Argosy pointed out that the expansion of the industry was undertaken exclusively on the assumption that a margin of profit was attainable on the West Indian market; and it was primarily on the basis of this that 'the outcry against the local selling price was so long postponed'.¹¹² Export earnings subsidised local prices. *The Daily Chronicle* observed that 'the very breath of the rice industry is bound up in the export trade'; and that the uncertainty engendered by Government's rice

policy had led to merchants withdrawing their advances to rice farmers, a serious blow to the growth of the industry.¹¹³

The elected members of the legislature were also opposed to the embargo. They told Collet, in November 1920, that 'a large surplus' could be exported profitably, without diminishing local supplies. They repudiated his handling of the rice issue:

We think your policy is sufficient to put a damper on the thrifty and industrious agriculturalist, and we hope that you will see the necessity for a change of policy; for it is quite evident that whatever Canadian and West Indian markets we have will be displaced by reliable sources.¹¹⁴

Collet was impervious to advice, however compelling. Meanwhile, rice producers had again resorted to hoarding, to stem the slide of prices. This forced a rise from \$8.50 to \$9.25 per bag, hardly a remunerative price. Abdool Rayman of the British Guiana East Indian Association, a big rice farmer on the West Coast Demerara, also admonished the Governor not to squander the West Indian market. He had just returned from Trinidad (in January 1921), where, he said, there was a 'great scarcity' of brown rice; shipments from the East were spasmodic. He had no doubts that British Guiana had a surplus, which should be exported: the local price of \$7 to \$9 per bag could not cover the cost of production.¹¹⁵

The rice farmers concurred. At a meeting of growers and millers at Helena, Mahaica in January 1921, in the presence of several Indian leaders — J.A. Viapree, Edwin Bacchus (the chairman of the Mahaica Village Council), A.E. Seeram, J.A. Jaundoo — and the Black legislator, Hon A.B. Brown, a resolution was passed calling on Collet to lift the embargo, as there was a surplus of rice, and the cost of production was 'far higher' than local prices. The millers undertook to retain whatever stocks the Government deemed necessary for local consumption. A.B. Brown, in an impassioned address, noted that in the past it was invariably the merchants, the exporters, who clamoured for freedom to export; on this occasion, the rice growers themselves were fighting for the reopening of the export trade. He said: 'Millers will not buy, neither merchants. Then what to do for the next crop? The infant industry must not die or perish — never. I feel it my duty to go and convince the Governor to allow the surplus produce to be exported'.¹¹⁶

On 19 January, a deputation comprising five electives — A.B. Brown, R.E. Brassington, Francis Dias, A. McLean Ogle, and J.A. Luckhoo — met Collet, and requested that some rice be released

for export, as there was a substantial stock in the colony. Collet responded that if data could be presented to establish that there was, indeed, enough for local consumption and 'to spare', he would 'consider' the question of export.¹¹⁷

The B.G.E.I.A., after communicating with growers on the East and West Coast Demerara, and Essequibo, deputed its representatives to several districts to ascertain the size of stocks of padi and rice.¹¹⁸ Viapree disclosed that in the areas surveyed, reserves of padi were estimated at 419,000 bags, and rice at 21,149 bags (approximately 224,117 bags of rice) —¹¹⁹ an incredibly large stock. Collet was 'immovable'.¹²⁰ Wood Davis of the Chamber of Commerce underlined the futility of reasoning with him: 'His position seemed to be that he was right and everyone else was wrong ...'; they were 'butting their heads against a stone wall'. *The Daily Argosy* went further: it saw Collet as 'an almost absolute dictator'.¹²²

The same paper warned that in view of the 'extreme' needs of the West Indian islands, they could not be blamed for seeking alternative sources of rice: in Burma, in early 1921, 1,000,000 tons were available for export. It concluded on an ominous note: 'If they do so to any great extent, then "good-bye" to the local industry, for the latter derives its strongest support from its outside customers.'¹²³ Indeed, the success of the industry depended heavily on exports.

In February 1921, Sandbach Parker and Co., the largest rice exporter in the colony, also warned the Government that if they wished to avert a 'catastrophe', they should lift the embargo. The company added that while they had no desire to 'injure' the millers and farmers, they would soon be forced to demand the repayment of advances made to them for the 1920 autumn crop. This would necessitate farmers having to dispose of their stocks at a loss, resulting in bankruptcy.¹²⁴

In April, the Chamber of Commerce, in a memorial to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, stated that in spite of the fall in production because of the drought of 1920, stocks of rice were conservatively estimated at 200,000 bags; and that the small spring crop, to be reaped in April-May 1921, would yield another 15,000 bags. They argued that if the latter (or its equivalent in padi) were deducted for seedlings for the autumn crop, and 140,00 bags were reserved for local consumption between April and September, when the big crop was due, 60,000 bags of rice could safely be exported. The Chamber of Commerce observed that most of the padi remained in the hands of the

growers. They, not the merchants, were the biggest losers. The future of the 1921 crop was in jeopardy: merchants could no longer make advances to millers and farmers. The embargo, they concluded, was having a devastating impact on the whole economy: trade, in all directions, was evaporating.¹²⁵ They were correct.

By April 1921 many Indian rice farmers already faced bankruptcy; and they allegedly interpreted Collet's rice policy as a 'conspiracy' between the sugar planters and the Government to ruin the rice industry.¹²⁶ Edwin Bacchus, an Indian leader from Mahaica, and a big rice and cattle farmer, reported that the banks and the merchants were demanding that rice cultivators repay their loans; and that some farmers were pawning their jewellery to buy food; others were disposing of their cattle, at ruinous prices, in order to survive. He noted that the people were in a 'nasty' mood; and implored the implacable Governor to reconsider his policies. Bacchus wrote:

Not so long ago, Professor Harrison [the Director of Science and Agriculture] said rice planting at the then price fixed by the Government, \$11.50 per bag, was not a paying proposition,¹²⁷ yet we have the Government forcing the people to sell their rice far below the cost of production only \$7 a bag is now being offered and hardly any sales taking place; such a state of affairs can only lead to ruin and trouble I am sure His Excellency does not realise the amount of harm and hardship he is inflicting on a hard-working lot of people, or he would surely act differently.¹²⁸

On 11 April 1921, a large number of Indian farmers and millers sought an audience with Collet to discuss their grievances; he refused to see them. A few days later, the growers and millers on the West Coast Demerara took a desperate step: at a meeting at Vreed-en-hoop, they passed a resolution beseeching the Governor to take over their stocks at the last scheduled price, to enable them 'to liquidate our liabilities and thus save ourselves from bankruptcy and ruin'. (Rice was being sold below the inadequate, scheduled price obtained before October 1920). They contended that the market would deteriorate further, with the reaping of the spring crop in Essequibo; and reminded him that in March the stock of rice was estimated at 224,000 bags, substantially more than was required for domestic consumption until the autumn harvest of 1921.¹²⁹

As the noose tightened around the rice industry, the Chamber of Commerce informed the Colonial Office that the West Indian market, which they had 'commanded to the exclusion of the Indian article', was practically lost: Indian rice was being imported again.¹³⁰ Even the conservative West India Committee denounced Collet's embargo: its *Circular* of 28 April 1921 carried an article captioned: DECONTROL OVERDUE: STRANGLING GUIANA'S RICE INDUSTRY. At an

executive meeting of the Committee on 14 April, it was noted that the restrictions were having 'a most prejudicial effect'; and that the estimates of domestic rice consumption were 'unduly high', being based on old figures, when 'imported foodstuffs, such as Canadian flour, were very dear with such foodstuffs now very much cheaper, there was a distinct falling off in the demand for rice'.

Mewburn Garnett, an executive member of the West India Committee, also deplored the retention of the embargo. Shortly after his visit to British Guiana, he observed that the rice trade to Surinam, valued at about \$1,000,000, was 'now dead', and that the crippling of exports to the West Indies had cost the colony a large sum of money, which could have been of much help during the current depression. He expanded on the implications of Collet's rice policy for Indian rice farmers:

The effect of this action of the Authorities as regards rice might be compared to the disastrous results of Bolshevik rule in Russia, where the farmers, unable to dispose advantageously of their surplus crops, are only growing sufficient to supply their immediate requirements. The restriction ... is ... having a disheartening effect on such East Indians who are disinclined to work on sugar plantations, but are quite prepared to extend their efforts in rice farming. Should the present state of things be permitted to continue, one of the chief attractions to East Indian labourers to migrate to the Colony — where they are sadly wanted — would be removed.¹³¹

In March 1921, as the slump in the sugar market deepened and wages fell, *The Daily Argosy* argued that it was imperative to lift the embargo, to allow money to move freely.¹³² Collet remained obdurate. In April 1921, amidst an avalanche of condemnation, he sought to justify, to the Colonial Office, his persistence with the embargo:

Owing to the extraordinary fall in the price of sugar it is impossible for employers to pay the same high rate of wages that they were paying in July of last year, and they have reduced wages from 10 to 20 per cent. This is necessary, but being necessary, it is incumbent on me not to allow prices of the principal article of labourers' food to be unduly raised.¹³³

The Indian rice farmer had to supply cheap food to local wage earners; in fact, as in 1920, he provided an indirect subsidy to sugar planters and urban employers. It was immaterial whether he operated at a loss; whether the backbone of the industry, the West Indian market, evaporated. Collet was confident that Indians would always grow rice, whatever the returns;¹³⁴ rice was the milch cow for the larger national purpose — the survival of sugar. The Governor was also especially sensitive to what he saw as a potentially volatile Black working class and unemployed elements in Georgetown. His cheap rice policy was aimed at palliating them. He seemed to have succeeded.

The Chamber of Commerce noted that his rice policy had a certain following, 'as it appeals as a cheap food policy to those who do not appreciate the economic effects of causing a set-back to an

important industry'; but that this policy, while 'claiming to safeguard the food supply of the colony, really aims at the discouragement of the rice industry'.¹³⁵ In April 1921, the Rice Growers' Association, in a telegram to the West India Committee, endorsed the Chamber's assessment, and urged them to press the Colonial Office to lift the embargo.¹³⁶

The Daily Argosy also deprecated Collet's cheap rice policy. It reflected: 'It is difficult to say on what ground the Government has reserved the right to assure the cheap and adequate supply of rice for the local consumer without at the same time offering some protection to the farmer'.¹³⁷ Yet Collet applauded himself for the wisdom of his action. He wrote to the Colonial Office: 'I am continually receiving petitions asking me not to give way in the matter'.¹³⁸ This is not corroborated by the evidence: in fact, the elected members of the legislature (including Blacks, with the exception of A.A. Thorne), *The Daily Argosy*, *The Daily Chronicle*, The Chamber of Commerce, The British Guiana East Indian Association, The Rice Growers' Association, even the West India Committee — a formidable aggregation of public opinion — vigorously opposed Collet's rice policy.

A trickle of support came from a section of the Black community, who welcomed the prolonged embargo as a guarantee of cheap rice, a commodity produced almost exclusively by Indians. One such supporter from New Amsterdam argued speciously that as consumers of rice far outnumbered the producers, it was prudent 'to do any and everything calculated to protect the interests of the consumer in preference to any or other interested party'. He proceeded to eulogise the Governor: he admired 'the mule' in him; and lauded his persistence with the embargo as 'eminently correct'.¹³⁹

Support also came from A.A. Thorne, the Financial Representative for New Amsterdam. At a meeting of his constituents, addressed by him and presided over by his chief lieutenant, Rev. R.T. Frank, he concurred with Collet that the merchants and millers had deceived the Government in 1920 into over-exporting rice, in order to profiteer. Thorne said that the Governor would not be 'gulled' again. He concluded: '... today rice imported from the far distant East is cheaper in Trinidad than the locally grown rice is here. There can be no demand for our rice under such conditions, and its export will only mean dear flour, and harder times for all'.¹⁴⁰

Thorne, of course, ignored the compelling data, from a variety of sources, that the colony had a substantial reserve stock. He could not see that Collet's tinkering with the export trade had led to

British Guiana being deemed an unreliable supplier by West Indian consumers. Moreover, the threat of bankruptcy confronting Indian producers, was no concern of Thorne and his Black supporters: they wanted cheap rice; and Collet obliged. They passed a resolution expressing their appreciation of Collet's 'fair and impartial administration', and endorsed his rice policy as being 'absolutely correct'; he should allow 'no change'.¹⁴¹

The retail price of rice fell from 5½° and 6° per pint to 3° per pint in 1921, sliding further in 1922; while the price of flour also dropped, from 12° per lb. in 1920 to 8° per lb. in 1921. As Table 3.4 shows, the price of rice never approached its 1919-1920 level for much of the decade; cheap rice was an important factor in the declining prices of flour, a crucial item in the diet of the Black working class. This explains their strange adulation of Collet.

It is amazing how often in the 1920s, Indian and Black perceptions, on a variety of issues, diverged. This did not lead to racial conflict; but it fed an undercurrent of racial antipathy. The rice issue dramatised this; and *The Daily Chronicle*, in a cartoon on 9 January 1921, portrayed, with graphic poignancy, this disparity in vision of the Indian and Black working classes. It depicted a regal Collet, with bloated abdomen, hoisting aloft in one hand, a small child, representing the rice industry. In the other, he holds a sword, and is on the verge of decapitating the child. A somewhat emaciated, turbaned Indian rice grower cowers on his knees, beseeching the Governor to stay his hand. Meanwhile, a fat, Black woman, with hands on her ample hips, smiles approval at Collet. The caption reads:

Rice Grower: Sahib, me beg it him: Suppose chop um, all people dead.

Consumer [Black woman]: Me isn't anything to do with that! I wants cheap rice fo' eat; and if you has to chop, you has to chop.

N.B — The rice growers are threatened with ruin as a result of the stoppage of exports, rice being freely offered at \$7 without finding purchasers; while local consumers reap the benefit — for the present.

In early May 1921, *The Daily Argosy* noted that 'His Excellency's preposterous fiat still remains in force', although the rice farmers had exhausted every possible means of 'constitutional representation', to persuade him to see the tragic consequences of his policies. The export market was already slipping away; the paper observed, with an air of resignation:

	<i>1919</i>	<i>1920</i>	<i>1921</i>	<i>1922</i>	<i>1923</i>	<i>1924</i>	<i>1925</i>	<i>1926</i>
Rice (per gal.)	56-60	44-48	24	22	28	28	36	27
Flour (per lb.)	11	12	8	9	6	6	6	5 ^{1/2}
Dāl (per lb.)	16	16	12	16	10	8	6	6
Potatoes (per lb.)	7	8	6	4	4	4	5	4
Sugar (per lb.)	8	8	5	4	5	5	3 ^{1/2}	4
Curry Ingredients (per lb.)	28-32	32	32	32	24	24	18	18
Coconut Oil (per pt.)	24	16	12	12	14	14	16	15

SOURCE: C.O. 114/200, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1926.

The future of the rice farmer holds but little prospect. Were the ban on exportation to be removed tomorrow, it is not too certain that the half-strangled rice industry could be resuscitated. Indian rice is now being exported freely and cheaply into this region and its presence will militate seriously against the further development of the colony's industry.¹⁴²

On 14 June, the Secretary of State for the Colonies was asked in the House of Commons if he was aware that the embargo was causing 'great dissatisfaction discontent and distress among the growers' in British Guiana; and why it was not removed, given that there was 'ample rice' in the colony. The Under-Secretary of State, E.F.L. Wood, replied that the Governor 'is still satisfied that the supply of local requirements is not excessive'; and that *his* intervention 'would be justified neither by the interests of the consumer nor by those of the industry ...'¹⁴³ In short, the 'man on the spot' could not be seen to be over-ruled, even if he were a fool.

Two weeks later, on 1 July 1921, significantly while Collet was on vacation in London, the acting Governor, Cecil Clementi, wrote to the Colonial Office, asking that the embargo be lifted. He argued that the change in policy was necessary to avoid inflicting 'permanent injury' on the rice industry. (This was done already; irreparably). Indian and Burmese rice had been flowing freely into the West Indies for several months; a substantial reserve had been built up; Clementi believed that there was 'no danger to local food supply if prohibition was cancelled'. The fact that a glutted West Indian market was inimical to the local industry did not seem to bother him.¹⁴⁴

Clementi informed the Colonial Office that due to 'plentiful' foodstuffs in the colony, rice consumption had been reduced; the local market could not absorb existing stocks. He noted that the West Indies were 'well supplied' with rice; yet he expected the 'surplus stock' to be absorbed by it

before the autumn harvest of October 1921. Unless export was allowed, he envisaged that a part of this crop could not be reaped for lack of cash and storage space in the mills, bulging with old stocks. And because of the depression in the sugar industry and rising unemployment, he argued, 'it is desirable to encourage the rice industry'.¹⁴⁵ The rice industry, apparently, had no basis for existence on its own.

On 23 July 1921, the Colonial Office, 'after consultation with the Governor' (in London), approved the end of the embargo. (It had lasted about fifteen months). They noted that export of rice from the East had ceased; that was likely to continue until early-1922.¹⁴⁶ Collet had stated in April that he would probably have lifted the embargo in October 1921, as 'the world's supply is likely to be so good as to render it unnecessary for me to continue the control over rice after October next'.¹⁴⁷ Of what use was a glutted West Indian market to the rice grower in British Guiana? As *The Daily Argosy* remarked, the embargo was lifted 'when the damage is almost complete'¹⁴⁸

Collet did not want the rice industry to expand: it was seen as a threat to sugar. In 1921, 63,420 acres of cane were cultivated, a fall of 6,000 acres from 1920, and 10,000 acres since 1918. Rice acreage in 1918-1919 had reached 60,000;¹⁴⁹ the sugar planters and the Government felt that rice was attracting Indian labour away from the plantations. The rice industry had to be restricted. This was primarily what underpinned Collet's infamous rice policy between 1917 and 1922. It is interesting to note that the Sugar Planters' Association, unlike Thorne and his supporters, never expressed approval of Collet's rice policy publicly; neither did they oppose it. However, towards May-June 1921, as the depression bit deeper, and the condition of the workers deteriorated further because of the rice fiasco (many sugar workers were also rice growers), and allegations of 'an unholy alliance between the Government and the sugar planters' became wide-spread, it would seem as if the sugar planters were urging the West India Committee to press for decontrol.¹⁵⁰

The belated lifting of the embargo, and the temporary suspension of exports from the East did not rescue the rice farmers, as the stocks accumulated in the West Indies were sufficient to last for several months. Only 2,027 tons of rice were exported between August and December 1921; the local market also, was glutted.¹⁵¹ E.M. Walcott, the Attorney of Sandbach Parker and Co., the largest rice exporter, estimated, in September, that 60,000 bags were available for export; but he was convinced that because of Collet's policies, the West Indian market was forfeited. He said that the embargo

had robbed the rice industry of between $\frac{3}{4}$ million and $1\frac{1}{4}$ million dollars; and elaborated on the folly of it. Walcott, an astute businessman, argued:

..... if the Government had adopted the correct policy of removing the restrictions in October [1920], farmers and others could have obtained from \$12 to \$14 per bag for their rice in the West Indian markets, and if there was found to be a shortage in June or July this year, this colony could have imported rice from other countries to sell here at \$9 to \$10 per bag. The consumer would have paid no more for his rice, but the producer would have benefited by the better markets existing at the end of last year and during the early months of this year, and the Government would have benefited to the extent of the export duties on rice exported, and if imports had been found to be necessary, by the import duties.¹⁵²

This approach could have secured the vital West Indian market for the colony.

In spite of the hostile environment — floods, droughts, malaria, poor prices, an insensitive regime — the rice harvest of 1921 was one of the best ever recorded. The total acreage reaped was estimated at 64,082 (about 55,000 acres were cultivated; but 9 to 10,000 acres, mainly in Essequibo, were double-cropped). In 1920, 65,470 acres were reaped. However, the crop of 1921 yielded 32,082 tons of cleaned rice, compared with 28,800 tons the previous year.¹⁵³

But the economic situation was dismal: advances to farmers from merchants and millers had dried up, with the death of the export trade; many farmers were unable to buy bags or procure funds for harvesting. Clementi, who was still the acting Governor, got the approval of the Executive Council to make an advance of \$150,000 at the rate of \$5 per acre to expedite the harvesting. But even this came too late;¹⁵⁴ unseasonal rains flooded out certain areas. In the Mahaica-Mahaicony District, many fields were submerged; harvesting was impossible; the padi was left to rot. Many farmers were reported to be reaping enough to have something to eat; others harvested more only because family labour was available, not because it was profitable to do so. Meanwhile, milling charges rose from \$1 and \$1.20 per bag of padi to \$1.44; the cost of transporting padi to the mill climbed from 10¢ and 12¢ per bag to 24¢. The cost of harvesting also increased: from \$5 and \$6 per acre to \$10 and \$11. But padi was being sold at 80¢ and \$1 per bag, compared with \$3 to \$5 previously.¹⁵⁵ *The Daily Argosy* had warned on 10 October 1921 that 'The new crop will meet a large surplus of the old crop for which there is at present no remunerative market' This was precisely what happened.

The impressive harvest, in the face of interminable adversity, was a testimony to the industry, tenacity, indefatigable will, and deep sense of family responsibility among Indian rice farmers. *The Daily Argosy* recognised this, and was moved to comment: '.... it speaks volumes for the moral fibre

of these people that they persist in a form of endeavour so fitful as this'.¹⁵⁶

Collet, as expected, saw the extraordinary effort and resilience of the rice cultivators as a defect. Responding to their seemingly inexhaustible energy during the 1921 harvest, when floods caused much devastation, he remarked:

In the matter of rice the East Indian is sometimes almost perversely industrious, and while part of the crop was being spoilt by rain, a number of farmers were putting in new rice during the continuance of the rain.¹⁵⁷

Collet expanded on the 'perverse' industry of the Indians in building up the rice industry: he deprecated it, suggesting comparison with the massive expansion of cane-sugar production by the Cubans, in order to corner the world market. He argued: 'Everything that was done in the way of extending the rice industry was based on the assumption that there would be no Eastern competition in the West Indies, and that Demerara would continue to sell in the West Indies at the rate of \$15 a bag'.¹⁵⁸

In fact, British Guiana had already established itself as a reliable supplier in the West Indies between 1914 and 1917, before Collet's arrival in the colony. In 1916-1917, over 27,000 tons of rice were exported; the rice acreage had almost doubled between 1913 and 1918.¹⁵⁹ The colony's reputation as an exporter was almost unassailable, when Collet, from 1917, embarked on an adventitious rice policy, hedged in by controls, opposition to drainage and irrigation, an obsession with sugar, a cheap food policy, and a determination to restrict, if not destroy, the rice industry. This was what destroyed the export trade and crippled the industry; not the 'perverse' industry of the rice growers: all of this in order to placate 'King Sugar' and what he saw as a potentially volatile urban, Black population.

Even after Clementi had lifted the embargo, and the West Indian market remained clogged with rice from the East, Collet, in January 1922, advised the Colonial Office to ensure that that market received a substantial supply of rice from Burma and India. He wrote: 'At our present rate of export, we shall probably have enough for ourselves before the 1922 harvest comes in, but it would be otherwise if suddenly the whole West Indian market were to get their supplies from us. I therefore trust that free, or at any rate, liberal export will be permitted from India and Burma to the West Indies'.¹⁶⁰ The West Indian market, as noted earlier, was indispensable to the survival and growth of the rice industry in British Guiana. Collet's behaviour was 'perverse': he was advocating the clogging of the West

Indian market with rice from the East, while the rice situation in Berbice, in January 1922, was considered 'parlous': 'There is no market, and the producers are being offered very low prices'.¹⁶¹

In July 1922, the Chamber of Commerce observed that the acreage under rice had declined appreciably; and that rice growers had become 'utterly disinterested' because of heavy losses in the previous two years. They attributed the dismal state of the industry to 'the misguided Government policy of restriction of exports and the prolonged absence of demand in the West Indies, which continue to import largely from India'.¹⁶²

This assessment did not make any impression on Collet. In July 1922, he conceded that 'the present low price of rice is due to the fact that export is freely allowed from the East, and therefore growers here have to be content with the world's price, and the world's price will never make it remunerative to grow padi but Indians will always put in rice if they can rely on even a very moderate return'.¹⁶³

As the sugar depression bit deeper — prices fell from £50 1s and £18 9s per ton in 1920 and 1921 respectively to £16 10s per ton in 1922 — wages declined.¹⁶⁴ The need for cheap rice to cushion the austerity became greater. The Governor repeated his perverse advice to the Colonial Office: 'Should the present rains continue, we are likely to have a very good crop, but I trust the free export of rice from the East will continue'.¹⁶⁵

In 1922, farmers planted only 49,070 acres, a fall of 15,000 from the previous year; only 20,070 tons of cleaned rice were produced, over 8,000 tons less than 1921.¹⁶⁶ The local market remained flooded: the retail price of rice slumped to 22^c per gallon in 1922, from 56-60^c in 1919, 44-48^c in 1920, and 24^c in 1921 (see Table 3.4). The West Indian market also, as the Governor wished, remained glutted: the export price fell from \$11.25 per bag in 1921 to \$5.50 per bag in 1922.¹⁶⁷ Collet had won his pyrrhic victory: wages could be reduced while cheap rice, produced at a loss, was available to the local consumer. As in 1920 and 1921, the Indian rice growers were providing an indirect subsidy to employers of labour.

In September 1923, the Director of Science and Agriculture, reflecting on the abysmal agricultural returns of 1922, noted that 'Twelve years progress had been wiped out in three years'. He attributed the decline to the cessation of immigration, the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919, when about 8,000 farmers died, bad weather, and the low prices.¹⁶⁸ These had not seriously affected rice production

in 1920 and 1921. His explanation was a spurious rationalisation: the Governor's rice policy was overwhelmingly responsible for the rice debacle. And *The Daily Argosy*, in July 1922, told him so, emphatically:

.... His Excellency has militated against the progress of this colony. The position of the rice industry is an eternal disgrace to his administration. As a result of his policy, Demerara rice — proved to be better than Indian rice — which had driven the Indian variety out of the West Indian market, is now hardly remembered, Indian rice having swamped the market He has admirably succeeded in ruining an industry which greatly enhanced the economic condition of the people.¹⁶⁹

Although Collet's rice policy was ruinous, it remained popular with the Black working class because it provided cheap rice. And the Governor was determined to persist with it. In January 1922, he explained to the Colonial Office: 'The staple food of this colony is rice. If it is plentiful and cheap, the poorer classes will be comparatively well off, and the working class as a whole will be able without hardship to accept such wages as employers can give them without carrying on at a loss'.¹⁷⁰ In June 1922, the British Guiana Labour Union started a campaign to have the Governor's regime extended, on the absurd premise that his experience of the colony entitled him to supervise the drainage scheme to which he had been belatedly converted.¹⁷¹ It has been observed that A.A. Thorne was one of Collet's faithful disciples. In 1924, he placed him on a pedestal: Thorne lauded his 'strict impartiality', 'shrewd business capacity' (sic), and claimed that 'the masses hailed Governor Collet as their saviour from dire oppression'.¹⁷² He could not have been speaking of the Indian rice farmers.

The Electives in the legislature, whatever their race, saw Collet differently; they recognised the true contribution of these rice cultivators. In an address to the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, E.F.L. Wood, in February 1922, during his visit to British Guiana, they observed:

The Rice Industry was the creature of the people; it arose from small beginnings unaided by capital or Government direction and has hitherto been maintained under the most distressing conditions. When it has not suffered from floods or drought, it has languished under legislation, or Government restrictions, not always in its best interest, and it speaks volumes for the perseverance and industry of the persons engaged in it that it should have survived to this day in its present dimensions. Given proper conditions British Guiana is the natural granary of the West Indies, and any measures which tend to obstruct the natural flow of trade from this colony to the neighbouring islands inevitably postpone the fulfilment of such a destiny.¹⁷³

(Collet presided over the meeting; his hagiographer, Thorne, was no longer a member of the legislature).

III

Collet, J.P. Santos, and E.R.O. Robertson and the Question of the Drainage and Irrigation of the Corentyne Coast, 1920-1922

..... on lands removed not three feet from estates' lands the rice crop has been scorched out, while on estates' lands, as far as the eye can see, there has been a splendid growth of lovely green rice the sooner the lands are drained the earlier will the Corentyne be able to return to its old record of producing enough rice not only for home consumption, but for exportation. The Corentyne has had the reputation of being the rice producing centre of the colony; and provided the West Indian market can be restored, rice, which in the days of the colony's prosperity rose unaided by the Government to the second position as an article of export, can easily regain its prestige.

The Daily Argosy, 7 December 1923.

Its importance as an export crop can only become possible if the necessary steps are taken to control water. This means comprehensive irrigation and drainage schemes which will allow of the storage of water for irrigation and for the disposal of surplus water from the irrigated fields in times of heavy rainfall and flood Since the majority of rice farmers are cultivating tenants or petty cultivators, private concerted effort is not likely to succeed, and I suggest that this is work for the Colony to undertake.

H.C. Sampson, *Report on Development of Agriculture in British Guiana* (Empire Marketing Board Report, No.4), (London: H.M.S.O., 1927), p.16.

It was seen in Chapter 2 that the cultivation of sugar-cane demanded the construction and maintenance of a complex and costly drainage and irrigation system, because of the peculiarly hazardous hydrological condition on the coastland of British Guiana. Cane had to be grown on a large scale; high overhead costs virtually precluded its cultivation by peasant farmers. Black farmers tended to concentrate on ground provisions: plantain was an important crop. While it thrived on the clay soil, it required well-drained land; and did not favour acid soils. It was, therefore, crucial to good husbandry to build and maintain adequate back-dams, to keep out the acidic water of the 'pegasse' backlands from the cultivated area.¹⁷⁴ Many found this beyond their means. Such hydraulic works required co-operative effort; this was difficult to mobilise. The Government did not help. By the 1920s, many Black farmers had abandoned agriculture.¹⁷⁵

Indian farmers, in spite of the many hazards of the coastland, developed the rice industry rapidly, partially because of their ingenious, labour-intensive husbandry, and their rudimentary water-control practices. However, the latter were inadequate to cope with excessive rainfall, or unseasonably low rainfall and high rates of evaporation. On the Corentyne Coast, in Berbice, the premier rice growing district, the average rainfall (80.06 inches between 1880-1924), was 22 inches lower than the average

for the same period in Essequibo, the wettest count y.¹⁷⁶ The rainfall on the Corentyne was more than adequate; but any excessive unseasonable variation, made the district vulnerable to floods and droughts. The latter tended to be more common;¹⁷⁷ but the Government was indifferent to the recurring hazards endured by the small cultivator.¹⁷⁸ They were consequently accused of sacrificing the interests of the farmer to 'the exigencies of the estate owners'.¹⁷⁹

The Indian farmers on the Corentyne had two resolute champions on the perennial question of drainage and irrigation: Hon. J.P. Santos, the Member of the Court of Policy for Berbice (including the Corentyne), from 1906 to 1921, and Rev. E.R.O. Robertson, a Black Wesleyan minister from Mahaica, and president of the British Guiana Farmers' Conference, who was a member of the Colonisation Deputation to London in 1919. They were both ardent developmentalists; they were opposed to the Government's obsession with sugar monoculture: they believed that the rice industry offered substantial possibilities for the broadening of the economic base of the colony. They fought, with sustained vigour, to persuade Governor Collet that the drainage and irrigation of the less malarious Corentyne was a crucial step in the achievement of this.¹⁸⁰ But Collet, as usual, was immovable.

As early as 1906, Santos, a wealthy Portuguese businessman, had offered the Government a loan of \$200,000 at 6 per cent, to drain and irrigate the Corentyne, in order to beat the recurring floods and droughts, thus providing security to the promising rice and cattle industries. But the Government, even before Collet's arrival in 1917, would not accept Santos's offer; it concurred with the sugar planters that the empoldering of private lands could not be the responsibility of the colonial state. The Chamber of Commerce also, eventually, lent support to this argument. In March 1919, they noted that the farmers in Berbice 'have been clamouring justly for a generation' for drainage and irrigation on the Corentyne Coast; but 'they have been told that this must be at the expense of the farmers'. The Chamber deplored the Government's giving priority to the bridging of the Berbice River (this was never done), rather than to the reclaiming of the land, which they considered 'desirable' and a 'crying' necessity. They concluded: 'if the Government is truly desirous of making a present to Berbice in the name of mercy, let that tract be first made really exploitable access alone is insufficient and costly'.¹⁸¹ By August 1919, the Chamber had done a somersault: they argued that the farmers should pay for land reclamation, as 'it would not be fair to the [sugar] estates were the Government to drain and irrigate other lands'¹⁸²

J.P. Santos disagreed. He believed that the Indians on the Corentyne had done remarkably well, despite Government's indifference to the floods and droughts which regularly destroyed their crops and stocks, and undermined their health. They could not afford to execute and administer a drainage and irrigation scheme; the state should help. In April 1920, he repeated his offer of a loan of \$200,000 to the Government, for the reclaiming of the district; and underlined the urgency of the problem:

I have seen a sea of water rising as high as the floor of many of the houses and higher than the floor in some cases. The houses themselves were like little islands dotted all over the surface of the water; the cattle were wading in water neck deep The drought, on the other hand, scorches up everything. Cattle and people are forced to drink anything except pure water, and here again, some of our mortality is accounted for.¹⁸³

Santos argued that in view of the serious economic and demographic implications of drainage and irrigation for the development of British Guiana, it should be made a colonial question: Government should assume responsibility for its execution. He repeated his observations that the colonial administration had stifled 'minor industries', especially rice:

..... the position of affluence to which the rice industry has reached through all of its tribulations, is not due to any assistance given by the Administration, but to the unaided efforts of private enterprise. Rather than help forward our industries the Government has, wilfully or not, done everything to retard them.¹⁸⁴

Rev. E.R.O. Robertson also ventilated similar sentiments. A rice farmer himself, he was no mere rhetorician; he empathised with Indian rice growers. This Black clergyman was extraordinary: he transcended the instinctive racial allegiances and parochial outlook of the time. A man of considerable vision, he undertook a relentless campaign, in 1920-21, to persuade Collet to implement a drainage and irrigation scheme for the predominantly Indian farmers on the Corentyne. In April 1920, with their approval, he presented a plan to the Governor; and requested him to guarantee the loan of \$200,000, which J.P. Santos was offering for the empoldering of the district.¹⁸⁵

Collet told Robertson and the farmers that the Government was not going to borrow any money from Santos; nor was it prepared to sponsor the loan. He said that if the administration assumed responsibility for the loan, it alone would have to carry out the work; but no staff or engineers were available for such a project. He suggested that the farmers could borrow the money on their own security; the Government would pay the cost for the first survey of the land only. Collet virtually discarded Robertson's proposals.¹⁸⁶

Robertson pleaded that Santos's offer was a reasonable one: he was prepared to lend the money to the Government for a period longer than twenty years. Collet was not impressed. He retorted: 'The

Government of this colony is trying to bite off more than it can chew'. And he proceeded to speak of the falling off in the stock of rice by 214,000 bags in March 1920; and he would like to know the reason for that — a reference to what he construed as false returns, conducing to a presumably excessive export of rice. He warned that 'they were going to get his back up if the local price went up'.¹⁸⁷ (Collet, as noted earlier, admitted later that his officials had apparently made an incorrect estimate of stocks; yet the rice producers had to be penalised for it). He imposed an embargo on exports; he was impervious to suggestions that the rice industry deserved help. Such was the pettiness, the bigotry, of this incompetent, unimaginative petty Caesar!

Santos informed *The Daily Argosy* that businessmen were offering him a higher rate of interest on his capital; but the Government seemed to think that he was trying to secure an investment by offering them the loan. He rejected that assumption: 'I am anxious to see the work for which I have lived and for which I have pleaded for years carried through. I am keen upon helping the people'.¹⁸⁸ However, he could not advance his money unless the Government was prepared to undertake its security. An astute businessman, Santos volunteered some sensible, alternative advice to Collet's stultifying embargo, demonstrating how the rice industry itself could bear the costs of drainage and irrigation. He dismissed the Governor's allegations of a rice shortage; he could not countenance any measure which undermined the export trade. In April 1920, he explained:

..... I suggested to Sir Wilfred Collet to take over the rice crop, securing the portion for local consumption and handling the exportation, giving local growers a fair return upon their investment. I suggested that His Excellency utilise the profits which I estimated at \$600,000 in improving the lands by drainage and irrigation. His Excellency said he did not possess the material and would not be persuaded of the practicability of the scheme If this colony loses the patronage of the Trinidad rice merchants, His Excellency will have his ill-informed policy to blame I have made my offer to Government for the good of the people and my constituency, and the Government has declined. I can do no more.¹⁸⁹

The Daily Chronicle expressed indignation at Collet's dismissal of the bold initiative of Santos and Robertson. It remarked that his 'wait-and-see' policy with regard to drainage and irrigation had reduced many to 'beggary'; it considered this 'the most ghastly' feature of his administration. The paper concluded: 'Thriving village settlements everywhere have been converted into uninhabitable lakes, sanitation has become a misnomer, and all is misery at the slightest rainfall, or the barest drought On this count alone, His Excellency's administration could be recorded as a colossal failure'¹⁹⁰

While Collet prevaricated, the drought of early-1920 extended itself into May; the heavy rainfall

essential for the preparation of the rice fields, did not materialise. *The Daily Argosy* also deplored the Governor's stubbornness, noting that within a few miles of the parched plots of the rice growers, the copious supplies of the Canje and Abary creeks (in Berbice), flowed merrily, uninterruptedly, towards the sea.¹⁹¹ In May 1920, it contrasted and dramatised the stark juxtaposition of verdant, empoldered sugar estates and arid, melancholy villages:

It is pathetic to see on sugar estates the cane fields irrigated and the managers' and overseers' gardens smiling with flowers, with all the drains full of fresh, sweet water, when one has just passed meek-eyed cattle perishing from thirst, donkeys eating greedily grass burnt by the fierce rays of the sun, the unfortunate animals swallowing more parched clay than grass, sheep panting painfully for water, all around rice planting held up indefinitely and young coconut palms and other vegetables calling aloud for water. One goes aback to find the pastures drier still. Dead cattle provide food for vultures, while but a mile or two away an abundant river finds its way to the sea.¹⁹²

But Collet, as usual, was implacable. Robertson persisted, endeavouring to prepare the groundwork for the scheme: he got an ordinance drafted, in an effort to create a 'Polder Authority' to supervise it. He expressed pain at Collet's rejection of Santos's loan; he considered it futile to try to persuade the Governor to change his mind. But he hoped that the money could still be raised locally, on the security of the lands, which he estimated were worth \$1,000,000.¹⁹³

The seemingly inexhaustible energy and resilience of the rice farmers made no impression on Collet. Although many lost their young plants, scorched by the drought, by mid-June 1920, they were reported to be repeating the whole demanding exercise, 'getting their lands ready and collecting and setting plants with redoubled energy'.¹⁹⁴ Meanwhile, Robertson travelled often to the Corentyne, meeting farmers, explaining the draft ordinance, and generally trying to sustain enthusiasm for the scheme. He believed that as soon as the ordinance was passed, a corporate body would be created to raise the loan. The scheme had the 'unanimous approval' of the people; and he appealed to wealthy proprietors on the Corentyne to buy bonds, to ensure that it was accomplished.¹⁹⁵

The drought on the Corentyne continued into June 1920. Robertson wrote to Collet on 30 June, reminding him that because of the absence of drainage and irrigation, rice planters were especially vulnerable to unseasonal weather. He noted that the drought had precluded rice fields between New Amsterdam and No.63, a distance of 35 miles, from being ploughed. Cultivation was progressing on the empoldered sugar estates, where Indian workers rented lands; but their activities were restricted by the authorities. Robertson said that the farmers had already suffered a loss, estimated at \$100,000, adding:

The scene that meets one is that of scorched crops, parched lands, and a people driven to almost desperation and madness I know of no other country in the Empire, with such tremendous resources, where the people are doomed to such suffering.¹⁹⁶

Robertson laboured to keep the scheme afloat; but he realised, in spite of his bold pronouncements, that some assistance from the Government was indispensable. In early-July, he beseeched Collet to do something for the farmers; while appealing to the elected members of the legislature to 'move' him to grant a loan of \$40,000, or 'any sum', so that the project could be started.¹⁹⁷ An exodus from the Corentyne had begun. Many frustrated farmers were leaving; some were seeking work in Dutch Guiana.¹⁹⁸ Several Indians were reported to be disposing of their assets, preparing to leave for India, because they were 'discouraged in respect of the rice question'.¹⁹⁹ In 1920, 2,468 were repatriated, the only occasion since 1907 when over one thousand left in one year.²⁰⁰

Collet, as usual, was unmalleable: as noted earlier, sugar prices were phenomenally high in 1920; the Governor and the plantocracy were convinced that sugar had re-entered a golden age; the old cry for more labour was stepped up. Collet could not conceive of the rice industry as an expanding, durable commercial proposition. Rice was considered subversive of the impending sugar millenium.²⁰¹

In September 1919, the Director of Science and Agriculture, J.B. Harrison, had recommended agricultural diversification, and the commencement of scientific research on a large scale, in order to modernise the rice and cattle industries. He believed that a potentially lucrative export market awaited its prudent exploitation by local producers. Rice yields, for instance, could be augmented by evolving new strains, the 'amelioration of soils', improved husbandry, and better drainage; cattle also could be exported if the pasturage were enhanced with nutritious grasses.²⁰²

Collet opposed these innovative proposals. Responding to Harrison's memorandum on diversification, he informed the Colonial Office in June 1920, that it would be 'unwise' to experiment with any agricultural produce, because 'Our market for sugar, rice and coconut is very much larger than we can supply. No agricultural undertaking should be started unless to produce some special drug or material which is required for imperial purposes.'²⁰³ Collet was deflecting attention from the primary focus of Harrison's memorandum: not new agricultural produce, but established industries, such as rice and cattle, should be revamped, in order to capitalise on the export market. It is noteworthy that Harrison felt that the sugar industry in British Guiana would soon be

'unexcelled' by any of the small colonies; the rice and cattle industries, however, required attention.²⁰⁴ The latter was unpalatable to the Governor. Collet's vision could not escape the imperatives of cane-sugar: cheap labour, and the restricting of any enterprise which undermined the labour supply of the sugar estates. Drainage and irrigation schemes for the village were perceived as a threat to the sugar industry.

In October 1920, Robertson reminded the farmers that for over forty years they had been begging the Government for drainage and irrigation; but it had 'laughed' at their appeals, and 'mocked' their losses.²⁰⁵ He observed that some still insisted that the scheme be made a responsibility of the colony. He did not disagree; but thought that it was futile to depend on the state, or the representatives in the legislature; they had to depend on themselves.²⁰⁶ However, Robertson made a minimum demand: 'If the people are going to make their own financial arrangements, then the Government should guarantee the loans, and I intend to fight until we secure this from the Combined Court'.²⁰⁷

By January 1921, however, the Government and the Electives, 'by a solid vote' had refused to give any help whatsoever to the scheme. Even the indefatigable Robertson had started to despair; this was reflected in his advice to Black youths: 'It has become a painful necessity to me to encourage our ambitious young men to emigrate to the United States and to Cuba or anywhere else where they have a chance to live As soon as it is a question for the improvement of the masses we are told that there is no money. I am bound to confess that the future is hopeless until the people take matters in their own hands.'²⁰⁸

At a large meeting of Indian rice farmers at Whim, Corentyne, in January 1921, Collet underlined that the idea of drainage and irrigation did not originate in his administration. He was emphatic that he would not guarantee any loans: 'I have promised nothing. I never promised anything'. He then proceeded to abuse the Indians. *The Daily Chronicle* reported: 'His Excellency further remarked that with Orientals [Indians] it was not only necessary to refuse them when they asked anything, but also to insult them'. And he returned to his petty, lingering recrimination, claiming that it was from the Corentyne that he received the first 'false rice returns', in 1920. Collet said that it made no sense to undertake any big scheme, given the high cost of labour; in a few years he anticipated that it could be done cheaper. Responding to a farmer's request for water to cultivate rice, he snapped: 'You seem to think that the whole world depends on your growing rice'.²⁰⁹ Meanwhile, the embargo on exports continued.

The Daily Chronicle had stated in December 1920 that Collet's 'petulant exhibition of temper must be brought to a period sometime or someplace'.²¹⁰ After his vulgar performance on the Corentyne, the paper observed that while his rudeness and other 'blazing indiscretions' probably characterised the 'mental approach of many minor officials in India', such temperament 'ill befits one holding the King's commission': Collet's retirement from the colony, it concluded, was 'about past due'.²¹¹

The Governor's refusal to guarantee Santos's loan undermined Robertson's efforts from the inception; his refusal to lift the obnoxious and unnecessary embargo destroyed public confidence in the rice industry: no loans were forthcoming; the merchants would not invest in a venture to which the chief executive was implacably opposed. By early-1921, the scheme to drain and irrigate the Corentyne was dead; and *The Daily Chronicle* was pained by the 'slanders' which were being thrown at Rev. E.R.O. Robertson by a few ungrateful rice farmers and millers. It remarked that this gentleman stood with the farmers at all times, 'carrying the people's banner', whether the issue was rice, sugar, or the empoldering of the land; and it was unfair that he was made the 'scapegoat' for the aborted scheme.²¹²

Robertson was indeed a fighter for the small farmers, whatever their race. In a colony where leaders instinctively responded to the perceived self-interests of their particular racial group, and felt no remorse, he was a unique man. In April 1921 he wrote: 'The two races in the colony, the East Indian and the African, must set themselves to work together towards a mutual understanding and a common sympathy²¹³ He believed this; his work among the farmers exemplified this high ideal. And he was incorruptible.

In May 1921, A.A. Thorne, the Financial Representative for New Amsterdam, a staunch supporter of the Governor, told his Black constituents that when Collet returned from London (he was going on leave), he would tackle the irrigation problem on the Corentyne. The farmers could contribute $\frac{1}{3}$ of the costs; the rest would be covered by the Government. He said: 'Sir Wilfred Collet is keen on attending to your needs, and he only wants a pledge of your earnestness'.²¹⁴ The rice farmers had, for over two decades, demonstrated independence, industry, resilience, and through Robertson, a willingness to pay for drainage and irrigation. Indeed, as Santos argued, the export trade in rice could have paid for this several times over.

The Indian rice growers did not share Thorne's and his Black constituents' perception of Collet; neither did *The Daily Chronicle* and *The Daily Argosy*. The former paper was extremely sceptical of Thorne's assessment of the Governor, 'now the all wise dispenser of colonial prosperity'; noting a radical change since he started to 'tread the carpeted stairs' to Government house, a recipient of Collet's 'dinners and favours'.²¹⁵ (Thorne had been the architect of the opposition to the Governor and the Colonialisation Scheme in 1919).

In May 1921, on the eve of Collet's departure for London (on leave) *The Daily Argosy* cautioned: '..... we trust he will return in a frame of mind more disposed to the wishes of the people and not, as in the case of the rice question, be disposed to maintain an implacable attitude where all the volume of evidence and desire conflicts with his own judgement'.²¹⁶ It is necessary to repeat that his cheap rice policy appealed to the Blacks: any diminution of Indian economic influence was desirable.

In July 1921, while Collet was in England, Robertson received a letter from the Colonial Secretary stating that in view of the financial difficulties of the colony, the Government 'accepts no responsibility whatsoever for the proposed scheme or any work undertaken in connection with it beyond the sum of \$1,500 to defray the cost of preliminary survey'.²¹⁷

In November, the elected members of the new Combined Court expressed regret that Collet had made no reference to the drainage and irrigation of the Corentyne, in his speech at the inaugural meeting of the legislature. They repeated what Santos and Robertson had argued on numerous occasions — the losses suffered by farmers over the years, because of the lack of empoldered lands, could have paid for drainage and irrigation several-fold: '..... hundreds of thousands of dollars have been lost to the wealth of the community, enough money in the aggregate to have been paid many times over for the simple forms of irrigation and drainage that are necessary to make these districts healthy and habitable and prosperous'.²¹⁸

It was an achievement of heroic dimensions, that in 1921, despite the crude, blatant opposition of the regime, and the floods in November during the harvest, the rice growers reaped 64,082 acres. Collet considered the crop 'an unusually large one':²¹⁹ 64,082 acres yielded 49,905 tons of paddy or 32,082 tons of rice. In 1920, although 65,740 acres were reaped, only 28,800 tons of rice were

obtained, because of the drought.²²⁰ In July 1922, Collet admitted that 'the price has been so low ever since the crop began to be put on the market [i.e. the autumn crop of 1921], that it is evident that there must have been a large supply' — over 100,000 bags of rice were exported. He dismissed allegations that 60 per cent of the crop was lost in the floods — supplies would have been exhausted.²²¹ What he did not admit was that the vast surplus from the 1920 crop, hoarded while he persisted with the embargo, was thrown onto the market after it was lifted in July 1921, meeting supplies from the autumn crop, thus flooding the market. Of course, the unnecessary embargo had undermined British Guiana's position in the West Indian market: by early-1922, substantial supplies of Eastern rice were entering it.²²² Incredibly, Collet was still advocating the unrestricted entry of Indian and Burmese rice: it fortified his cheap rice policy in the colony.

Belatedly, in August 1922, the Governor announced his conversion to the implementing of a limited scheme for draining selected areas; he could not see the necessity for irrigation, although the two were patently inseparable. He sought the approval of the Colonial Office to spend \$300,000 from loan funds for the drainage of the area between Plaisance and Triumph, on the lower East Coast Demerara.²²³ (The colony had raised a loan of \$2,000,000 locally, and \$4,800,000 (£1 million) in London). It is interesting that in a draft proposal for the disbursement of loan funds, none was allocated to the premier rice growing district, the Corentyne.²²⁴ Collet's granting of priority to the lower East Coast was probably a recognition of the support he had in that area, where the British Guiana Labour Union had campaigned, in June 1922, to have him retained as Governor — their argument was that his long experience of the colony made him eminently suitable to administer any scheme for draining the villages.²²⁵

However, the Colonial Office did not sanction his scheme. They repeated the old contention that the drainage of cultivable lands was 'primarily a matter for private enterprise rather than Government, and it is a matter for serious consideration whether it is desirable to depart from this policy'.²²⁶ Priority, they argued, should be given to the implementation of a pure water supply system. In November 1922, Collet again requested approval for the drainage of the lower East Coast, pleading a 'dire need', while urging similar works in the Canals Polder. There was again no reference to the Corentyne.²²⁷ Wiseman, at the Colonial Office, minuted that the drainage question was 'too big to be dwelt with piecemeal'. He added: '..... I cannot see why a project which has been equally

urgent for years should not wait for a couple of months we ought to have a policy and not cut haphazard on particular areas'. It should await the arrival of the new Governor.²²⁸

In July 1926, J.P. Santos, in a letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, returned to his old subject, the drainage and irrigation of the coastland; and bemoaned the bigotry of several administrations in this crucial matter. (In 1925-1926, a prolonged drought devastated the crops, while man and beast scrounged for whatever polluted water was available). Santos argued:

Had my warnings been heeded in 1906, or in 1910, or in 1912, the present drought would have been robbed of most of its horrors. Had the coastland been irrigated in 1919, there would have been no need for the disastrous rice policy of a previous Governor [Collet]; for not only would there have been no danger of a local shortage, but enough rice would have been exported in that year alone to the neighbouring islands, which at the then export price of from £2 10s to £3 per bag would have paid the entire cost of the irrigation schemes advocated. The drought of 1925-1926, however, came and found the Colony in practically no better position than when I raised the question 20 years before.²²⁹

J. Van Sertima, the Town Clerk of New Amsterdam, a prolific and incisive observer of local affairs, had noted, in September 1919, that rice cultivation by 'the East Indian coolie' was expanding rapidly since the War; the demand for crown lands was on the rise; and rice mills were springing up everywhere. However, he lamented the loss of much rice each year because of the absence of drainage and irrigation. Van Sertima then explained why the Collet administration did nothing to help the hard-working rice growers:

The cure for defective drainage and irrigation is beyond [the rice farmers], and if the Government were to aid in making smooth the path of the rice cultivator, the sugar industry, which seems to be rocking its way down to Avernus, would find the downward pace quickening. The balance of economic advantage seems to be to allow the rice industry to continue to fend for itself — unsupported, neglected, and unsung. Poor Cinderella! For Saccharina must be reserved all the rights and privileges of primogeniture.²³⁰

The acreage under rice was expanding, while the area under sugar-cane was contracting. Collet's rice policy was designed to stem the advance of the former, to actively discourage it. By 1922, he had contrived this (See Table 3.5). In July, he reported that rice farmers had not taken advantage of the May rains; the acreage cultivated had fallen. He attributed this to a rumour that the Government of India was sending ships to take Indians away; and to exorbitant rents charged by Indian landlords and millers, which made it unremunerative to grow rice: there was a free export of Eastern rice to the West Indies; the colony's rice was not competitive. Yet Collet hoped that 'the free export of rice from the East will continue'.²³¹

Table 3.5 Acreage under sugar-cane and rice, 1903, 1908, 1913, 1918-1922		
<i>Year</i>	<i>Sugar-Cane</i>	<i>Rice</i>
1903	78,860	17,503
1908	74,865	39,743
1913	72,698	35,582
1918	73,565	60,432
1919	70,876	61,400
1920	69,532	55,246
1921	63,420	55,911
1922	60,760	49,070

SOURCE: C.O.114/184, Report of the Department of Science and Agriculture, 1922

He believed firmly that only sugar was profitable on the coastland of British Guiana; it was a waste of Indian labour to encourage the rice industry; it could be better employed on the sugar plantations. In September 1922, he unveiled, to the Colonial Office, the dominant assumption which shaped his disastrous rice policy:

It is impossible to develop the Colony with a population which does not increase in number. It is no good policy, having an already sparse population, to still more scatter it, and at the present moment the greatest trouble with the sugar industry is that it cannot get enough labour to work the mills to the fullest capacity With proper machinery and sufficient labour, we could easily produce on existing estates 50% more than we do. And the extension of any cultivation on the coast diminishes the supply of labour for sugar. The produce per acre is so much less in value than is that of sugar that it is doubtful whether it could repay necessary outlay on irrigation and drainage.²³²

J.P. Santos had tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade Collet that by taking control of the export of rice, while retaining a proportion for local consumption, the colony would have benefited from the lucrative prices between 1919 and 1921. Rice farmers could have earned good returns; and at least \$600,000 could have been secured for drainage and irrigation.²³³ The Electives, too, tried to convince him that the losses each year from flood or drought could have paid many times over for empoldering.²³⁴ The Government Medical Officer of Health, Dr E.P. Minett, argued, in 1920, that 'Our present high mortality from mosquito-borne and intestinal diseases is intimately bound up with the deplorable condition of the drainage system.'²³⁵ Collet, however, could only see the colony as a big sugar plantation.

In 1921, J.P. Santos retired from the legislature, disillusioned with the Government's inertia on the drainage and irrigation issue.²³⁶ In January 1923, it was reported that Rev. E.R.O. Robertson was resigning from the Wesleyan Church to study law in England.²³⁷ He also, was frustrated by the Governor's intransigence. Collet left the colony in December 1922, having antagonised all sections

of the population, except, it seems, the British Guiana Labour Union, A.A. Thorne, and sections of the Black population, who were enamoured of his cheap rice policy.

But the Indian rice farmers, in spite of the hostile environment — 15 inches of rain were recorded in six consecutive days, during the harvest of 1922 — planted 49,070 acres (a fall of 15,000 from 1921); 20,070 tons of rice were produced; while 8,790 tons were exported at \$5.50 per bag, or about 50 per cent of the average price between 1919 and 1921. Export earnings were \$601,676 in 1922; in 1920, when about 8,000 tons were exported, the earnings were \$1,130,736.²³⁸

IV

The Decline and Recovery of the Rice Industry, 1923-1929; Cattle, and the Exploitation of Several Niches in the Village Environment

The reduction of acreage under ... [rice] cultivation was largely attributable to the policy of restricting and eventually prohibiting exports, adopted during the War by Sir Wilfred Collet and continued too long afterwards, which resulted in heavy losses to the producers; the loss of the principal West Indian market; and the discouragement of the growers. A further factor has been the lack of a proper water supply for irrigation.

C.O. 114/199, Sessional Paper, No. 39 of 1926: Report of a Joint Meeting of the Chamber of Commerce, the Sugar Planters' Association, and the British Guiana Farmers' Conference, held on 5 November 1925

..... progress and prosperity cannot come by words alone, or by politics alone, and it was vitally necessary in the interests of the whole population of the colony that the process of stagnation and decay should be arrested the East Indians rightly consider it more important to improve their own material interests by thrift and steady work than to waste time listening to idle talk from idle orators who expect to be maintained in luxury at the expense of the community The real trouble with the Negro Progress Convention is that it is little more than an annual debauch of oratory.

Leader, *The Daily Argosy*, 2 August 1928.

The disastrous repercussions of Collet's rice policy were felt for several years after he left the colony in December 1922. Rice acreage plummeted from around 74,000 in 1919 and 65,000 in 1920-1921 to around 38,000 and 40,000 in 1923-1924, then recovered progressively to about 50,000 in 1926-1927, and 55,000 and 63,000 in 1928 and 1929 respectively. Collet's embargo on exports destroyed British Guiana's reputation as a reliable supplier; and enabled rice from India and Burma to reassert itself in the West Indian market after 1922, thus producing a massive slump in prices for the rest of the decade. From an average of \$11.20 per bag in 1919-1921, prices declined to about

\$5.55 per bag in 1922-1924, recovered slightly to \$6.05 in 1925-1926, then slid to a low of about \$5.00 per bag in 1927-1929 (see Table 3.6).

<i>Year</i>	<i>Acreage reaped</i>	<i>Padi (tons)</i>	<i>Milled rice (tons)</i>	<i>Tons exported</i>	<i>Price per bag exported (dollars)</i>	<i>Value of exports (dollars)</i>
1919	74,220	72,266	46,360	6,940	11.01	951,485
1920	65,740	44,400	28,800	8,005	11.35	1,130,736
1921	64,082	49,905	32,082	2,027	11.25	283,834
1922	49,070	34,080	20,070	8,790	5.50	601,676
1923	38,715	33,270	19,962	3,971	5.54	273,687
1924	40,272	42,100	25,260	4,470	5.62	312,567
1925	39,890	38,403	23,042	6,918	6.09	523,964
1926	49,445	49,899	29,939	2,914	6.01	218,146
1927	50,427	59,748	35,848	11,497	5.06	723,871
1928	55,560	61,144	36,686	18,083	4.91	1,114,147
1929	63,441	72,096	43,257	14,091	5.00	876,407

SOURCES: Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], p.256; C.O. 114/172, 177, 182, 184, Reports of the Department of Science and Agriculture, 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922; C.O. 114/207, Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1929.

It was a great testimony to the 'diligence and perseverance' of the Indian cultivators that they sustained and re-established the rice industry in spite of the poor prices. The recuperation began in 1926: the area cultivated started to rise, after the sharp contraction between 1922 and 1925; but of probably greater significance was the increased productivity towards the end of the decade. While about 64,000 acres yielded 32,082 tons of cleaned rice in 1921, in 1927, 50,427 acres yielded 35,848 tons of rice; in 1928 and 1929, 55,560 and 63,441 acres yielded 36,686 and 43,257 tons of rice respectively. In fact, the output in 1929 exceeded those of 1920 and 1921 by 15,000 and 11,000 tons, although the area cultivated was smaller. In 1927, 1928 and 1929, 11,497, 18,083 and 14,091 tons of rice respectively, were exported. The export for 1928 exceeded that of any year; and it brought in \$1,114,147, although the price of \$4.91 per bag was one of the lowest ever recorded. Higher productivity was an important factor in the rescue of the rice industry (see Table 3.6).

This recovery was recognised partially, belatedly, by the Department of Agriculture. They noted, optimistically, in 1930:

British Guiana is competing with countries in which the industry is long established and where the labour supply is abundant and cheap. Nevertheless, the yields which are obtained (1-1¹/₂ tons of milled rice per acre are frequently obtained locally, while an average of ¹/₂ ton is obtained in India) should offer sufficient advantages to enable the

local exporter to place a product with which successful competition cannot be offered by most distantly situated supplies²³⁹

What the Department did not acknowledge was that the Indian rice growers, single-handedly, retrieved the industry from under the boot of the Government. Others did. Edgar Beckett, an agricultural expert, wrote in 1926 that 'The real development of the industry is due entirely to the indomitable pluck and energy of the East Indian'²⁴⁰ *The New Daily Chronicle*, in June 1928, when the recovery was firmly established, observed: 'There can be no greater tribute to the inherent powers of self-reliance and initiative of the people than the way the rice industry has survived, despite heart-breaking failures; for which too often the Government has been responsible'.²⁴¹

The revival did not come easily. It demanded a sustained effort, and immense sacrifices from Indian farmers. The unconquerable will of these people, on the Corentyne, was the subject of comment by *The Daily Argosy* in August 1923, when the industry had reached its trough. The paper noted that twenty five years earlier, the number of Indians between Eversham and Alness could be counted 'on the fingers of one hand': everything was owned by the Blacks. Much of their lands had since been bought by the Indians, who were commended for their 'thrift and frugality', and their fine houses; while the Blacks, regrettably, were being 'elbowed out'.²⁴²

The unflagging industry of the Indian family was responsible for their achievements in this difficult environment, a point underlined by Harold W.B. Moore, a naturalist. After a prolonged dry spell in 1924-1925, the rains came late, in June, yet the Indians on the Corentyne were engaged in a frantic effort to plant rice. Moore observed in early-June 1925:

Rice growers have welcomed the rains, and from early morning till after sunset, East Indian men, women, and children can now be seen in the rice fields doing the best they can to make up for lost time. On Friday evening, for instance, near 7 o'clock, I noticed a few men very tardily leaving their rice-bed, and had the moon been more advanced, I rather fancy they would have continued work by its light.²⁴³

Many Black farmers, as noted earlier, had abandoned agriculture because of the recurring floods and droughts. The Indians faced the same hazards; suffered heavy losses, and survived; some even prospered. The recovery of the rice industry, indeed, was accomplished in spite of the persistence of water problems. In August 1923, Ayube Edun, an Indian leader on the West Coast Demerara, complained to the new Governor, Sir Graeme Thomson, that his people's 'industrial stability has been rocked to its very foundation' through the depression in the rice trade, which followed Collet's embargo. He also attributed their dismal condition to the lack of drainage.²⁴⁴ Edun, too, made a

wide-spread error: the coastland of British Guiana needed both drainage *and* irrigation; the two were inseparable. By October 1923, the Corentyne, West Coast Berbice, and Mahaicony were again experiencing drought. In the latter two districts, residents had to walk up to six miles to get water from the Abary and Mahaicony creeks; these were reportedly 'muddy, sometimes brackish, sometimes salt'.²⁴⁵

The rice crop of 1923, already undermined by low prices, was handicapped further by the failure of the rains. On the drier Corentyne and West Coast Berbice, the yield was only 10 and 15¹/₂ bags per acre.²⁴⁶ The acreage reaped and the output of rice throughout the colony, were the lowest for the 1920s. In many areas on the Corentyne, the rice crop, after much labour, simply withered. *The Daily Argosy* commented: 'Rice planting in Berbice is a mere matter of chance, and until Government applies themselves to the urgent question of irrigation, this potentially wealthy part of the colony will remain a wilderness with nothing to show, but discontented and dejected peasants'.²⁴⁷

The case was somewhat over-stated: Indians persisted with rice, vegetables, and cattle; but the point was made. However, the paper also, had committed the common, tragic error: *irrigation alone was inadequate*. The drought on the Corentyne continued into 1924. In April, residents were reported carrying buckets for several miles, in search of water for themselves and their stocks. Some were digging deep, often unsuccessfully, along the sandy fore-shore at No. 62 Village, in painful desperation, hoping to strike water. Some excavations yielded 'small quantities of water early in the morning and late in the afternoon, but none during the day'.²⁴⁸ By the end of April, the Corentyne was reportedly 'like the Sahara'; and cattle were running wild, in agony, from dire thirst. The West Coast Berbice also, was depressingly arid, 'without food for man and beast'.²⁴⁹

There was general despair after Collet's debacle; and a perceptible sloppiness crept into the rice industry. The quality of the seed grains deteriorated,²⁵⁰ while 'sighing' or sowing broadcast tended to replace the tedious, back-breaking, but infinitely more productive, hand-transplanting method. Sowing broadcast, as Beckett argued in 1922, had several drawbacks: the principal one being that there was uneven germination, as some seeds lodged too deep, while others were too near the surface; there was, consequently, an uneven ripening of the grains, thus impairing the quality of the milled rice. Birds tended to feed on the sown grains; this diminished the number of potential plants and the final output. Beckett underlined the importance of having a regular supply of water, and the need

to regulate its depth. The lowering of morale in the industry was also seen in the use of dirty water from ponds and trenches for soaking padi, an essential process in the manufacture of parboiled or brown rice. This tended to impair the quality of the milled rice, as did the proliferation of 'volunteer' rice from 'sighing', as well as 'bull-mashing' on damp or inadequately prepared threshing floors.²⁵¹

Yet Beckett conceded '... under the present most unsatisfactory conditions, our yield is one which can be envied by many a country which prides itself on the production of this cereal'.²⁵² The yield had declined steadily from about 20.8 bags of padi per acre in the immediate pre-War years to 15, 10.9, 12.4, and only 9 bags per acre between 1919 and 1922. The rapid expansion of the market during the War, and the necessity to increase production quickly, had led to the use of poor seed-padi, and a deterioration in the standard of husbandry. This contributed to the reduced yield;²⁵³ but the alternating floods and droughts, coupled with government's rice policy, were equally destructive to the industry.

The area under rice fell appreciably between 1922 and 1925; but the yield per acre showed some recovery in 1924 and 1925: from 13.7 bags in 1923 to 16.7 in 1924, and 15.4 in 1925. This was due partially to the abandonment of Plantation Anna Regina, the biggest sugar estate on the Essequibo Coast, in 1923, and the conversion of its adequately empoldered lands to rice-beds. The area under rice in Essequibo increased from about 7,000 acres in 1923-1924 to 12,585 in 1927. The yield here in 1924 was 17.8 bags of padi per acre; on the Corentyne it was 14.3.²⁵⁴ The higher productivity in Essequibo was a result of better water control, coupled with the wide-spread practice of hand-transplanting, and a generally more intense, efficient husbandry.²⁵⁵ Moreover, the lack of opportunities for supplementary employment on sugar estates, except at Hampton Court, the last remaining estate on the Essequibo Coast,²⁵⁶ and the marginal position of cattle rearing, made double-cropping absolutely necessary for survival.²⁵⁷ And the fact that big landowners, many of whom were Indians, charged rents of \$6 to \$8 per acre for empoldered land, also induced greater scruple in cultivation methods.²⁵⁸

But the perennial problems of flood and drought continued, even in Essequibo. In March 1925, unseasonably heavy rains flooded out several villages on the Corentyne — 13.2 inches were recorded in that month, compared with an average for March of 6.3 inches between 1846 and 1924.²⁵⁹ On the Essequibo Coast, where the rainfall was invariably higher, people were reported to be living

'somewhat amphibious' lives, while cattle perished in flooded pastures — the public road was used as a sleeping place, at night, for the stocks.²⁶⁰ In 1924-1925, the Government inaugurated a limited drainage scheme for several coastal villages;²⁶¹ but it was flawed at birth: it catered exclusively for drainage; no provision was made for irrigation.

As if to underline the irrationality of divorcing drainage from irrigation, 'one of the severest droughts on record', struck the colony from October 1925 to April 1926: only 11.78 inches of rain were recorded, compared with a mean of 46.21 for the period.²⁶² The Immigration Agent General noted: 'East Indians, comprising as they do the great bulk of the agricultural and stock-owing section of the population, were the principal sufferers ...'²⁶³ The rice harvest was diminished; while cattle rearers suffered immense losses. In December 1925, *The Daily Argosy* reported:

On the East Coast Demerara the cattle are merely skin and bones with very little vitality left to carry themselves along. On the West Coast Berbice both man and beast are enduring privations. The water of the Abary creek upon which the villagers depend, is unfit for use, being salty for nearly the whole length. Cattle are dying by the score, and on some parts of the Coast, the water used for potable and culinary purposes is very unwholesome.²⁶⁴

The drought on the West Coast Berbice was devastating: over 4,000 heads of cattle perished from lack of water and grass.²⁶⁵ Starving animals invaded farms, and 'made a clean sweep of everything'. A correspondent observed: 'Between Mahaica and Rosignol the traveller by train passes through miles of desolation'. Among the casualties were prized steers, crucial to the rice industry.²⁶⁶ Owners of young bulls refused to sell to butchers, who were inclined to pay \$20 to \$25 per head; while rice farmers were offering \$35 to \$40 per head, in order to replace their seasoned steers, which had succumbed to the drought.²⁶⁷

Azeez Rohoman, the proprietor of Plantation Felicity, in the Mahaicony District, spoke of a heavy toll in cattle in that prolific rice and cattle area; he himself having experienced a painful loss of stocks. The water was salty for over 12 miles up the Mahaicony Creek. The drought also killed out economic plants, such as cassava, sweet potatoes, plantains and bananas, as well as the small, 'second' or spring crop of rice.²⁶⁸ The devastation was mitigated somewhat as a result of the generosity of two prominent Indian businessmen: at No. 5 Village, West Coast Berbice, Matbaralli allowed residents of several neighbouring villages to use his shallow well; the Jugdeo brothers, as the Director of Public Works acknowledged, 'allowed cattle owners to drive herds onto their irrigated lands between the Mahaicony and Abary Creeks'.²⁶⁹

The drought was soon followed by floods, in June 1926.²⁷⁰ A deluge during the first week of June inundated the hitherto parched land, thus retarding the growth of grass. Emaciated cattle, greatly weakened by the drought, could not graze; they succumbed to cramp, in the torrential rains and the 'biting winds'. Harold Moore, the naturalist, captured the dark melancholy which hung over the Corentyne: 'One afternoon I saw a number of East Indians fighting hard to save a cow that had collapsed through cramp and was unable to rise. In anticipation of a feast, carrion crows had already begun to assemble about the prostrate animal. The men built over it a rough shelter of coconut leaves and fed it with grass from time to time, but all their efforts to save it proved futile'.²⁷¹ Moore added that the plight of the cattle was exacerbated by a 'colossal outburst of very blood-thirsty mosquitoes, which increasingly harry and worry them both by day and by night' Many also succumbed to these parasites.²⁷² The number of cattle in Berbice, estimated at 52,819 in 1926, had decreased to 41,885 in 1927.²⁷³

Between March 1925 and June 1926, British Guiana experienced the traditional problems of floods and alternating droughts, and their emphatic negation of Indian agricultural effort. Between 1925 and the end of 1927, the Government spent \$1,150,099 on drainage, and the drilling of artesian wells in several coastal villages; no money was spent on irrigation.²⁷⁴ This was an improvement; yet strangely, the Government and several presumably authoritative local people, seemed unable to anticipate the limitations of a purely drainage scheme, and the necessity for a comprehensive drainage *and* irrigation scheme. Archie Rose, a big cattle farmer on the East Coast Berbice, argued that because the colony suffered more often from floods, the people should support the Government's drainage scheme.²⁷⁵ This short-sightedness claimed even the knowledgeable Harold Moore, who noted that 'Floods occur almost yearly, but droughts of any note only at long intervals'²⁷⁶ This was true; but farmers and stock-rearers suffered yearly, during the dry season as well as unseasonally dry spells, from the inadequacy of water and the drought-like condition which the coastal clays soon assumed, because of its texture, residual salinity, and the high rate of evaporation.

It was a waste of resources to ignore irrigation, as the Government did in its drainage programme between 1925 and 1927; the perspicacious Financial Representative for Berbice, A.R.F. Webber always maintained that the two needs were urgent and inseparable. While visiting the Corentyne in February 1926, during the drought, he observed, in the presence of Governor Rodwell, that the colony sustained losses of about \$5,000,000 annually from lack of irrigation; rice and cattle farmers on the Corentyne lost about \$250,000 annually from the same cause.²⁷⁷ Webber believed that 1,000

square miles of fertile land on the coast were ideal for the expansion of rice cultivation; and appealed to Rodwell to initiate 'a comprehensive scheme of drainage and irrigation to induce British capital to invest in an undertaking that cannot possibly result in a loss'.²⁷⁸

But the Government would not concede that its drainage programme was inherently flawed. In September 1926, Webber remarked on the inertia and fear of independent judgement, which, predictably, soon encumbered new Governors. He wrote perceptively, alluding to Rodwell, who had succeeded Thomson as Governor in late-1925:

..... a new Governor falls into the rut of his predecessor as readily as a plummet on a line. He finds the same advisers; the same cliques pulling the strings at Government House; the same tennis parties; the same Georgetown Club — in all probability the same butlers. He sees through the same spectacles as his ready-made advisers²⁷⁹

The Indian farmers also appreciated how stupid it was to spend money on drainage, while leaving the problem of irrigation untouched. In February 1926, during the drought, the Government Agricultural Instructor for the Mahaicony District told farmers at Dundee that they should endeavour to eliminate bad rice, and that they should dig ponds and plant shade-trees in order to secure water for their cattle during dry spells. Responding to the advice of this authority, one of the farmers reportedly argued that 'although his advice was very good, it was useless to follow it, as there were no means of irrigating their lands, and until there was irrigation bad rice could not be eliminated'. The farmer proceeded to expose the confusion of the Government on the question of ponds: while the Instructor was urging the digging of ponds, the Sanitary Inspector, during the drought, was calling on villagers to fill them up, because they were considered breeding-places for mosquitoes.²⁸⁰

In August 1926, A. Rahaman, an Indian councillor of the Whim-Bloomfield Village Council, on the Corentyne, opposed the drainage scheme. He said that 'drainage without irrigation would be useless, and unless the assurance was given that both would be carried out at the same time, or irrigation be undertaken at an early date, the proprietors would not accept the proposed drainage scheme'.²⁸¹ In July, J.P. Santos, in a letter to Amery, the Secretary of the Colonies, had observed that the 'irrigation and drainage' scheme of the Government was a misnomer: the entire loan was being used for sewerage and drainage; irrigation 'essential for stimulating rice and stock production' was totally ignored. Santos believed that British Guiana had to look to the rice industry 'paramountly for its present and future salvation'.²⁸² He and legislators, Francis Dias and Webber, discussed the issue with the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sir Samuel Wilson, in London, in

July 1926; but, typically, the latter decided that 'the whole matter be referred over to His Excellency the Governor for a special report'.²⁸³

Webber was inflamed. In September, in his weekly column in his newspaper, *The New Daily Chronicle*, he denounced the Colonial Office: 'They have sent idle Governors, stubborn Governors, stop-gap Governors; but not one successful Governor. The Empire surely is not so decadent; British administrative ability is not at such a low ebb, that in 20 years not one winner could be found'. But he conceded that no Governor was likely to take the initiative to 'inaugurate changes and innovations' which neither their successors nor the Colonial Office would approve. Webber said that the *modus operandi* of the latter was characterised by incorrigible myopia, and a corroded bureaucratic stasis; no initiative could be expected from them either. He summarised their methods with amazing accuracy: '... refer to file 60006 and "pp" — which mystic sign means "previous papers" and may reach back to the Dutch occupation. So very little, if anything at all, can be expected from that direction'.²⁸⁴

In 1927, after the completion of the much-vaunted drainage scheme, H.C. Sampson of Kew Gardens visited British Guiana under the auspices of the Empire Marketing Board to report on the development of agriculture. He observed that 'the East Indian is still the most thrifty and hardworking of the agricultural labouring classes²⁸⁵ He was impressed with the 'very high yields' obtained by rice growers on abandoned cane lands, without the use of manure;²⁸⁶ and he advised that if the colony wished to become an important exporter of rice, 'comprehensive irrigation and drainage schemes which will allow of the storage of water for irrigation and for the disposal of surplus water' had to be executed. Since most rice farmers were tenants or small cultivators, he argued that 'private concerted effort is not likely to succeed, and I suggest that this is work for the colony to undertake'.²⁸⁷

This was, as expected, unpalatable to the plantocracy; and their ally, *The Daily Argosy*, quickly articulated its old hostility to the empoldering of non-plantation lands: 'If it be right that elaborate coastal drainage schemes should be a "colonial question", then logically such schemes should also include the sugar plantations in their scope It is no business of the Government of any country in the world to spend public money in increasing the value of the land of private owners'²⁸⁸

This was dishonest: much of the history of the colony was, in fact, a record of the Government's

direct or indirect efforts to maintain the colony as a sugar producer *par excellence*. Black consumers, as they had argued often, were taxed to provide partial funding for Indian immigration; in short, to undercut their own position as wage labourers. And Government had always discouraged 'minor industries' because these were likely to attract labour away from the sugar plantations. Indian rice growers throughout the 1920s, provided a cheap staple to local consumers, thus indirectly subsidising the sugar planters and other employers, as sugar prices remained low and wages had to be reduced.

As noted earlier, rice exports could have earned enough in 1920-1921 to pay for drainage and irrigation; and the losses each year, because of floods and droughts, could have paid for a good water system several-fold.

The Olivier Commission, which visited the colony and the West Indies in 1929, at the start of the Great Depression, to examine the prospects for sugar, stated that the rice industry had been developing as an 'extremely promising alternative' to sugar. But rice, they argued, did not earn as much per acre; consequently, it could not bear the cost of drainage and irrigation.²⁸⁹ They, like Collet and the planters, were wrong. The rice yield in the colony was comparatively impressive, in spite of the primitive water control system.²⁹⁰ The empoldering of these lands would have increased output considerably; and as Santos had argued, if this were done, the rice lands could repay the expenditure. Rice, of course, was the principal food of a majority of the people.

The colonial authorities were incapable of conceiving of the colony other than as an appendage of Empire: a producer of sugar. A.R.F. Webber accused the colonial rulers of cowardice on the drainage and irrigation issue because they feared the wrath of the sugar planters. He deemed the drainage scheme mere 'window dressing'; the Government had no agricultural policy; and were not prepared to encourage any industries other than sugar. On 8 May 1925, in his speech to the Combined Court, he was at his combative best:

'..... the type of official that comes to the Colony is without initiative, without constructive ability, without courage, and without anything that makes for progress in the Country I fear the Government of the day seems to be in the grip of one section of the community. If that section of the community say "Thou shalt not have irrigation on certain lands of the Colony", the Government says, "Aye, aye, masters, they shall not have it"..... Here you are with your ear to the ground from morning to night listening to the tramp of the feet of those whom you fear Good resolutions, good movements have been started in this Court; Government takes up an uncompromisingly hostile attitude, afraid of its shadow Why are you spending \$2,000,000 when you say you are not going to encourage any industries? We are not going to encourage any industries because we have no labour and we do not intend that the labour on the sugar estates should be disturbed.'²⁹¹

The Indian rice farmers, as noted earlier, revived the rice industry between 1926 and 1929, in spite of poor prices after Collet's debacle, and the generally hostile response of the Government, the plantocracy, and the Colonial Office. It would have been perfectly understandable if they had failed. Black farmers, labouring under similar constraints, did. Why did the Indians survive as agriculturalists?

With all its limitations, the better drainage in some villages, after 1926, induced many disheartened farmers to return to the rice fields — by the end of 1927, \$213,848 were spent on drainage and pure water supply in Essequibo, \$486,067 on the East Coast Demerara, between Georgetown and Mahaica, \$99,293 on the West Coast Demerara, and \$200,720 on the East Coast Berbice and the Corentyne.²⁹² In Berbice, the rice area reaped rose from 16,000 to 17,000 acres in 1923-1925 to 23,871 in 1926, and 26,729 acres in 1929.²⁹³ On the Corentyne, 750 acres between No.57 and No.60 Villages were drained; while the construction of a dam of 500 roods, from the back-dam southwards into the savannah, prevented the flood water on the pegasse backlands from escaping into the creek at No.66; water was thus conserved for the rice lands in this area. A middle-walk trench at Nos.67 and 68 Villages was dug; the empoldering of the second depth at Nos.70, 71, and 72 Villages made new land available to rice farmers; so also did the trench dug across Lots 69 to 74.²⁹⁴

On the Essequibo Coast, the rice acreage reaped was about 7,000 in 1923; by 1927 it was about 12,500: the conversion of empoldered land at Plantation Anna Regina to rice-beds, after its acquisition by the Government in 1923, increased output and boosted productivity. In Demerara, the area reaped in 1926 was 10,920 acres; in 1929 it has increased to nearly 20,000.²⁹⁵ Meanwhile as the area under sugar cane contracted — from about 71,000 acres in 1919 to about 57,000 in 1928-1929,²⁹⁶ possibilities for supplementary earnings on the estates were reduced: rice farmers on the Essequibo Coast and the islands of Leguan and Wakenaam, as well as the upper Corentyne, reverted to a more intensive husbandry — hand transplanting superseded 'shieing', better seed-padi were selected, rice beds were vigorously prepared.²⁹⁷ The rewards were most encouraging, as the Director of Agriculture, Professor J. Sydney Dash, noted in June 1929: 'The yields in British Guiana today are higher than in other rice producing countries in the world'. He advised farmers: 'To grow it successfully you get properly constructed meres so that the beds can be levelled and water efficiently controlled to grow rice well the water and clay have to be churned up into a thick cream and nothing does it so effectively as a couple of oxen'²⁹⁸ Because most Indian rice growers

owned their own seasoned oxen, they were able to achieve this rigorous preparation of beds. Comparatively good weather between 1927 and 1929 — there were no droughts or serious floods — also helped to boost yields.

In spite of poor prices towards the end of the decade, export was unhindered. And rice farmers were energised into greater effort, with the arrival of the new Director of Agriculture in June 1927, Professor Dash, a progressive officer,²⁹⁹ who believed that the rice industry had a future, and constantly applauded and reassured the farmers.³⁰⁰ His knowledge of tropical agriculture was immense; his grasp of the minutiae of rice farming was most impressive; and he constantly tried to disseminate information to the farmers.³⁰¹ Dash abhorred the placing of inhibiting controls on agriculture; in October 1930, he instituted the grading of rice before export.³⁰²

It is interesting that in 1928, 18,083 tons, valued at \$1,114,147, were exported, the highest in the history of the export trade. However, the Director of Agriculture noted: 'Unfortunately, lower prices were obtained as compared with the boom year of 1917, when 14,367 tons were exported with a value of \$1,422,805'.³⁰³ Although prices had declined by over 50 per cent since 1920-1921, the end to all controls and the hope of better markets fed a new optimism.

But the main reasons for the survival and recovery of the rice industry rested with the Indians themselves: thrift, family labour within an essentially joint-family context, the integration of the cattle and rice industries, the exploitation of various niches in the village and plantation environments, and the powerful sanctions to effort and achievement provided by Hinduism and Islam.

In spite of the low rice prices, in 1928, 9,920 Indians had deposits with the Post Office Savings Bank, totalling \$959,157.47, or an average of \$96.68 per person; 24,874 Blacks had \$699,110.97, or an average of \$28.11 per person. In 1929, 9,637 Indians had deposits totalling \$898,110.97, or an average of \$93.19 per person; while 23,747 Blacks had \$630,448.13, or an average of \$26.54 per person.³⁰⁴ Indians also held considerable deposits with the two commercial banks; many used no banks — they had ingenious methods of hiding their savings at home. It was common for even poor Indians to buy some jewellery; this was a form of saving.³⁰⁵

In 1929, C.F. Andrews spent three months in British Guiana. He was especially elated by the

achievements of the Indians on the Corentyne; and he reflected upon this, in an address at the New Amsterdam Town Hall on 11 June 1929:

I have been very pleased to see the remarkable industry and patience of those who have come from India and settled on the land. It is very wonderful to see how they have overcome difficulty after difficulty; how they have struggled against adversity; how they have worked their way forward with amazing perseverance and have won their reward. Today one can see all along the high road which goes from this city right to Skeldon [on the Corentyne], village after village, and house after house. The villages, the houses, have been built by East Indians themselves out of their own hard savings and hardly-won capital, and one sees what wonderful patience, perseverance, diligence and self-sacrifice that must have meant.³⁰⁶

A.R.F. Webber had a deeper empathy with the Indians and the forces which shaped their attitudes than most. In July 1926, shortly after the drought, his newspaper carried an editorial, explaining why Indian farmers survived, and saved, while others suffocated in the hostile environment:

Within recent years the East Indians have swelled the ranks of the small farmers; with few wants and labouring — adult and infant — seven days in the week, they have succeeded in saving the greater portion of sums earned which ordinarily would be insufficient to maintain civilised life. After the harvest, these farmers reserve enough paddy, on which they totally subsist, until the next crop, while the greater portion is sold and is either invested in cattle, or placed in the Banks³⁰⁷

Rice, of course, was the staple food of the Indians; that was sufficient reason for them to persist with its cultivation, whatever the circumstances. A reserve of rice was wealth: it reduced considerably the cash needs of the family; family labour lessened substantially the financial overhead in rice cultivation. The anthropologist, Raymond Smith, who worked in several Indian and Black villages in British Guiana in the 1950s, has written perceptively on the fashioning of a measure of financial prudence in the Indian household. His assessment is even more applicable to the 1920s, when family land was often the principal basis of livelihood in the villages; urban migration was minimal; and the joint-family, or a modified version, functioned as a corporate economic unit. Smith observes:

The Indian household, most usually consisting of a man, his wife and children, with perhaps a recently married son and wife, functions as a co-operative economic unit under the control of the eldest male. He, with the help of his wife, plans the family budget and directs the farming activities. As compared with the negro villages there is much more careful long-term planning of expenditure, saving, and investment, and such planning is related to the needs and productivity of the household and family rather than being individualised.³⁰⁸

Even when the sons and their families did not belong to their parents' households, residence tended to be patrilocal: this reinforced the authority of the father; so also did the religious sanctions of Hinduism and Islam. The religious functions, held in the home (temples were optional among Hindus), were a medium for the constant enunciation of ethical standards, which strengthened

paternal authority: this aided the marshalling of family labour for collective purposes. Thrift, industry, and the subordination of individual needs to the demands of the family were repeatedly emphasised in speeches and precepts based on the lives of Hindu deities: the characters of the *Ramayana*, in particular, could be appropriated and tendentiously manipulated to suit any pedestrian exigency.³⁰⁹

Rauf, an anthropologist who worked at Crabwood Creek, a predominantly Indian village on the Corentyne River, in the late-1960s, noted that his Black informants interpreted Indian ethical standards, particularly their thrift and an apparent containment of worldly desires, as an acceptance of a lower standard of living. Indians, however, 'describe these ethical standards with an enormous pride and perceive them as a mark of their distinctiveness',³¹⁰ sustaining effort and a sense of community. Paternal authority also was prized.³¹¹

The authority of the male head of the joint-family (or its variant) to deploy family labour, facilitated the exploitation of a variety of ecological niches within the coastal environment. In Chapter 2 it was seen how estate residents supplemented earnings in the cane-fields by cultivating rice and vegetables, and rearing cattle and sheep. In the villages, Indians did not depend exclusively on rice farming. For most, it was the principal economic activity; but many farmers also worked on the sugar plantations. A rice grower could delegate one or more sons to earn cash through estate labour, while he and other family members concentrated on rice-field work. (It is understandable why great premium was placed on having many sons; in the 1920s and beyond, Indian families tended to be very large).³¹²

Indian children also supplemented family incomes by doing a variety of jobs on the estates — leading mules which hauled cane punts, cleaning stables, sprinkling manure, etc. In October 1925, for instance, 22 estates were reported to be employing children under 12 years of age; they usually worked from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., and sometimes had to walk eight miles to their places of work.³¹³ Indian parents in the villages frequently kept their children away from school to work in the rice fields: children assisted the women in extracting weeds and grasses from the fields; they were also engaged in scaring predatory birds which fed on the recently broadcast grains, or sucked the milky fluid when the grains began to fill out. Children were assigned to the minding of stock, and cutting grass for the cattle.³¹⁴ The Indian child was a worker; and a sense of responsibility to the family was inculcated early.

Harold Moore was impressed with their early socialisation into rice culture. In May 1925, during the rice planting season, he observed two Indian children at work/play in the rice nursery:

On Sunday morning I was greatly amused at seeing two little children, mere tots, hardly beyond the toddling stage, taking an active part in the preparation of a seed-plot; the grass has been weeded by their elders, and the tiny tots, who were stark naked, splashed delightfully through the water, and worked manfully and whole-heartedly in collecting the grass and piling it on the small dam which marks off the seed-plot from the rest of the bed it is no wonder the East Indian grows up with an intuitive love for rice growing³¹⁵

Women also made a major contribution to the livelihood of their families, both as producers and managers. Apart from raising large families, women contributed a significant portion of the labour in the rice fields. Women, their unmarried daughters, and their daughters-in-law were rice planters and rice cutters; they winnowed the padi after it was threshed; they also assisted in drying padi on the drying floors at the rice mills, prior to milling. A daughter or a daughter-in-law was assigned to preparing the meals, and the care of the small children: rice cultivation was demanding work, claiming the attention of other family members for long hours. Some village women also worked on the sugar estates as weeders.³¹⁶

The paucity of Indian women in the 19th century in British Guiana and Trinidad, and the fact that they earned their own wages on the estates, spawned a spirit of independence among them. What Gerard Tikasingh observes of Indian women in late-19th century Trinidad, was equally applicable to the women in British Guiana in the 1920s: although the sexual imbalance was nearly redressed, Indian women retained their assertive attitudes. Tikasingh argues: ‘... females were quite ready to break the existing union and form another whenever they were ill-treated or dissatisfied with their particular condition. And in the family itself, wives found that they had acquired authority to a degree they had never known previously — over the disposition of the nuclear family’s income, over the conduct of her family, and even in the decision-making process concerning family matters’.³¹⁷

Within the joint-family, her influence was enhanced; she mediated between the head of the household and his sons on questions of personal expenditure on clothes, ‘sporting’, etc.³¹⁸ In the 1920s, the rice industry survived and recovered because Indian family labour reduced the need for cash in growing the crop; Indian women did much to harmonise potential conflict within this network: they often moderated the tendency to arbitrary and authoritarian behaviour on the part of family heads.³¹⁹

As noted earlier, Indians rarely depended exclusively on rice growing. They diversified their resource base. Expenditure on food was minimised considerably: they grew their own rice and

vegetables; these also brought in cash. In July 1923, a correspondent of *The Daily Argosy*, in criticising Black farmers for what he saw as their obsession with ground provisions — plantains, cassava, eddoes, etc., praised Indians for growing short-term economic crops, such as pepper and egg-plant, which had a ready and profitable market.³²⁰ Indians usually kept a kitchen garden in the vicinity of their homes: the principal vegetables grown included calaloo (thick-leaf spinach), squash, ochro (okra), bora beans, same, pumpkin, and *karaila*. Enough was grown for home consumption; the surplus was sold to fellow villagers, or at markets on the estates, or in the towns. By the 1920s, some Indians were also established producers of ground provisions. *The Daily Argosy* noted in January 1929: ‘..... it is probable that one-half to two-thirds of the total production of “ground provisions” comes from East Indian agriculturalists. The African farmers are very far indeed from having a monopoly of such products ...’³²¹

As on the sugar estates, most Indians in the villages kept cattle; it was, by far, their principal stock; sheep, goats, and donkeys were also reared. (The donkey-cart was the main vehicle for transporting padi, fire-wood, cow-manure, etc.). But, as in India, cattle evoked a special pride. However, while few Indians ate beef, they had no reservations to selling their cattle to butchers. Meanwhile, milk was obtained for home use; and a substantial amount was sold to Indian traders, who supplied urban Blacks primarily. As the Immigration Agent General noted in 1921: ‘.... the milk trade of the Colony is chiefly carried on by East Indians’.³²²

Cattle were a hedge against a potentially bad rice harvest. In 1921, rice farmers on the Corentyne, in opposing the Cattle Slaughter Bill, argued that because of the critical state of the rice industry, ‘they have been in the habit of disposing of some of their cattle in order to meet their liabilities’.³²³ The Bill, designed to curb the slaughter of cows and heifers because of a dubious assessment that stocks were diminishing rapidly, would have restricted this option. (The Collet administration argued that the stock was greatly reduced). It is significant that the Department of Science and Agriculture, in 1924, refuted this; they argued: ‘It is certain that from 1916 the number of cattle on the frontlands has been very materially underestimated by the cattle-farmers, and that such supplying of falsified returns has very greatly increased since 1920’.³²⁴

It is reasonable to assume that Indian cattle rearers — they owned most of the cattle on the coastland³²⁵ — already gravely antagonised by Government’s rice policy, deliberately falsified their returns; and the threat of similar controls on the cattle industry in 1921, aggravated this practice. The Director of Science and Agriculture argued that if the cattle stock had increased at the 1912-1916 rate, there should have been about 93,300 head

at the end of 1920; but only 85,938 were returned, a shortfall of 9,300. He believed that an important cause for the 'depression in the rate of increase' was 'the indiscriminate slaughter of milch cows and promising heifers.'³²⁶ What he did not say was that rice farmers, confronted with the loss of their rice crops because of poor drainage and irrigation, were sometimes forced to sell their milch cows in order to survive; while Collet's disastrous rice policy and the decline of the rice industry, accelerated this tendency. Besides, the rate of expansion in 1912-1916 could not be sustained because of poor pasturage on these unempoldered coastal lands; and with the expansion of the rice industry during the War, the area available for grazing was reduced considerably.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Berbice</i>	<i>Demerara</i>	<i>Essequibo</i>	<i>Total</i>
1916	?	?	?	93,264
1917	60,286	17,919	9,045	87,250
1918	50,935	17,881	8,292	77,108
1919	50,017	18,200	10,218	78,436
1920	54,900	19,764	11,274	85,938
1921	43,467	31,940	8,499	83,960
1922	35,850	23,000	15,500	74,350
1923	33,560	13,950	9,160	56,670
1924	26,879	17,932	9,504	54,315
1925	50,558	16,249	8,822	75,629
1926	52,819	16,431	8,594	77,844
1927	41,885	19,951	9,610	71,446
1928,9	not available			
1929	?	?	?	81,131

SOURCES: J.B. Harrison, 'Memorandum on the Falling Off in the Number of Cattle since the Year 1916', *Journal of the Board of Agriculture of British Guiana*, Vol. XIV, No.2, (1921), pp.229-233; C.O. 114/158, 162,167, 172,177, 182, 184, 187, 192, 195, 200, 204, 207, Reports of the Dept. of Science and Agriculture, 1916-1927, 1929.

In spite of these difficulties, the stock on the coastland was estimated at over 80,000 head in 1929.

An efficient drainage and irrigation system was crucial to the expansion of the cattle industry, as the

Government Veterinary Surgeon argued in 1929:

The nature of the land, the difficulty of drainage, and the heavy rainfall are all against successful breeding and rearing of cattle in small areas under the present system. When the grazing was more or less unrestricted it was possible for cattle to roam over the wet savannahs without doing much damage to the pasture, but now the trampling of many cattle over small areas kill off the herbage. When struggling knee-deep and girth-deep in mud and water, the animals at each step, for every mouthful of herbage eaten, trample four out of existence. And when this over-stocked and trampled land is dry, it is packed and hard and grows only a few worthless weeds In any case the peasants are not in a position to alter the conditions under which stock are kept; this is only possible for land-owners.³²⁷

Yet the cattle industry yielded 'considerable profit to a large number of people'.³²⁸ Indians in the villages made use, often surreptitiously, of grass from the dams and canals on the sugar plantations, especially during dry spells, when village pastures became stunted.³²⁹

In most Indian yards, a few coconut trees were always planted. Some, especially on the extensive sand reefs on the East Coast Demerara, West Coast Berbice, and the Corentyne Coast, grew this crop on a large scale. But because such soils were found only in pockets, farmers also planted coconuts on the heavy clay soils, although these were less suitable.³³⁰ Ingenious uses were found for virtually every part of the plant. Coconut oil, a vital ingredient in Indian cooking, was extracted from the kernel of the nuts;³³¹ so also was coconut 'milk', used in the preparation of cook-up rice, a popular delicacy, in which virtually anything could be thrown in (Indians, appropriately, called it 'all-in-one'). The branches were used for shading young plants, such as calaloo and other forms of spinach, from the fierce sun; they were also stripped, and the 'pointers' obtained were tied into a bundle, thus forming an effective broom. The dried shells were used for kindling fires for cooking, or for making 'smoke' for the cattle, an effective antidote to mosquitoes.³³²

The crushed kernel of the coconuts, after the 'milk' was extracted, served as one form of feed for fowls, ducks, and pigs. But coconut products were also a valuable export: in 1929, the export trade was nearly twenty times what it was in 1919.³³³ The acreage under coconuts was about 28,000 in 1928-1929; and the exports for the latter year were as follows: 637,812 nuts valued at \$10,614; coconut oil — 20,862 gallons, valued at \$16,730; and copra (the dried kernel of the nut) — 75,180 cwts., valued at \$314,350.³³⁴ However, as with so many of the economic activities of the Indians, it was impossible to quantify the returns: the products were adapted to meet a multiplicity of needs, rarely ever acknowledged by government officials.

As noted above, most Indians did not eat beef; but they were fond of chicken and duck; by the 1920s, many also ate pork. Most families kept their own fowls and ducks. Fish were caught in the numerous ditches and ponds in the villages;³³⁵ and the deeper canals on the sugar estates, with their guaranteed supply of water, were a reliably copious source of a variety of fresh-water fish. The flood-fallowed cane-fields were a reservoir of vast quantities as well; as were the rice-fields, shortly before the water was released for harvesting. Indian villagers had acquired an enviable competence in ferreting out fish from the most inconspicuous hiding places, often using their bare hands. As most villages were located on the front lands, fish were also caught in the sea: some villages, such as Sheet Anchor, at the confluence of the Canje Creek and the Berbice River were established fishing communities by the 1920s.³³⁶

Wood for cooking was usually obtained from the fore-shore: dried courida trees were felled and transported in donkey-carts to their homes, where it was stored, thus obviating the daily scrounge for fire-wood. And before wooden houses, with roofs of corrugated zinc sheets, became popular, the wattle-and-daub thatched huts (still very common the 1920s) were constructed with materials acquired from the village environment and the fore-shore: mud, wooden beams and rafters, and 'iron' grass for thatching.³³⁷

The Indian villager had, indeed, developed a strong communion with his environment, exploiting judiciously every conceivable ecological niche in the villages and on the sugar estates. It is a grave error to assess his livelihood purely on the basis of crude official statistics on wages earned on the estates, or the presumed returns from rice farming. It was a complex process, enhanced, as most contemporary observers acknowledged, by an amazing thrift, and consistently hard work, by the family unit. As early as August 1891, D.W.D. Comins, on a visit to the upper Corentyne, noted that between Lots 63 to 75, all the land had been settled by Indians, who had chosen and bought it by themselves, some twenty-five years before. He was impressed with the extent to which they had developed and integrated varied forms of agriculture, in an area estimated at over 4,000 acres.

Comins reported:

All the coolies' houses are built along the front of these lots, facing the road Their land lies at the back and is planted in rice, corn, plantain, and cassava. The front land is planted with coconut trees, and a plot is reserved round the house for mango, guava, and other fruit trees, which also afford shade for their cattle, fowls, donkeys, goats, etc., of which they have a great number. Many of the houses have a cattle shed or pen near the house, in which calves and young cattle are kept. In front of many of the houses I saw rice drying, and in some they were pounding rice with 'dhenkies'. One cannot help being struck by the great happiness and contentment of the women and children The children are fat, sturdy, and well-groomed, and the mothers well-dressed and smiling. In one place a vigorous game of cricket was going on among cooly (sic) boys. Nearly every house had a donkey cart, in which the owners either go themselves or carry fruit, vegetables, grain, etc., to market It is difficult to recognise in these happy, contented, prosperous, and worldly-wise people, living comfortably and independently on their own property, and rapidly acquiring wealth and importance of position as thriving settlers, the ignorant, penniless, bigoted, and intensely stupid coolies who left Calcutta only a few years previously.³³⁸

These achievements might have been less impressive without the powerful promptings fed by the imperatives of Hinduism; Islam as well. As anthropologist, Leo Despres, argues: Indians 'must devote considerable time and energy to work in order to practise his religion'. He adds that Hinduism is a belief system which permeates the life of the Indians in British Guiana; and explains why the performance of Hindu rituals conduces to the sustaining of effort among its practitioners:

'The virtuous Hindu is simultaneously a good man and a successful man. His conformity to the prescribed religious practices is taken as evidence of his virtue. At the same time, his ability to conform is evidence of his economic progress. Without some accumulation of wealth, it is extremely difficult for the Hindu to fulfil his ritual obligations.'³³⁹

The celebration of the spring festival, *Holi*, and the harvest festival, *Diwali*, and the performance of regular religious functions in the home, required considerable financial expenditure; it was necessary to save. The performance of elaborately ritualistic, orthodox Hindu weddings added greatly to a family's prestige; it also strengthened links within families and fostered a sense of community: very many people were invited and feasted at these weddings, extending over three or four days. It required much effort and planning to execute them. Men, women, and children worked hard so that the family could save.³⁴⁰

By the 1920s, in spite of the difficult environment — the floods, the droughts, malaria, and the stubborn, unsympathetic attitude of the Government, many Indians in British Guiana had done remarkably well: life was infinitely better than in the United Provinces; no one starved; many were very comfortable; a minority had acquired considerable wealth — a middle class was on the rise. This, always, is a significant achievement in any community. It energises others to make a greater effort; it sets standard; and feeds a notion of attainable goals. In mid-1929, C.F. Andrews observed of Indian women in the colony: 'The women are very free in their movements from one place to another in British Guiana. They have a healthy out-of-door existence and there is no seclusion'.³⁴¹ Of his visit to Windsor Forest, on the West Coast Demerara, Andrews wrote: 'The East Indians have found themselves there. They are holding up their heads like free men and not crouching and complaining and expecting everything to be done for them'.³⁴² There could be no better testimonial to the achievements of the Indians in British Guiana.

Notes

1. The ex-slaves, understandably, had no interest in labouring on sugar plantations. As Michael Moohr argues: '... estate labour was looked upon as a degrading occupation.... It was work unfit for a free man. The negro had never seen whites or coloureds.... perform field work'. The acquisition of land was, therefore, crucial to the ex-slaves' larger conception of freedom — independence of plantation labour; and the substantial wages earned between 1833 and 1841, estimated at £474,600, made this possible. The cost per head of estate labour increased over seven-fold; while the post-Emancipation labour supply was 'of an irregular nature': between 1838 and 1846, 57 of the 308 plantations had to be abandoned; and exports of sugar declined dramatically, from an annual average of 1,044,000 cwt. in 1830-1833 and 940,500 cwt. in 1834-1838, during 'apprenticeship', to 598,400 cwt. annually, between 1839-1842. See Michael Moohr, 'Patterns of Change in an Export Economy: British Guiana, 1830-1914', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1970, pp. 103-115. The following were some of the large purchases made by the ex-slaves between 1838 and 1844: \$10,000 for Plantation North Brook; \$80,000 for Plantation Friendship; \$50,000 for Plantation New Orange Nassau (Buxton); \$22,000 for Plantation Beterverwagting; \$39,000 for Plantation Plaisance. The planter-dominated legislature countered this diminution of the labour supply to the sugar estates by introducing indentured labourers, primarily from India: the state funded one-third of the immigration costs; commodities consumed by the ex-slaves were taxed heavily to meet this. Moreover, through a series of ordinances between 1852 and 1861, the upset price of crown lands rose from five to ten dollars per acre, with the minimum purchasable parcel set at 100 acres. See Alan H. Adamson, *Sugar without Slaves: The Political Economy of British Guiana, 1838-1904* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 35-36, 57, 106-109.
2. Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in Guyana* (London: The Author, 1970), p.256. Moohr notes that 'the period of rice's greatest expansion (1896-1905) coincided with the period when the output of the industry was wholly concerned with the satisfaction of domestic needs.... By the end of 1905, the local production of rice was high enough to meet all indigenous demands and to displace all foreign rice imports. After this date, Guyana became a net exporter of this commodity....', *op. cit.*, [1970], p.262. For more on the early years of the rice industry, see Jay R. Mandle, 'Population and Economic Change: The Emergence of the Rice Industry in Guyana, 1895-1915', *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol.30, No.4, (1970); and his *The Plantation Economy: Population and Economic Change in Guyana, 1838-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973), pp.32-43.
3. This argument is best developed in Moohr, *op. cit.*, [1970]; and in his 'The Discovery of Gold and the Development of Peasant Industries in Guyana, 1884-1914: A Study in the Political Economy of Change', *Caribbean Studies*, Vol.15, No.2, (1975).
4. *Ibid.*, [1975], p.60.
5. Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], p.250.
6. Lesley M. Potter, 'Internal Migration and Resettlement of East Indians in Guyana, 1870-1920', Ph.D. Thesis, McGill University (Montreal), 1975, p.149; and her 'The Post — Indenture Experience of East Indians in Guyana, 1873-1921', in *East Indians in the Caribbean: Colonialism and the Struggle for Identity*, Bridget Brereton and Winston Dookeran (eds.), (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus International Publications, 1982), p.74.
7. Moohr, *op. cit.*, [1975], p.62.
8. Moohr, *op. cit.*, [1970], p.103.
9. *Ibid.*, p.253. He argues: '... the gold industry gave birth to an increasingly large and highly articulate group of men [merchants and professionals, doctors, barristers, etc.], who found that many of their new interests coincided for the first time with those of the powerless labouring and shop-keeping classes. So vocal and influential was this transformed elite that it was able to convince the Colonial Office of the desirability of admitting them to a share of the constitutional power formerly monopolised by the planters. By carefully, if often misleadingly, identifying the interests of the unemployed and underpaid Guianese labourers with that of their own, this group was able to claim that it represented the welfare of the entire colonial population'. See also Moohr, *op. cit.*, [1975], pp.63-67.
10. Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p.144.
11. For some of the deeper political implications of the work of the Reform Club and the Reform Association, see Rodney, *ibid.*, Chapter 5: 'The Politics of the Middle Classes and the Masses, 1880-1892'; and Francis M. Drakes, 'The Development of Political Organisation and Political Consciousness in Guyana: The *Conscientizacao* of the Middle Class and the Masses', Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1989, Chapter 2.
12. Quoted in Tyrann Ramnarine, 'The Growth of the East Indian Community in British Guiana, 1880-1920', D.Phil. Thesis, University of Sussex, 1977, p.115.
13. Quoted in Potter, *op. cit.*, [1975], p.244.
14. Quoted in J.B. Harrison, 'Notes on the Society's Work in 1897-1918', [The Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society], *Timehri*, Vol.V, (third series), (1918), p.xlvi. Harrison, who was the Director of Science and Agriculture in British Guiana noted: 'Among the striking, if not the most striking, of the agricultural developments in the West Indian Province during the 21 years which have elapsed since 1897 has been the very extensive rice industry of British Guiana'.
15. Potter, *op. cit.*, [1975], pp.246-247; see also Mandle, *op. cit.*, [1970], pp.793-794.
16. Potter, *op. cit.*, [1982], p.83; Ramnarine, *op. cit.*, [1977], p.135.
17. *Ibid.*, [1982], p.89. For a study of the retention of this pattern of livelihood among Indian rice farmers in contemporary Guyana, see Bonham C. Richardson, 'Spatial Determinants of Rural Livelihood in Coastal Guyana', *The Professional*

- Geographer*, Vol.25, No.4, (1973). He states that the ecological hazards of the past persist; and rice growers, with the exception of those in Essequibo, where there are no sugar estates, invariably have some supplementary, extra-village source of earnings.
18. Interviews with Latchman Sohan (1908-1989), Palmyra, East Canje, Berbice, December 1985; and Sarran Jagmohan (1920-) of the same address, April 1986.
 19. Mandle, *op. cit.*, [1970], pp.791-793; Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], pp.221-222.
 20. See note 18.
 21. Ramnarine, *op. cit.*, [1977], p.135; Interviews with several elderly Indian villagers at Nos. 45, 47 and 48 Villages, on the Corentyne, April 1986.
 22. *Ibid.*, [1977], p.130.
 23. *Ibid.*, p.148.
 24. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 27 November 1927. A decade earlier, Edgar Beckett, whose views on the problems of the Black villages were widely respected, had also remarked on the stagnation of these villages; but he emphasised the amazing energy and industry of these Black villagers in the extremely hazardous gold fields, and in the balata bush. He regretted the tendency for them to fritter away their hard-earned cash when they returned to town or village; and thought it was necessary to woo them back to farming, and the cultivation of 'permanent crops'. However, this could not be done unless the land was 'properly and efficiently drained'. See Beckett's 'The Black Peasant Proprietor', *Timehri*, Vol.IV, (third series), (1917).
 25. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 30 November 1928.
 26. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 6 December 1928.
 27. *Ibid.*
 28. *The Daily Argosy*, 25 March 1921.
 29. Leader, *The Daily Argosy*, 10 May 1929.
 30. Charles E. Douglas, *Report on the Cultivation, Treatment and Prospects of Rice in British Guiana* (Empire Marketing Board, no.32), (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1930), p.9. For a discussion of the relationship between soil types and the development of agriculture, see H.C. Sampson, *Report on Development of Agriculture in British Guiana* (Empire Marketing Board, no.4), (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1927), pp.8-10.
 31. J.B. Harrison, 'The Climate of British Guiana: Abstract of Observations, 1846-1925', *Journal of the Board of Agriculture of British Guiana*, Vol.XIX, No.2, (1926), pp.118-119.
 32. *Ibid.*, pp.117-118.
 33. Douglas, *op. cit.*, [1930], p.9. He noted that in 1928 the average yield per acre in British Guiana was 17¹/₂ bags (about 2,865 lb.) of padi; in Lower Burma, the colony's chief competitor for the West Indian market, it was about 1,480 lb. of padi per acre, or nearly 1,000 lb. per acre less (p.24).
 34. Sampson, *op. cit.*, [1927], p.16.
 35. Richardson, *op. cit.*, [1973], p.367. The position had not improved by the late-1960s, when Richardson, an historical geographer, worked in several Indian villages: 'The typical village unit is poorly suited for the production of a small-scale peasant crop. These large rectangles were originally designed to be controlled by a single estate owner. Now, literally hundreds of decisions are made within each coastal rectangle by padi farmers. The result is continued misuse of irrigation and drainage canals serving each of the several hundred padi plots in a single coastal community. The lack of central control over village water canals accentuates the ecological hazards of drought and flooding: canals are often choked with reeds or mud so that water cannot be brought in during dry spells, and excess water cannot be drained from fields during rainy periods'.
 36. As early as 1909, the Department of Science and Agriculture had emphasised this, noting that 'It is on record that the industry on the Corentyne Coast was virtually extinguished by drought in 1899. It is admitted that the question of irrigation is vital and pressing'. — 'Rice and Risks', *Journal of the Board of Agriculture of British Guiana*, Vol.II, No.4, (1909). It is interesting that this article was reproduced in the same journal in April 1921 (Vol. XIV, No.2), when Governor Collet opposed the drainage and irrigation of the Corentyne, and some were arguing that drainage should be given priority over irrigation. (The quote is from the latter, p.111).
 37. H.R. Nevill, (comp. and ed.), *District Gazetteer of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Vol XXXII — Basti* (Allahabad: Government Press, United Provinces, 1907), p.40: 'The crop thrives best in a clay soil, but the most important factor in the selection of the fields is the position of the land as regards drainage; for the plant requires a constant supply of water till at least the end of October. In the south of.....[Basti], the best *jarhan* [late rice] grows in.... shallow depressions, sufficiently deep to retain the water, but not deep enough to allow the rice to be swamped....' In Trinidad, Indians adapted their knowledge of wet-rice cultivation to the Caroni and Nariva swamps, and the Oropouche lagoon; in Jamaica, 'the age-old traditional Indian skill in irrigation' was crucial to the revival of the sugar industry: 'until very lately the "water-man" was an East Indian' — J.C. Jha, 'The Indian Heritage in Trinidad', in *Calcutta to Caroni: The East Indians of Trinidad*, John La Guerre, (ed.), (London: Longman Caribbean, 1974), p.15; J.H. Parry and Philip Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies*, 3rd edition, (London: Macmillan, 1971), p.203.
 38. H.L. Drake-Brockman, *Azamgahr District Gazetteer* (Allahabad: Government Press, United Provinces, 1911), pp.32-33.

39. *Ibid.*, pp.33-34.
40. *Ibid.*, p.40: In Azamgahr, as in British Guiana, water was retained by 'the erection of low embankments round the fields, so that this form of irrigation depends solely on the monsoon, and is in no sense a precaution against drought, but rather the retention on the land of the seasonal rainfall.....'
41. *Ibid.*, p.21.
42. This account of rice husbandry in British Guiana is based on J.B. Harrison and F.A. Stockdale, 'Rice Cultivation', *Journal of the Board of Agriculture of British Guiana*, Vol.III, No.4, (1910), and a revised version of this article, published in the same journal as 'Rice Cultivation in British Guiana', Vol.XII, No.4, (1919); Edgar Beckett, 'Rice', *Journal of the Board of Agriculture of British Guiana*, Vol.XV, No.4, (1922), and his article with the same title, in the same journal, Vol.XX, No.1, (1927); [The Department of Agriculture], 'The A.B.C. of Rice Culture', *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.1, No.1, (1928); Douglas, *op. cit.*, [1930]; Guy E.L. de Weever, 'British Guiana Rice and India', *The Empire Review*, Vol.LVIII, No.394, (1933); J. Sydney Dash, 'The Rice Industry of British Guiana', *Empire Journal of Experimental Agriculture*, Vol.3, No.11, (1935); Ramnarine, *op. cit.*, [1977]; and interviews with several elderly Indian villagers at Nos. 45, 47, and 48 Villages, on the Corentyne, April 1986.
43. Harrison, *op. cit.*, [1926], p.120. One scholar, in accounting for the failure of many Government-sponsored land settlement schemes since 1880, argues that it 'can be attributed to the inadequacies of the hydrological works than to any other cause'. He adds: 'Despite the large amount of rainfall there is often insufficient moisture for optimum crop-growth conditions during the drier seasons (February through April and mid-August through mid-November) because of the high rate of evapotranspiration'. See James W. Vining, 'Site Development and Settlement Scheme Failure in Guyana', *Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol. 42, (1976), pp.92-93.
44. de Weever, *op. cit.*, [1933], p.305.
45. Interviews with several elderly Indian villagers at Nos. 45, 47, and 48 Villages, on the Corentyne, April 1986.
46. This term, like several associated with wet-rice husbandry in British Guiana, was derived from the United Provinces and Bihar. An account of the methods of rice cultivation in the U.P. and Bengal during the first decade of this century, needs virtually no revision for British Guiana in the 1920s. See *The Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol.III* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), pp.27-29; and de Weever, *op. cit.*, [1933].
47. Harrison and Stockdale, *op. cit.*, [1919], p.244.
48. de Weever, *op. cit.*, [1933], p.304.
49. Dash, *op. cit.*, [1935], p.239.
50. See note 45.
51. Douglas, *op. cit.*, [1930], p.30. He thought that this practice was 'the very best treatment' for the rice land during the fallow; but cautioned that cattle could do 'almost irreparable damage' to the banks of the side lines and drains when watering.
52. *Ibid.*, pp.26, 31.
53. de Weever, *op. cit.*, [1933], p.305.
54. Ramnarine, *op. cit.*, [1977], p.181.
55. See note 53.
56. Dash, *op. cit.*, [1935], pp. 239-240. For a detailed discussion and a critique of the system of milling in the colony, see Douglas, *op. cit.*, [1930], pp.38-44.
57. C.O. 114/154, Report on the Pomeroon District, 1915.
58. J.A. Luckhoo, 'The East Indian in British Guiana', *Timehri*, Vol.VI, (third series), (1919), p.59.
59. *Journal of the Board of Agriculture of British Guiana*, Vol.XIV, No.2, (1921), p.111.
60. Ramnarine, *op. cit.*, [1977], p.175.
61. C.O. 114/162, Report of the Department of Science and Agriculture, 1917.
62. Edgar Beckett, *op. cit.*, [1927], p.5: 'The real development of the industry is..... due entirely to the indomitable pluck and energy of the East Indian immigrants — in the face of all obstacles they plodded on....'
63. Ramnarine, *op. cit.*, [1977], p.176; Moohr, *op. cit.*, [1970], p.262.
64. Edgar Beckett, 'The Minor Industries', *Timehri*, Vol.II, (third series), (1912), p.75.
65. Ramnarine, *op. cit.*, [1977], p.177.
66. C.O. 114/154, Report of the Lands and Mines Department, 1915.
67. C.O. 114/158, Report of the Lands and Mines Department, 1916.
68. See note 65.
69. C.O. 114/167, Report of the Department of Science and Agriculture, 1918.
70. *Ibid.*

71. *The West India Committee Circular*, 30 May 1918.
72. Leader, *The Daily Argosy*, 7 April 1918.
73. See note 71.
74. Peter Ruhomon, *Centenary History of the East Indians in British Guiana, 1838-1938* (Georgetown, Guyana: the East Indians 150th Anniversary Committee, 1988 [1947]), p.180.
75. Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], p.256.
76. *The Daily Argosy*, 30 June 1920.
77. See note 75.
78. C.O. 111/631, Collet to Milner, secret, 7 June 1920, encl.; for more on the state of industrial unrest, especially among Black stevedores, see C.O. 111/631, Collet to Milner, no.338, 19 July 1920; C.O. 111/631, Collet to Milner, no.376, 14 August 1920.
79. Leader, *The Daily Chronicle*, 25 April 1920.
80. Leader, *The Daily Chronicle*, 28 October 1920.
81. *The Daily Argosy*, 20 June 1920.
82. See, for example, *The Daily Argosy*, 16 June 1920, for the arrest of several Indian hucksters who sold rice above the controlled price of 6^c per pint.
83. *The Daily Argosy*, 30 June, 4 July 1920.
84. *The Daily Argosy*, 31 October 1922.
85. *The Daily Argosy*, 21 August 1920.
86. *The Daily Argosy*, 25 August 1920.
87. *The Daily Argosy*, 22 August 1920.
88. *The Daily Argosy*, 28 August 1920. This view had been advanced earlier by Jugdeo Brothers, the largest rice growers in the Mahaicony District — *The Daily Chronicle*, 6 August 1920.
89. See note 87.
90. *The Daily Argosy*, 27 August 1920.
91. See note 88.
92. *Ibid.*
93. *The Daily Argosy*, 28 August, 11 September 1920. In the later issue, Viapree repeated that the Governor 'seems determined to crush the industry'; and added that this attitude would have a negative effect on the Colonisation Scheme.
94. C.O. 111/632, Collet to Milner, confidential, 8 October 1920, encl.
95. *The Daily Argosy*, 7 September 1920.
96. Leader, *The Daily Chronicle*, 10 June 1920.
97. *The Daily Chronicle*, 18 July 1920.
98. Viapree said that he was prepared to substantiate the report that the Governor had told the B.G.E.I.A. delegation 'Let the people starve'. He added that Collet told Kawall that 'if rice did not pay the East Indians, they could do something else'. Viapree concluded: 'What else could they do? The only alternative was to go back to the sugar estates'. — *The Daily Argosy*, 28 August 1920.
99. Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], pp.249-250.
100. *The West India Committee Circular*, 4 September 1919. Collet, along with Nunan, Hon. P.N. Browne, Hon. A.B. Brown, Rev. E.R.O. Robertson, and Dr. W. Hewley Wharton of the Colonisation Deputation, addressed the Committee. Collet reportedly said of British Guiana that 'There was enough land there, if only they had the people, to supply all the sugar required here [Britain], and it would be a good thing to get sugar exclusively from British sources'. He thanked the Committee for assisting West Indian soldiers over the previous three years, and for instilling some 'common sense' into people who 'in some respects, seemed to be deficient'. This was typical of Collet; his bigotry had a perverse impact on his administration of the colony.
101. *The Daily Argosy*, 15 August 1920.
102. *The Daily Argosy*, 23 June 1920.
103. Leader, *The Daily Chronicle*, 10 June 1920: 'Sir Wilfred Collet has actually declared that he can see evil in the expansion of the rice industry.... in place of the bread of a courageous policy of stimulation for the rice industry, we are given the barren store of timorous short-sightedness, with cramping regulations and ruined crops.....'
104. C.O. 111/632, Collet to Milner, confidential, 17 November 1920.
105. C.O. 114/167, 172, 177, Reports of the Department of Science and Agriculture, 1918, 1919, 1920.
106. A correspondent argued convincingly that the control of the price of milk at 8^c per pint was unjust; he, like the B.G.E.I.A., advocated an increase to 10^c. This, he believed, would allow for a small profit, while going a long way in

reducing milk adulteration. He explained: 'Before the war in 1914 and up to early 1915, previous to the increase in prices in foodstuffs, milk was selling.... for 6 cents per pint, when bran was selling for \$2.90 per bag, oilmeal for \$2.50, broken rice for \$1.20, and corn \$1.50 per bag — all feeds that are fed to cows, and today, when bran is selling for \$5.00, oilmeal between \$7.50 and \$9.00, broken rice between \$4 and \$5, corn between \$7.50 and \$9.00 per bag — over 200 per cent increase — milk is selling for 8 cents per pint, an increase of $33\frac{1}{3}$ per cent....' He saw price control as discriminatory to Indians: 'Do the powers that be realise that the two articles on which there is a maximum price at the present are both peculiar to the East Indian population of this colony, the growing of rice and the selling of milk. I am in favour of giving every man a chance, and allowing the law of supply and demand to regulate the price....' — 'Pure Milk' to the Editor, *The Daily Argosy*, 26 September 1920.

107. See note 105.
108. *The Daily Argosy*, 11, 25 November 1920.
109. See note 104.
110. *The Daily Argosy*, 26 November 1920.
111. *The Daily Argosy*, 24 August 1920.
112. Leader, *The Daily Argosy*, 5 October 1920: 'Rice has been grown extensively in the colony principally on the expectation that a large margin of profit would be made on the export trade.... at the present prices which are being paid for padi, it is economically impossible to produce a bag of rice for \$9.75, [the controlled price]....'
113. Leader, *The Daily Chronicle*, 28 October 1920.
114. *The Daily Argosy*, 30 November 1920.
115. *The Daily Argosy*, 16 January 1921.
116. *The Daily Argosy*, 21 January 1921.
117. *The Daily Argosy*, 30 January 1921.
118. *The Daily Argosy*, 4, 12 February 1921.
119. *The Daily Argosy*, 6 March 1921.
120. Leader, *The Daily Argosy*, 13 March 1921. Commenting on the intransigence of the Governor in the legislature and his 'immovable disposition' on the rice issue, it observed: 'If some incidents of an uncompromising nature have at times occurred, they may be fairly attributed, in large measure, to the egotistical and self-sufficient pose which His Excellency has invariably adopted'.
121. *The Daily Argosy*, 26 October 1920.
122. See note 120. The paper added: '... his views are coloured and conceived by the principles which animate the Colonial Office without due regard to the wishes of the people who pay the revenue'.
123. Leader, *The Daily Argosy*, 29 January 1921: '... we shall not be over-stating matters if we say that the industry is being slowly strangled.... If some concession is not granted exporters, and immediately, a fine industry may be marred beyond redemption, and the colony itself may receive a set-back from which it will find it most difficult to recover'.
124. C.O. 111/638, Collet to Churchill, no.175, 4 April 1921, encl.
125. C.O. 111/638, Collet to Churchill, no.197, 12 April 1921, encl.
126. *The West India Committee Circular*, 26 May, 9 June 1921.
127. See The Director of Science and Agriculture [J.B. Harrison] and R. Ward, 'Memorandum on the Cost of the Cultivation of Rice', *Journal of the Board of Agriculture of British Guiana*, Vol.XIV, No.2, (1921). They argued: 'Our experience at the Botanic Gardens in 1920 in cultivating rice on lands not hitherto used for its cultivation, indicated that at the present high price of labour it is no longer a business proposition to lay out new land for rice-planting unless a yield of at least 25 bags per acre be assured and the selling price of rice be not less than \$11.50 per bag'(p.85). The Department of Agriculture used hired labour; most Indian rice growers used family labour; this enabled them to squeeze a margin of profit.
128. *The Daily Argosy*, 14 April 1921.
129. *The Daily Argosy*, 22 April 1921.
130. See note 125.
131. *The West India Committee Circular*, 26 May 1921.
132. Leader, *The Daily Chronicle*, 12 March 1921.
133. C.O. 111/638, Collet to Churchill, no.175, 4 April 1921.
134. C.O. 111/644, Collet to Churchill, no.300, 31 July 1922.
135. See note 125. In their memorial to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, dated 7 April 1921, the Chamber of Commerce outlined Collet's rice policy most perceptively: 'The principle involved is whether the Rice Industry is to be used solely to support the colony and export is only to be allowed when large visible surplus stocks are on hand, or whether the law of supply and demand is to govern the Industry as it did before the war without any disadvantage whatever to the local population. The present policy seemingly is to accumulate a large stock in the colony, to prevent export, and not even to restrict imports in case of a slump in values of Indian rice, as is the case at the present period,

thus creating an artificially low price for the immediate benefit of the consumer, at the expense of those interested in the Industry.'

136. *The Daily Argosy*, 14 April 1921.
137. *Ibid.* (Leader).
138. See note 124.
139. *The Daily Argosy*, 24 March 1921.
140. *The Daily Argosy*, 26 May 1921.
141. *Ibid.*; C.O. 111/638, Collet to Churchill, no.281, 30 May 1921, encl.
142. Leader, *The Daily Chronicle*, 1 May 1921.
143. *The West India Committee Circular*, 23 June 1921.
144. C.O. 111/639, Clementi to Churchill, confidential, 1 July 1921. It is noteworthy that Clementi was determined that the lifting of the embargo should not be seen as a reversal of Collet's rice policy, although it was a transparent repudiation of it. He wrote: 'Sir Wilfred Collet has expressed emphatically and on repeated occasions the view that it would be unwise to remove the prohibition on the export of rice before next October, and the members of the Executive Council are anxious that no overt action should be taken which might be construed as a reversal of Sir Wilfred Collet's policy But for the very strong views on this matter taken by Sir Wilfred Collet, the Executive Council would have no hesitation in advising me on the 28th inst. to cancel prohibition unconditionally, nor should I have been unwilling to accept this advice..... in the opinion of the Executive Council, it would be better to run the risk of a possible shortage in the rice supply of the colony, seeing that there is an abundance of other foodstuffs available, than to face the certainty of further injury to the rice industry and the trade of the colony as a whole.....' (emphasis added).
145. C.O. 111/639, Clementi to Churchill, confidential, 19 July 1921: 'I may say that with each week that passes the situation of the rice farmers and rice merchants becomes more critical'.
146. C.O. 111/639, Churchill to Clementi, telegram, 23 July 1921.
147. C.O. 111/638, Collet to Churchill, no.224, 22 April 1921. Collet definitely had no interest in seeing the colony re-established as an exporter of rice to the West Indies. That cheap rice should be available to local consumers had become an obsession: he brooked no argument that the unnecessarily prolonged embargo was destroying the industry. In May 1921, he informed the Colonial Office: 'It will..... be necessary to continue to control export, unless the West Indies can import freely from India and the East. Given free import from the East, I do not think it will be necessary to maintain the rice control.....' — C.O. 111/638, Collet to Churchill, no.281, 30 May 1921.
148. *The Daily Argosy*, 27 July 1921. *The Daily Chronicle*, Leader, 29 July 1921 commented: 'The lesson that has to be learnt now, by those who supported Sir Wilfred Collet in his unsound economics, is that cheap food for the people is not the only aim of statesmanship: the greater aim has always been and should be to place the people in a position to buy food — be it dear or cheap.....'
149. C.O. 114/182, Report of the Department of Science and Agriculture, 1921.
150. See note 126.
151. The local retail price had slumped to 24 cents per gallon in 1921; in 1919 it was 56 to 60 cents per gallon — Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], pp.256, 262; *The Daily Argosy*, 19 August 1921.
152. *The Daily Argosy*, 1 October 1921.
153. See note 149.
154. C.O. 111/640, Clementi to Churchill, no.515, 12 October 1921. Clementi noted that 'the rice farmers are now in great distress..... unless they are assisted financially much of the present rice crop will be lost... owing to past and present uncertainties in respect of the rice industry and to the large stocks still on hand from 1920, neither the merchants, nor the Royal, nor the Colonial Bank will advance money to help the rice farmers'. The enabling legislation for the Government loan of \$150,000 is in C.O. 113/16, Ordinance 2 of 1922: The Rice-Growers Loans Ordinance.
155. *The Daily Argosy*, 9 November 1921. Edwin Bacchus, the Chairman of the Mahaica Village Council, said that 'fully 50 per cent' of the crops in the area were ruined by the heavy rains: '.... while the rice farmers are grateful for the assistance rendered by the Government..... such help came too late'. — *The Daily Argosy*, 25 December 1921.
156. *The Daily Argosy*, 9 November 1921.
157. C.O. 111/643, Collet to Churchill, no.22, 10 January 1922.
158. C.O. 111/643, Collet to Churchill, no.164, 28 April 1922.
159. Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], p.256.
160. See note 157.
161. *The Daily Argosy*, 1 January 1922.
162. *The Daily Argosy*, 27 July 1922.
163. C.O. 111/644, Collet to Churchill, no.300, 31 July 1922.
164. Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], p.250.

165. See note 163.
166. C.O. 114/184, Report of the Department of Science and Agriculture, 1922.
167. See note 159.
168. J.B. Harrison to the Board of Agriculture, 17 September 1923, *Journal of the Board of Agriculture of British Guiana*, Vol.XVI, No.4, (1923), p.194.
169. *The Daily Argosy*, 2 July 1922.
170. See note 157.
171. *The Daily Argosy*, 25, 30 June 1922; Ashton Chase, *A History of Trade Unionism in Guyana, 1900 to 1961* (Ruimveldt, Guyana: New Guyana Co. Ltd., [1964]), p.60.
172. C.O. 111/656, A.A. Thorne to J.H. Thomas, (Secretary of State for the Colonies), 6 March 1924: 'Memorandum on British Guiana'.
173. Address from the Elective Members of the Combined Court of the Colony of British Guiana to Major E.F.L. Wood, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, [February 1922].
174. W.H. Mathews, 'Plantain: Its Cultivation, Disease, and Insect Pests', *Journal of the Board of Agriculture*, Vol.XVI, No.1, (1923), p.23.
175. In 1927, Sampson underlined the virtual impossibility of maintaining the crucial back dams in the villages: 'The back dam in areas where there is swamp forest frequently gives trouble as it is quite common for the "pegasse" here to be several feet thick and water all the time seeps through, weakening the dams and trench banks. In the rainy season also water from the back has a way of breaking through and inundating the holding. The consoling feature of such labour is that if the owner can keep his health and can stand the cost of successful empoldering, he is in possession of an extremely rich piece of land. In the case of big cane estates..... such work has been feasible on an extensive scale, but for the small man with a grant of a few acres and without any capital but his will to work, this empoldering frequently breaks him both physically and financially' — *op. cit.*, [1927], p.10.
176. See note 31.
177. As early as 1882, the legendary sugar planter, William Russell, dramatised the depressing transformation of the coastal landscape, during the rainy and dry seasons: '.... in the wet season..... the pasture lands have the appearance of velvet. Perhaps no finer stretch of grazing ground is to be seen in any country than the fine rolling sward with just sufficient clumps of trees to form shelter.... with fine, fat, sleek cattle luxuriating in the fattening herbage... Let the same journey be taken after three months of drought, and what a transformation has taken place! The velvet-like grass is replaced by stunted dried-up herbage.... at every turn cattle are seen in all stages of exhaustion, scrambling through partially dried-up trenches in search of the dregs of muddy water, while in many of these sticky sloughs the old and weak cows are making their final struggle. Carrion crows are seen luxuriating on the dead carcasses, and the well-picked bones of not a few dot the plain..... I have no hesitation in attributing the want of general success in cattle-raising in this Colony to the great mortality which takes place every dry season'. - 'Farming and Irrigation', *Timehri*, Vol.I, [first series], (1882), pp.90-91.
178. In 1882, the progressive manager of Plantation Skeldon, J.S. Blake, observed that Indian villages between Spring Garden (No.75) and Benab, on the Corentyne, had little or no drainage; and he bemoaned the fact that 'Not the slightest notice has been taken of this thriving population, and nothing has been done to assist it. The land is at the mercy of bush-water in a heavy season; the nearest dispensary is in New Amsterdam some 50 miles away; there are no schools except a small hut at Spring Garden.....' — 'A Plea for the Encouragement of the Lesser Industries', *Timehri*, Vol.I, [first series], (1882), p.123.
179. *The Daily Argosy*, 14 March 1920.
180. This is documented in several issues of *The Daily Argosy* in 1920-1921: 21, 25 April 1920, 2, 16, 26 May 1920, 20 June 1920, 2, 3, 4 July 1920, 8, 10, 26 August 1920, 30 October 1920, 4 November 1920, 28 May, 8 June, 28 July, 6 August 1921.
181. *The Commercial Review*, Vol.I, No.9, March 1919.
182. *The Commercial Review*, Vol.II, No.1, August 1919.
183. *The Daily Argosy*, 25 April 1920.
184. *Ibid.*
185. *The Daily Argosy*, 21 April 1920.
186. *Ibid.*
187. *Ibid.*
188. See note 183.
189. *Ibid.*
190. Leader, *The Daily Chronicle*, 25 April 1920.
191. *The Daily Argosy*, 16 May 1920.
192. *The Daily Argosy*, 2 May 1920; see also *The Daily Argosy*, 3 July 1920.

193. *The Daily Argosy*, 26 May 1920.
194. *The Daily Argosy*, 18 June 1920.
195. *The Daily Argosy*, 2 July 1920.
196. *Ibid.*
197. *Ibid.*
198. *The Daily Argosy*, 10 August 1920.
199. *The Daily Argosy*, 30 July 1920.
200. Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], p.222. These repatriates took \$249,710 in cash, and jewellery valued at \$41,618.
201. A regular contributor to *The Daily Argosy* observed on 4 July 1920: 'Twenty years ago many a sugar planter thought that it was his bounden duty to do all in his power to throttle the rice industry.... Everything was done by some planters to prevent their people growing rice. Today, one of the attractions offered to labour by sugar authorities is irrigated and drained rice lands. Rice growing had to come. So also rice growing by means of properly irrigated areas is bound to come soon or later'. This optimistic correspondent overlooked the fact that the area under rice on the estates was restricted to between 9 and 10,000 acres; the planters were less obtrusive in their opposition to the expansion of 'minor' industries; but their capacity to influence the colonial administration was not diminished.
202. C.O. 111/631, Collet to Milner, no.270, 11 June 1920, encl.: Memorandum on Scientific Research and Economic Exploration in the Colony, dated 6 September 1919.
203. C.O. 111/631, Collet to Milner, no.270, 11 June 1920.
204. See note 202.
205. *The Daily Argosy*, 3 October 1920 reported on the effects of the drought: 'The picture is a pathetic one. Rice areas parched out of existence by the relentless sun; cattle which during the rainy season were sleek and fat, grazing on luscious grasses and drinking their fill, are worn to skin and bone, or have already laid themselves down and dried. Soon the greedy vultures make short work of these and nothing remains but the poor bones bleached white by the pitiless sun. Yet not far off will be found inexhaustable supplies of water which by irrigation or conservation would turn the pastures into smiling areas of fresh green grass, and acres and acres would be laughing with their crops of rice. One wonders when the lesson will be learnt'. The correspondent said that drainage and irrigation should be made a 'colonial' question. See note 177, for William Russell's 1882 account of the effects of droughts.
206. E.R.O. Robertson, 'Five Minute Chat with Farmers', *Journal of the Board of Agriculture of British Guiana*, Vol.XIII, No.4, (1920), pp.209-210.
207. *The Daily Argosy*, 3 November 1920.
208. E.R.O. Robertson, 'Five Minute Chat with Farmers', *Journal of the Board of Agriculture of British Guiana*, Vol.XIV, No.1, (1921), pp.57-58.
209. *The Daily Chronicle*, 14 January 1921.
210. Leader, *The Daily Chronicle*, 3 December 1920.
211. Leader, *The Daily Chronicle*, 16 January 1921.
212. Leader, *The Daily Chronicle*, 19 February 1921.
213. *The Daily Argosy*, 24 April 1921.
214. *The Daily Chronicle*, 26 May 1921.
215. Leader, *The Daily Chronicle*, 29 May 1921.
216. Leader, *The Daily Argosy*, 1 May 1921.
217. *The Daily Argosy*, 28 July 1921, 6 August 1921.
218. *The Daily Argosy*, 30 November 1921.
219. See note 163.
220. C.O. 114/182, Report of the Department of Science and Agriculture, 1921.
221. See note 163.
222. *Ibid. The Daily Argosy*, 14 October 1922 noted: 'The acreage under cultivation this year is very much less than last year or the previous year.... the prices have declined considerably in sympathy with the lower quotation for Eastern rice, and it is feared that any advance in price cannot be anticipated for many months to come. The price of rice today is between \$5.25 and \$5.50'.
223. C.O. 111/644, Collet to Churchill, No.333, 16 August 1922.
224. C.O. 111/644, Collet to Churchill, No.342, 25 August 1922.
225. See note 171. Collet's support for the drainage of selected areas probably stemmed from a strong desire to have his administration extended; his term of office was coming to an end; he faced retirement. However, E.R.O. Robertson was not impressed: 'He is fighting a forlorn cause, and he knows he is beaten. Today he is in a frightful hurry.... to get drainage, and the day after he will be as busy over irrigation. I am not enamoured of His Excellency's tactics.' — *The Daily Argosy*, 5 August 1922.

226. Churchill to Collet, 3 October 1922 in C.O. 111/644, no.333, 16 August 1922.
227. C.O. 111/646, Collet to Devonshire, 2 November 1922.
228. *Ibid.*, R.A. Wiseman, minute, 10 January 1923.
229. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 21 July 1926.
230. J. Van Sertima, 'The Rice Industry: A Remarkable Expansion', *The Daily Chronicle*, 5 September 1919.
231. See note 163.
232. C.O. 111/645, Collet to Churchill, no.380, 14 September 1922.
233. See notes 183, 229.
234. See note 218.
235. E.P. Minett, 'The Health Problem in British Guiana', *Journal of the Board of Agriculture of British Guiana*, Vol XIII, No.1, (1920), p.21.
236. *The Daily Argosy*, 28 May 1921, 8 June 1921. The latter issue noted: '.... he had a fixed policy, and given his way the coastlands would have been drained and irrigated from one end to the other..... He had one matter and one matter only at heart. He was convinced that the Corentyne would progress if the people were given facilities to drain their lands when necessary, and he preached that gospel to the Administration in season and out of season. If the subject for discussion was sanitation or education, Mr Santos continued to reason that with drainage and irrigation, sanitation could be improved, or that the people would be better able to educate their children if they had what he rightly described as the two great necessities'.
237. *The Daily Argosy*, 11 January 1923.
238. C.O. 114/184, Report of the Department of Science and Agriculture, 1922; Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], p.256.
239. C.O. 111/685/75038, Part II, [1930], encl.: 'Buy Demerara Rice' [pamphlet issued by the Department of Agriculture, 1930], pp.6, 8.
240. Beckett, *op. cit.*, [1927], p.5.
241. Leader, *The New Daily Chronicle*, 3 June 1928.
242. *The Daily Argosy*, 5 August 1923.
243. *The Daily Argosy*, 1 July 1925.
244. *The Daily Argosy*, 26 August 1923.
245. *The Daily Argosy*, 2 October 1923.
246. C.O. 114/187, Report of the Department of Science and Agriculture, 1923.
247. *The Daily Argosy*, 14 October 1923.
248. *The Daily Argosy*, 1 April 1924 — The correspondent added: 'This is just the reverse of what takes place after the rainy weather sets in for 2 or 3 weeks. Practically the whole coast, with the exception of the lands owned and controlled by the planters, is under water, and houses are flooded. Sometimes these have to be abandoned'.
249. *The Daily Argosy*, 27 April 1924.
250. *The Daily Argosy*, 14 October 1923, 30 March 1924.
251. See Beckett, *op. cit.*, [1922]; *op. cit.*, [1927].
252. Beckett, *op. cit.*, [1922], p.214.
253. Beckett, *op. cit.*, [1927], pp.5-6; *Journal of the Board of Agriculture*, Vol.XII, No.2, (1919), p.248.
254. C.O. 114/192, Report of the Department of Science and Agriculture, 1924; C.O. 114/207, Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1929.
255. In 1929, Douglas observed, after visiting the Essequibo Coast and the Essequibo Islands (Tiger Island and Wakenaam): '.... the impression left on our minds by the..... visit was one of distinct encouragement in respect of the desire to adopt, whenever possible, improved methods both of cultivation, and treatment after harvesting..... Tiger Island is now practically given over to rice cultivation which, from reports received, is doing well and giving excellent yields. We also stopped at Wakenaam Island, where rice was being loaded on to the steamer. Once an important sugar centre, this island is being gradually given over to rice.' — Douglas, *op. cit.*, [1930], p.28.
256. Hampton Court ceased grinding in 1936; no sugar cane was cultivated after that year in Essequibo. Plantation Marionville, on the island of Wakenaam, ceased operation in 1930. In 1910, 6,471 acres were under cane on the Essequibo Coast; this had declined to 5,150 and 890 acres in 1920 and 1931 respectively. See Editorial: 'Rice Development', *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.X, No.1, (1939), p.1.
257. The Agricultural Superintendent of Essequibo observed, in 1934, that the closure of the sugar estates on the Essequibo Coast, and the remoteness of this district from the West Coast Demerara and Georgetown, greatly reduced the options available to the farmers: 'Farmers are entirely dependent on their padi crop for a livelihood. There is no out-of-season employment, and little sale for other agricultural produce as everyone is self-supplying. Transport of produce to Georgetown is out of the question, owing to the distance and cost'. Farmers on the islands of Leguan and Wakenaam, however, apart from growing rice, also produced milk, vegetables, and ground provisions for the market in

- Georgetown and the sugar estates of West Coast Demerara. Proximity to the latter also allowed them to work there during periods when rice was not being cultivated. — A. de K. Frampton, 'The Essequibo Autumn Rice Crop', *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.V, No.3, (1934), p.215.
258. Douglas, *op. cit.*, pp.21-24.
 259. *The Daily Argosy*, 20 March 1925; C.O. 111/661, Rodwell to Amery, no.327, 17 July 1926, encl.
 260. *The Daily Argosy*, 27 March 1925.
 261. *The Daily Argosy*, 28 June, 8 October 1925; *The West India Committee Circular*, 8 October 1925.
 262. C.O. 111/661, Rodwell to Amery, No.327, 17 July 1926, encl.: The Director of Public Works, Report on the Drought, 1926.
 263. C.O. 114/195, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1925.
 264. *The Daily Argosy*, 13 December 1925.
 265. See note 262.
 266. *The Daily Argosy* 21 March 1926. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 5 February 1926, reported that at Marionville, Wakenaam 'Straying cattle in quest of water have been doing much damage to the rice fields, and have been the means of creating some little disturbance among East Indian rice growers.....'
 267. *The Daily Argosy*, 25 July 1926.
 268. *The Daily Argosy*, 7, 21 March 1926.
 269. See note 262.
 270. See *The Daily Argosy*, 6, 9, 11, 15, 16 June, and 7 July 1926.
 271. *The Daily Argosy*, 9 June 1926.
 272. *The Daily Argosy*, 16 June 1926.
 273. C.O. 114/200, C.O. 114/204, Reports of the Department of Science and Agriculture 1926 and 1927.
 274. C.O. 114/204, Report of the Director of Public Works, 1927. For details of this drainage scheme, see C.O. 111/658, O.A.G. (ag.) to Wiseman, s.o., 13 November 1925, encl.: Memorandum on Coastal Drainage and Irrigation Schemes and the Provision of a Pure Water Supply.... prepared for..... Kunwar Maharaj Singh..... Indian Delegate to British Guiana, [1925]; C.O. 111/661, Rodwell to Amery, no.294, 1 July 1926, encl: Director of Public Works, Report on the Progress of Drainage and Irrigation Schemes and the Provision of Pure Water Supply...., July to December 1925; C.O. 111/662, Rodwell to Amery, no.507, 4 November 1926, encl.: Director of Public Works, Report....., January to June 1926. The inclusion of 'Irrigation' in the title of these reports was a distortion.
 275. *The Daily Argosy*, 15 June 1926. The correspondent noted that while J.P. Santos advocated both drainage *and* irrigation, Joseph Eleazar, the then Financial Representative for Berbice, argued that drainage should be given priority. He felt that the latter had been vindicated with the setting in of the rainy weather. It was as if the devastating droughts in the colony were a mirage.
 276. *The Daily Argosy*, 8 June 1927.
 277. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 9 February 1926.
 278. Leader, *The New Daily Chronicle*, 19 May 1926.
 279. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 26 September 1926.
 280. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 9 February 1926.
 281. *The Daily Argosy*, 17 August 1926.
 282. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 21 July 1926.
 283. *Ibid.*
 284. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 26 September 1926.
 285. Sampson, *op. cit.*, [1927], p.14.
 286. *Ibid.*, p.8.
 287. *Ibid.*, p.16.
 288. Leader, *The Daily Argosy*, 26 January 1928.
 289. *Report of the West Indian Sugar Commission* (Lord Olivier, chairman) (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1930), p.99.
 290. *Ibid.*, p.100: The Commission conceded that the prospects for the industry were encouraging, providing the rice-lands were drained and irrigated. They noted: '.... the physical conditions of the large area suitable for profitable rice production imperatively need to be dealt with by putting the system of drainage and irrigation in order.... On properly-managed rice-lands in British Guiana the yield of rice is extremely satisfactory..... 1 ton to 1½ tons per acre were frequently obtained, compared with a yield of about ½ ton per acre in India. The soils and natural conditions are decidedly advantageous and there is no room for question that, properly dealt with, British Guiana can find in her rice industry a very valuable and increasing source of wealth....'

291. C.O. 111/657, Thomson to Amery, no.243, 27 May 1925, encl.
292. C.O. 114/204, Report of the Director of Public Works, 1927.
293. C.O. 114/207, Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1929.
294. C.O. 114/200, Report of the Local Government Board, 1926.
295. See note 293.
296. *Ibid.*
297. See note 257.
298. 'Address by the Director of Agriculture to the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce on the Rice Situation', [21 June 1929], *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.II, No.3, (1929), pp.173-174.
299. In a speech to the Combined Court, shortly after his arrival in the colony, he criticised the Government for the paucity of information on crops other than sugar and rice; and he deplored the niggardly sum allocated to the Department of Agriculture. He said: 'It is not sufficient to say that we are a country of unlimited possibilities; it is essential that we should be able to provide prospective settlers and those already on the land with specific data on the kinds of crops to be grown, where to grow them, how to grow them, and if possible something of the costs and profits likely to accrue..... A far-sighted policy is imperative and its prosecution hinges on an adequately equipped Department of Agriculture... The expenditure on the Department.... is roughly a little over 1¹/₂ per cent of the total expenditure of the colony.... A Department charged with carrying out a policy with which the whole prosperity of the colony is so closely bound up, being allotted 1¹/₂ per cent of the total expenditure presented in this year's Estimates!' See 'Address by the Director of Agriculture in the Combined Court on January 10, 1928', *The Agriculture Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.I, No.1, (1928), pp.16-20.
300. The new Governor, F.G. Guggisberg, also appreciated the contribution of the Indians. In a message to the agriculturalists of the colony on 17 December 1928, he remarked: 'If British Guiana is ever to become a prosperous country, with a population and trade proportionate to its area, it will only be by following the principle of giving the people a fair opportunity of owning and farming their own lands..... In view of the importance of agriculture to this country it is regrettable to notice the disfavour in which it appears to be held by the inhabitants of African descent. What can be done is shown by the success of British East Indians. If the people of African descent in British Guiana do not want to be left behind they will have to wake up to the fact that the vocation of farming is just as honourable as that of a lawyer, doctor or clerk..... it is certainly a more profitable occupation....' See *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.I, No.4, (1928). Guggisberg was instrumental in the establishment of the Bush Lot Land Settlement Scheme in Essequibo; but this progressive Governor had to leave the colony in 1929 because of poor health; he died shortly afterwards. For a favourable assessment of this Scheme, see C.F. Andrews, 'The New Colonisation Scheme at Anna Regina', *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.II, No.1., (1929).
301. From 1928, *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, carried numerous articles on a range of agricultural topics: rice, cattle on the coastland, minerals in the pasture grasses, animal diseases, the paddy bug, hints on coconut and coffee cultivation, etc.
302. Ordinance 18 of 1930. See Editorial: 'Grading and the Rice Industry', *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.III, No.3, (1930), pp.131-133.
303. C.O. 114/205A, Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1928.
304. C.O. 114/207, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1929; C.O. 114/207, Report of the Postmaster General, 1929.
305. See note 45.
306. *The Daily Argosy*, 14 June 1929.
307. Leader, *The New Daily Chronicle*, 3 July 1926.
308. Raymond T. Smith, 'Ethnic Difference and Peasant Economy in British Guiana', in *Capital, Saving and Credit in Peasant Societies*, Raymond Firth and B.S. Yamey, (eds.), (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), p.317.
309. See note 45. The celebration of Hindu festivals, such as *Diwali* and *Holi* (*Phagwah*), and the Muslim festival, *Eid*, gave community leaders opportunities to address large gatherings on a variety of secular issues, while always underlining the need for Indian unity. Speaking at the conclusion of a seven-day Hindu religious function (*yajna*) on 10 May 1924, at Cane Grove, Mahaica, Sookdeo Persaud of the Rice Growers' Association observed that 'the great feature of the ceremony was the unity between Muslims and Hindus'. He deplored the neglect of female education and the custom of early marriage; and referred 'to the part played by Indian women in politics and religion, when India was the cradle of the human race'; and impressed on his audience the necessity for them to send their daughters to school — *The Daily Argosy*, 31 May 1924. See *The Daily Argosy*, 2 November 1924, for the celebration of *Diwali* at Triumph, East Coast Demerara.
310. Mohammad A. Rauf, *Indian Village in Guyana: A Study of Cultural Change and Ethnic Identity* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), p.103.
311. *Ibid.*, p.102: Rauf argues: 'Religions have played a major role in the development of an aggregate of values among East Indians The status of the father in the East Indian family has been reinforced by the religious expressions of his role. Even though we find that the older inter-family patterns of economic co-operation have been disturbed in the process of adjustment to the local Guyanese situation, the father continues to be the source of authority and discipline in the family unit'. He adds that non-violence, sacrifice, self-discipline, and thrift are among the ideals constantly preached at religious functions.

312. See note 45.
313. C.O. 114/195, Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1925.
314. de Weever, *op. cit.*, [1933], p.305.
315. *The Daily Argosy*, 1 July 1925.
316. See note 45.
317. Gerad Tikasingh, 'Social Change in the Emerging East Indian Community in Late 19th Century Trinidad', *Journal of Caribbean Studies*, Vol.1, Nos.2 and 3, (1980), p.129.
318. R.T. Smith and Chandra Jayawardena, 'Marriage and the Family among East Indians in British Guiana', *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol.8, No.4, (1959), p.341.
319. *Ibid.*
320. *The Daily Argosy*, 15 July 1923.
321. Leader, *The Daily Argosy*, 3 January 1929.
322. C.O. 114/182, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1921.
323. *The Daily Argosy*, 24 May 1921.
324. C.O. 114/192, Report of the Department of Science and Agriculture, 1924.
325. In 1917, the Immigration Agent General estimated that Indians owned 75 per cent of the cattle on the coastland. (This was probably a bit conservative). — C.O. 114/162, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1917.
326. J.B. Harrison, 'Memorandum on the Falling Off in the Number of Cattle since the Year 1916', *Journal of the Board of Agriculture of British Guiana*, Vol.XIV, No.2, (1921), p.231.
327. Major T. Bone, 'Cattle in the Coastal Belt', *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.III, No.1, (1930), pp.35-36. For the merits and limitations of some of the principal grasses found on the coastal savannahs, and recommendations for remedying deficiencies of lime, phosphate, and nitrogen, see R.R. Follet-Smith, 'Minerals in the Pasture Grasses of British Guiana', *loc. cit.*, pp.39-44.
328. In 1930, the Small Farmers Committee, appointed by the Government, reported: '... it would be possible for a single peasant to rear 100 or 200 head of cattle, provided he possessed the means of pasturing them. Many such small cattle-owners now exist on the upper East Coast [Demerara] and West Coast Berbice districts. The large numbers of cattle which now roam the coastlands are made up of small lots belonging to different small owners the economic condition of these small cattle-owners is much better than that of those peasants who confine their attention to agriculture'. The Committee believed that the export trade in cattle could be developed; and recommended the draining and irrigating of all pastures on the East Coast Demerara, West Coast Berbice, and the Corentyne Coast. See C.O. 114/209, Legislative Council Paper No.9 of 1931.
329. See note 45.
330. H.D. Huggins, 'Coconut Cultivation in British Guiana', *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.III, No.3, (1930), pp.164-165. See also J. Sydney Dash, 'Coconut Cultivation', *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.II, No.1, (1929), pp.14-16, for a discussion of soil types and the yield of coconut.
331. See Huggins, *op. cit.*, [1930], p.173, for the popular method of producing coconut oil. He observed: 'It is crude, not economical, and the expression of oil is extremely low. A good grade of oil is produced, but the production costs are so high that there is little encouragement to increase the present output'.
332. Interviews with older Indian residents of the East Canje District, Berbice, July 1986.
333. 'Message from His Excellency the Governor to the Agriculturalists of the Colony', *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, Vol.III, No.3, (1930), p.130.
334. C.O. 114/207, Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1929.
335. Sampson, *op. cit.*, [1927], p.13.
336. See note 332.
337. *Ibid.*
338. D.W.D. Comins, *Note on Emigration from India to British Guiana* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1893), p.32.
339. Leo A. Despres, *Cultural Pluralism and Nationalist Politics in British Guiana* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1967), p.98.
340. *Ibid.* Despres adds: '... the African tends to perceive the East Indian as a miserly sort of fellow who devotes all of his time and energy to work in order to accumulate wealth The fact of the matter is that the East Indian must devote considerable time and energy in order to practise his religion. Saving money is a necessary part of Hinduism'.
341. C.O. 111/689/75141 [1930], C.F. Andrews, 'Impressions of British Guiana', (mimeo), p.75.
342. *Ibid.*, p.39.

CHAPTER 4

THE RISE OF AN INDIAN MIDDLE CLASS IN BRITISH GUIANA

The East Indian ... remains in the colony because he makes a better living here than anywhere else ... Whatsoever there is of religion in him operates upon his mind in exactly the same way as religion did on the old Puritans of North America: 'Whilst they neglected not religion they gave full play to their commercial instincts'. This is a characteristic, comparatively speaking, that is sadly lacking in the descendants of the African slaves. There is too great reliance upon Providence — thanks to their advisers after Freedom — and too little upon their own business instincts and initiative.

J. Sydney McArthur, 'Our People', *Timehri*, Vol. 2 (third series), 1912, pp. 26-27.

To the East Indians we owe in the past the continuance of our sugar industry, the establishment of the rice industry, on a scale never contemplated before, the gradual development of the cattle and milk industry, and the example of the habit of continuous and methodical work coupled with severe thrift and sound business capacity we believe the hand of God will be with us here in our efforts at Christianising our heathen East Indians. The manner in which the East Indian in this colony sticks to the religion of his forefathers compels a deep respect. As people who can cling fast as they have to their faith and to the forms and ceremonies of their religions as they have done, will assuredly, if rightly taught and if truly converted, become splendid examples to us Western Christians.

Edgar Beckett, Address at Meeting of the Church of England's Missionary Work among East Indians, New Amsterdam, *The Daily Chronicle*, 16 May 1919.

What we are bound to acknowledge is, that by his success the East Indian has made a mark, commanding high respect for his section; and that this is certainly something to be envied by creoles to a degree impelling them to like activities.

F.H. Ridley, [Black correspondent], to the Editor, *The Daily Chronicle*, 27 May 1919.

I am fully aware of the excellent work that the East Indians have done in this country. It is a very great encouragement to see that in spite of the many evils, many drawbacks, many difficulties, the old system of immigration, that so many East Indians have proved themselves superior to the circumstances and have done well in this country.

Sir Gordon Guggisberg, Governor of British Guiana, *The New Daily Chronicle*, 9 November 1928.

I

The Growth of Indian Entrepreneurship: Rice, Cattle, and Commerce

The emergence, in any society, of a middle class, whether in business or the professions, is a major development socially and economically. In a plural society, where one's allegiance often goes instinctively towards one's own ethnic or religious group, it is a factor of even greater significance.¹ It is a barometer of a particular section's progress; it sustains a sense of achievement and suggests possibilities for advancement; it establishes patterns

of behaviour considered worthy of emulation by the less privileged; it encourages effort. The middle class sets standards, which, in an immigrant society such as British Guiana, constitute viable strategies of adaptation — a reworking of a particular community's cultural and economic traditions to gain maximum benefit from the new environment.² The middle class is a bearer of progress. The rise of an Indian middle class in British Guiana, a process already advanced by the 1920s, was an achievement for the Indian community as a whole. As C.F. Andrews observed in 1938, on the centenary of the arrival of Indians in the colony, 'the enterprise of the Indian community has given them a high standing among the diverse population ...'³

But the rise of an Indian middle class was a painful process, often eliciting ambivalence in its community or origin, and resentment in the broader host society. It spawned references to some of the less savoury aspects of its ascendancy. Attention was drawn on several occasions to the apparently unscrupulous behaviour of Indian landlords and merchants towards their compatriots, who were their tenants or employees.⁴ In October 1921, after Governor Collet had nearly ruined the rice industry, the secretary of the Rice Growers' Association, Sookdeo Persaud, caustically deprecated what he saw as the unconscionable response of some Indian rice millers to the plight of the small Indian rice farmers. He indicted them for withholding empty bags and storage space in their mills, while refusing to certify farmers' applications for an emergency loan, offered by the Government to expedite the harvesting of the autumn crop. Persaud condemned the attitude of the millers: 'The cruelty of savages is not equal to the cruelty of the Indians who think it their duty to distress their fellow Indians. These are the kinds of Indians who create a furore about the ill-treatment of Indians in British Guiana, and I trust when the Indian delegates arrive, these loyal Indians who are supposed to maintain the tradition of India, will be true to themselves and verify my statement The system of charging rent for land to grow padi, and the high interest charged on loans, make it impossible for Indians to progress'.⁵

In March 1922, Indian residents at Bush Lot, West Coast Berbice, in their address to the delegates from India, Pillai and Tivary, lamented that Indians who had reached 'the top of the ladder both intellectually and financially have often-times neglected to fight the cause of their brethren, simply for the smile of another race'.⁶ A correspondent observed in April 1923 that Indian merchants in Water Street, the premier commercial area in Georgetown, were 'defrauding' their clerks. He complained to the Chamber of Commerce that these clerks, Indians invariably, had to work as late as 6.30 p.m. during the week; on Saturdays and public holidays, they worked up to 5 p.m.⁷

There were cases of remorseless exploitation of Indian small farmers by Indian rice millers. Lesley Potter cites the Report of the Immigration Agent General for 1908-1909 that the extortionate rate of interest on advances made by millers to rice growers was as high as 300 per cent: for every 72 cents loaned, they demanded one bag of padi, which was valued at about \$2.00, when milled. If the price of padi rose, as it usually did some months after the harvest, the millers' gain was even greater.⁸ But this insidious practice by some millers bit deeper. Potter explains: 'Any individual who managed to remain independent and did not surrender his liberty by accepting financial advances from the miller was likely to incur his hatred and the ostracism of fellow villagers under the miller's control'.⁹

This gave rise to many odious practices in some villages. At Bush Lot, West Coast Berbice, for example, as anthropologist Marilyn Silverman argues, limited acreage, inadequate drainage and irrigation and consequent crop uncertainty, made Indian rice farmers especially vulnerable to two rice-milling families since the 1920s. Small farmers were indebted to them, thus creating patron-client relationships, which led to economic exploitation and the retarding of democratic practices in village administration. However, in an agriculturally-insecured environment, with few sources of credit, village factionalism, though paternalistic and exploitative, had its merits: '.... the millers helped people build houses, buy land, and marry off daughters A farmer could bring his padi into the mill, obtain a receipt from the miller and pick up rice for home consumption. The remaining padi was credited to the farmer's account from which was deducted the money borrowed or the grocery bills the miller had paid for him'.¹⁰

In December 1928, *The New Daily Chronicle* noted that some millers 'defraud the growers, who are bound to bring their paddy to these mills because they are indebted to the proprietors'. It advocated the establishment of a colony-wide agricultural bank, which, it believed, could kill this pernicious practice by 'steady competition', while identifying the perpetrators and putting pressure on them.¹¹

Because social legislation was rudimentary, often non-existent, opportunities for exploitation were wide-spread. Several ascendant Indian landlords, millers, and merchants, in their embryonic struggle to repay loans while striving for financial prudence, seemed to have been guilty of many socially irresponsible industrial practices against their poorer compatriots. But it would be a distortion to see every manifestation of entrepreneurial success as a consequence of unbridled exploitation, a cruel pursuit of profit. A more rational explanation of the basis of Indian middle class achievements must

recognise their thrift,¹² the contribution of the joint-family,¹³ their astounding entrepreneurial skills, their unremitting industry, often to the exclusion of even mildly-extravagant social diversions, and their will to improve the material and educational position of their children.¹⁴ Rice cultivation, cattle rearing, rice milling, money-lending, and commerce in the rural areas were the means by which a competence was earned, a measure of self-confidence achieved, and a sound financial base established. This was the foundation for commercial activities in the urban centres — Georgetown and New Amsterdam. By the 1920s, Indian businesses were well-advanced in rural and urban British Guiana (see Appendix).

The expansion of the rice and cattle industries, as was seen in Chapter 3, was due initially to the relatively easy terms of crown lands purchase, facilitated by Ordinance 10 of 1898, and Ordinance 23 of 1903. Before 1890, the cost per acre was \$10. The 1898 ordinance slashed the cost per acre to 15 cents, although the minimum purchasable by an individual remained at 100 acres. In 1903, the minimum was reduced to 25 acres. A spate of land purchases followed: many Indians acquired substantial holdings on the Mahaica, Mahaicony, Abary, Berbice, and Corentyne Rivers. Several became full-time rice and cattle farmers on these impressive plots. Indians, especially those who had been 'drivers' (foremen) on the sugar estates, and had subsequently acquired some capital from cattle-rearing, shop-keeping, money-lending, etc., were among the principal land-buyers. The development of the rice industry, at the turn of the century, fed a consuming urgency among Indian labourers on the sugar plantations to own land, to reduce their dependency on estate labour. The owners of extensive tracts were able to cash in on this rampant land-hunger: they sub-divided portions of their holdings and sold them to their compatriots at lucrative prices, ranging from \$1 to \$2.50 per acre. Substantial capital was thus obtained — they were able to empolder their lands; several invested in the profitable rice-milling industry. From 1906-1907 to 1914-1915, the number of mills rose from 44 to 86; this had increased to 144 by 1918, as British Guiana rice cornered the West Indian market, deprived of supplies from India and Burma during the War.¹⁵ Potter argues:

The commercialisation of the industry meant opportunities for entrepreneurship and social mobility among the Indians who were in a position to take advantage of the situation. Although Georgetown merchants, including representatives of the large sugar companies, became involved in the milling and exporting of rice, the millers in the country districts were mainly East Indians. In their ancillary activity as money-lenders, making advances to the growers to finance their crops, they exploited the poverty of their fellow countrymen.¹⁶

But this discernible prosperity, reflected in an expanding Indian commercial elite, was percolating to other layers of the Indian community. Through thrift, family effort, enterprise, and a will to achieve, fed by their religious and cultural security and a compelling sense of responsibility to the family, many Indian small farmers, also, were acquiring properties in the villages. As early as 1912, Rev. J.B. Cropper, the head of the [Presbyterian] Canadian Mission to the Indians, noted:

Many villages are witnessing a striking change in the nationality of their inhabitants. The descendants of the early negro settlers are giving place to the East Indian. Neglected farms have ceased to yield produce and the owners go away in search of a living elsewhere the lands their fathers left them, now owned by the despised wearer of the baba and the turban The East Indian is also originating his own villages. In these it is interesting to note how soon the wattle-side thatch-roofed house gives place to crabwood boards and zinc sheets.¹⁷

The progress of the Indian middle class made a profound impression on other Indians: it nourished a seemingly insatiable hunger for land; it fed an enduring vision of achievable goals; it bred a sturdy self-confidence.¹⁸ In 1921, at Rose Hall, on the Corentyne, Indians were reputed to be the largest property owners, having superseded the Blacks, the original inhabitants. But they generally ignored village politics — the Blacks were still dominant. However, in early-1921, the latter opposed the appointment of W.V. Tennessee as overseer of the village on grounds, as *The Daily Chronicle* reported, that he was 'an East Indian and a stranger'. He was the overseer of Alness Village, and wrote frequently to the press on a variety of subjects. In a militant response, J.W. Permaul, a prominent Indian businessman from Rose Hall and chairman of the village council, exhorted the Indians 'to realise their privilege and their corresponding responsibility'; and advised them as 'the largest rate payers in the village [to] exercise their votes in the election of the new council'. The elections were held shortly afterwards; and the Indians captured all the seats on the village council. The Blacks threatened to boycott Permaul and his colleagues. In response to this, *The Daily Chronicle* observed that 'for some years, the black people have been selling their lands which were purchased by East Indians, thus divesting themselves of their qualification. They, therefore, have themselves to blame, and what took place should serve as a lesson to them. Instead of boycotting any member of the community, the black people should try to retrieve their lost position'.²⁰ *The Daily Argosy* noted that the welfare of the village was being 'subordinated to a race-hatred campaign'.²¹

Indian land purchases in Black villages seemed to have elicited much resentment among the Blacks; but the popular Black leader from New Amsterdam, Rev. R.T. Frank, cautioned his people that their

'salvation was in their own hands': he deplored what he interpreted as their 'crab-like psychology' and a 'lack of thrift'. He observed: 'Of all races we are said to be the most backward. To that charge we have to plead guilty. Here and there you see a few individuals rising, but among the bulk of the people, there is a steady retrogression. Socially and commercially we are nonentities. If we are to rise we must be united. Our detractors recognise it, and we ought to recognise it by this time.'²² This was a recurring theme in the 1920s: perceived Indian progress producing a harsh, introspective re-assessment by Black leaders, especially those in the Negro Progress Convention, who always advocated the emulation of what they identified as the basis of Indian achievements: thrift and self-help.²³

By the early-1920s, extensive tracts on the coastland and up the creeks were owned and cultivated by Indian farmers. G.F. Keatinge, who, along with Pillai and Tivary, visited British Guiana in early-1922 to report on the condition of Indians, for the Government of India, was greatly impressed with the achievements of Indian agriculturalists. He had special praise for those along the Mahaicony Creek, thirty miles east of Georgetown. He visited the district on 4 April 1922 and reported:

This is a substantial settlement of Indians It is only 20 years since Indians began to settle in this area, and during this period they have converted a strip of land for some 25 miles up the creek from forest and swamp savannah to cultivated land; and their houses are planted all along the bank of the river which forms an excellent water-way. The Indian population in this settlement now amounts to 2,000 and the land held by them to 20,000 acres. This is mainly rice land, but includes 2,000 acres of grazing land and plots of coconuts and ground provisions cultivated for domestic use. The largest holding is that of Mr Jagdeo who owns 3,000 acres of rice land which he tills with motor ploughs. He also owns a rice mill, a steam thresher, and a motor launch. Another Indian holds 1,500 acres, 10 Indians hold 500 acres apiece, and there are holdings of all sizes between 500 and 25 acres, farms of 50 to 100 acres being a common size. The soil is rich alluvial clay mixed in places with pegass (vegetable matter).²⁴

Keatinge noted that on the Essequibo Coast also, there were many big Indian landowners who held blocks extending over 1,000 acres. But, unlike the Mahaicony Creek, a large proportion of these lands was subletted to small rice growers at \$12 per acre annually. Often, they were obligated to sell their padi to the landlords. Apparently many of the tenants were dissatisfied with the conditions of tenure; but the landlords defended current practices, contending that they had invested much in empoldering the land.²⁵ In 1929, Douglas estimated the rent at between \$6 and \$8 per acre in Essequibo; and noted the better water control and the higher yields obtaining there.²⁶

Among the big landowners on the Essequibo Coast were Ramsaroop Maraj of Coffee Grove, Fear Not, and Sparta, Lalbeharry Maraj of Adventure, Rahim Bacchus of Lima, Shrigobind Maharaj of

Perseverance, Rash Beharry [Maraj] of Riverstown, and Meer Abdul Rahaman of Hamburg.²⁷ These people were usually engaged in a variety of business activities simultaneously. Rahim Bacchus, for instance, also owned a rice mill at Richmond;²⁸ in early-1926, he acquired a large omnibus, with which he provided a passenger service on the Essequibo Coast.²⁹ Rash Beharry was also a substantial rice cultivator, who acquired a fine reputation for his public service among the Indians. In January 1925, the Local Government Board appointed him chairman of the local authority of the Johanna Cecilia Country District.³⁰ In February 1926, he founded the East Indian Burial Society in his village, Johanna Cecilia. It had a membership of about 200. *The New Daily Chronicle* described him as one 'who is interested in the progress of his people'.³¹ Rash Beharry gave a dinner for some 500 Indians in mid-1929, in honour of Rev. C.F. Andrews, who was visiting the Essequibo Coast.³² The event gave Andrews much pleasure; and he was deeply appreciative of Rash Beharry's work in his district. He recalled:

Since I had decided to wear my Indian dress, nearly all those present did the same. It was at once noticeable how the self-respect returned and what a happy evening we had together. The festival lasted over three hours, but every moment was of value. There was such universal happiness Everyone was deeply moved by the occasion. Even the younger generation felt something of its unique happiness. Some of them told me that they were determined to go to India and learn about their mother country and then return again to British Guiana. Throughout the evening we spoke to one another in Hindi. Pandit Rash Behari (sic) is the leader of this district, and he has become the chief religious authority along the coast. It is very important indeed to get such leaders as he is, whenever that is possible, and utilise them to the full.³³

(He died shortly after Andrews left the colony in September 1929).

It is impossible to ascertain precisely how much land was owned by Indians in the villages in the 1920s — no records were kept of land ownership in villages which were not under the Local Government Board - the country districts.³⁴ In 1918, it was estimated that in areas under the Local Government Board — the village districts — Indians owned 9,314 properties, valued at \$961,775. And the secretary of the Board observed that 'the properties in these districts represent a comparatively low percentage of the properties in the whole of the settled and inhabited areas of the colony'.³⁵ In 1921, 29,500 Indians lived in 22 village districts; 6,488 of these were lot-holders, owning 21,784 acres (some had several properties). In the same year, 47,540 people of other racial groups, primarily Blacks, lived in the village districts; 10,055 were lot-holders, owning 23,419 acres. The average holding of the Indians was 3.35 acres, compared with 2.32 acres among the Blacks. It was noted that as Indian property owners were 'proportionately as numerous' in the village

districts as in the country districts,³⁶ they owned at least as much land in the former as in the latter. In fact, Indians probably owned more in the country districts: some of their biggest estates, such as those along the Mahaicony Creek, were located there; possibilities for land purchase were greater in these areas — they were settled later; fewer Blacks resided there; and as Ramnarine argues, Indians preferred those districts which were not under the Local Government Board because they felt less exposed to the scrutiny of the authorities. Indians generally associated Government intervention with agricultural censuses and higher taxation.³⁷

Although Indians comprised 38 per cent of the population in the 22 village districts between 1922 and 1924, they accounted for only 20 per cent of the electorate and 19 of the 143 elected village councillors, or a mere 13 per cent. However, in the 79 country districts, where councillors were *not* elected — they were nominated by the Local Government Board — 134 of the 384 councillors in 1923-1924, or 34.8 per cent were Indians³⁸ The rural Indian middle class was becoming increasingly involved in village politics; but the small property-owners still tended to look askance at local government. Yet, between 1917 and 1927, Indians spent nearly \$3 million on land purchases; their properties as a whole, were worth infinitely more (see Table 1^{4.}).

It is noteworthy that the fall in expenditure on properties after 1923 coincided with the decline in rice production, following Governor Collet's deliberate policy of restricting the industry. But, as will be seen later, the savings of Indians increased considerably in the late-1920s: the uncertainty which enveloped rice cultivation had dampened their seemingly insatiable demand for land; and strengthened their propensity to save, in spite of the drastically reduced rice prices. Land purchases fell from 807 and 852 in 1919 and 1920 respectively, to an annual average of about 650 between 1921 and 1927 (see Table 4.1).

However, by 1925, numerous Indians owned properties valued at over \$10,000 each. (Table 4.2 is a list of 51 such proprietors; but there were many others, especially in Berbice and Essequibo, who are not included). Several of the properties listed were in Georgetown, primarily business premises; but an overwhelming majority were in the rural areas — from the Essequibo Coast to the Corentyne. Most of the big landowners had acquired abandoned sugar estates, or substantial virgin tracts along the rivers, and had converted them to rice lands and cattle pasture.³⁹ Often, especially on the East Coast Demerara, or in areas where the coastal clay was interspersed with sand reefs, extensive

holdings were under coconut.⁴⁰ In 1919, for instance, H.M. Nehaul (Nehall), who went to the colony in 1882 and was indentured to Plantation Non Parcil, bought Chapman's Grove, Mahaica, a coconut estate, for \$100,000.⁴¹ In 1924, he was listed as one of the important 'coconut dealers' in the colony;⁴² and in May 1926, the Executive Council noted that he had only two instalments on the purchase money to be repaid.⁴³

Table 4.1			
Land purchases made by Indians, 1917-1927			
(information for 1928-1929 is unavailable)			
<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of purchasers</i>	<i>Total value (Dollars)</i>	<i>Highest price paid for one property (Dollars)</i>
1917	630	204,850	35,000
1918	703	249,723	4,100
1919	807	453,605	100,000
1920	852	379,949	30,000
1921	697	351,672	33,500
<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Purchasers</i>	<i>Total value (Dollars)</i>	<i>Highest price paid for one property (Dollars)</i>
1922	622	307,541	45,517
1923	603	182,069	12,300
1924	622	219,860	28,000
1925	725	271,918	25,150
1926	681	252,136	22,500
1927	615	230,064	24,000

SOURCE: C.O. 114/162, 167, 172, 177, 182, 184, 187, 192, 195, 200, 204: Reports of the Immigration Agent General, 1917-1927.

The tendency for big landowners to rent plots to Indian rice growers, so common in Essequibo, was less prevalent in Demerara and Berbice, where the rich, alluvial coastland was more extensive, and the sugar plantations more prosperous. These two factors made land and cash more accessible to many Indian labourers on the estates; thus restricting possibilities for landlordism among Indian estate owners in Demerara and Berbice. In these two counties, some of the prominent landowners in the mid-1920s were: Edwin Bacchus (Virginia), for many years the chairman of the Mahaica Local Authority, Resaul Maraj (De Kinderen), Ramjohn (Triumph), C.A. Macdoom (Macdoom Village), Abdool Rayman (Vreed-en-Hoop), the heirs of Thomas Flood (Blankenburg), Azeez Rohoman (Felicity, Mahaicony), and Jugdeo (Mahaicony Creek). In Berbice, among the popular big landowners were: Sheotahal (Friendship), Sreagobind (Vryheid), Hanoman (No. 11), Peer Bacchus (Washington), Matbarally (No. 6),⁴⁴ Robert Chundun (Maida),⁴⁵ and Abdool Kadir (Smythfield) (see Table 4.2 and the Appendix).

Table 4.2
Some properties owned by Indians in British Guiana,
valued at over \$10,000 each, November 1925

<i>Names of Proprietors</i>	<i>Location</i>		
	BERBICE		
Heirs of Sheotahal, (died 1924)		Friendship	
Robert Chundun		Maida	
Lachman Singh		Bush Lot	
Jonadhan (sic)		do.	
Goberdhan		do.	
Robert Ramdeholl		New Amsterdam	
Hanoman		No. 11	
Peer Bacchus		Washington	
Abdool Kadir		Smythfield	
	DEMERARA		
Poonooa	Mahaica	Baboolal	La Jalousie
Deoki Sawh	do.	Sarjoo	do.
Shivgobind	do.	Heirs of Thomas Flood, (died 1920)	Blankenburg
Mahabir Maraj	De Hoop	Heirs of D. Gravesande	Georgetown
Narainsawmy	Helena	Gajraj	do.
Edwin Bacchus	Virginia	Abdul Rahaman	do.
Resaul Maraj	De Kinderen	Heirs of Nisbat, (died 1923)	do.
Madray	Huntley	Altaf Hussain	do.
Boodhoo	Spring Hall	Abdul Hack	do.
H.M. Nehaul	Chapman's Grove	Koomar Maraj	do.
Padarath	Cove and John	Rambharose Maraj	do.
Ramawtar Maraj	Golden Grove	Jagarnath Maraj	do.
Ramjohn (Ramjan)	Triumph	Ramparikan Rai	do.
C.A. Macdoom	Peter's Hall	Joseph Jaikaran	do.
Heirs of Bhagwandin Maraj, (died 1923)	Craig	Rampersaud	do.
Boodhan Lall	La Grange	Jaimangal Singh	do.
Mangal Singh	Vreed-en-Hoop	Ramcharan	Bachelor's Adventure
Abdool Rayman	do.	Hansa	do.
Chheddi	Canal No. 1		
	ESSEQUIBO		
Ramsaroop Maraj		Coffee Grove	
Rash Beharry		Riverstown	
Meer Abdul Rahaman		Hamburg	
Budhan Maraj		Success, Leguan	
Abdul Rahaman	Maryville, do.	Enterprise, do.	
P. Guyadeen		Amsterdam	
Heirs of Kamal, (died 1916)			

SOURCE: C.O. 111/658, O.A.G. (ag.) to Wiseman, s.o., 13 November 1925, encl.

To record the achievements of many of these Indian families in British Guiana would require a special study; only a brief sketch could be attempted here. The history of the rice industry would be incomplete without recognition of the Jugdeo (Jagdeo, Jagadev)⁴⁶ family of Mora Point, 12 miles up the Mahaicony Creek. Jugdeo was described by Pillai and Tivary, following their visit to his estate in March 1922, as representing 'the high water-mark of Indian enterprise in British Guiana'. Born on a sugar estate to parents who were indentured labourers, and with little formal education, he was the first man in the colony to successfully use machinery in cultivating rice. He had over 3,000 acres under cultivation, having dug a canal about four miles long, between the Mahaicony and Abary Creeks, to irrigate his rice fields.⁴⁷ Jugdeo also owned a rice mill, a steam thresher, and a motor launch.⁴⁸ In 1916, he imported a 'Caterpillar' tractor, through Sandback Parker and Co., to transport his padi to the threshing point. *The Daily Chronicle* noted that the arrival of the tractor created a sensation in Georgetown.⁴⁹ The paper also commented on the operation of Jugdeo's 'Caterpillar' with uncontrollable wonder, clearly mesmerised by what it termed its 'walking ways':

It is able to plough steadily over fields where even bullocks are mired to the withers, and owing to [its] peculiar construction it does no destruction to crops. It has been driven over standing grass without injuring it in the least, and ordinary obstacles are no bar to its progress. It will walk over a narrow ditch or small trench with the greatest ease, and if the trench be wide and shallow, it will climb down one side and up the other with equal facility.⁵⁰

Jugdeo also bought and renovated the machinery of an American company, whose rice project, begun up the Abary Creek in 1911-1912, had collapsed. He adapted them to the water-logged environment up the Mahaicony. It was a uniquely remarkable achievement; and Pillai and Tivary noted it in 1922, remarking that 'his only qualification for work of this kind being that he is quite innocent of all knowledge of engineering'.⁵¹ Governor Collet also, had commented earlier on Jugdeo's achievements, in a despatch to the Colonial Office in April 1919. He wrote: 'I met an East Indian who had constructed a water-channel from the Mahaicony to the Abary, and erected a large pump worked by an oil engine. This man was able to irrigate his own land and also to supply water to some of his neighbours. I believe he is worth in money considerably more than I am. He is not a solitary instance of East Indian immigrants who have come into the colony under indenture and made fortunes in it'.⁵²

In 1926, during the devastating drought, the Director of Public Works praised the Jugdeo family for their magnanimity: they allowed cattle farmers to graze their herds on their watered lands, an oasis

in a Sahara of decrepit flocks and thirsty people.⁵³ In 1929, Charles Douglas visited Jugdeo's estate, while preparing his excellent report on the rice industry. He also was impressed with their irrigation canal, which took two years to complete, and their efficient adaptation of agricultural machinery to their extensive rice lands. Douglas noted:

..... by means of this canal, coupled with pumping plant installed on the banks of the river, it is possible to irrigate a considerable area of land in times of deficient rainfall the maximum development was observed in the application of cultivating machinery consisting of tractor-operated ploughs and harrows, mechanical threshers, and binders and reapers — all of American origin On this property there is a number of caterpillar tractors of two, five, and seven tons respectively with a two-ton tractor and a three-disc plough, five to six acres can easily be cultivated per day.⁵⁴

Douglas added that the two-ton tractor was ideally suited for driving the mechanical threshing machinery. And he observed that the fields were well laid out, rarely under 30 acres, and there was 'no unnecessary breaking up of the land by excessive bunding or meres'.⁵⁵ These flat, sprawling rice fields enhanced the mobility of the machinery.⁵⁶

In 1922, Keatinge had estimated that 12 Indian rice farmers in the Mahaicony Creek owned about 10,000 acres, while another 200 smaller Indian landholders had a total of 10,000 acres or 50 acres per family. This was an enviable achievement; and Keatinge reflected on it with evident satisfaction: 'They must have invested considerable capital in the reclamation of this land; and the fact that they have acquired this capital and used it to such good purpose speaks well for their frugality and industry. The presence of such a body of substantial landholders, all of whom came to the colony as indentured labourers, or are the sons of indentured labourers, speaks well for the opportunities which the colony offers to men with the right characteristics'.⁵⁷ The achievements of the Jugdeo family⁵⁸ and their compatriots along the Mahaicony Creek were a compelling demonstration of what Indian farmers could do on empoldered lands. These accomplishments owed nothing whatsoever to the colonial rulers.⁵⁹

It is interesting that the foe of Indian enterprise, Governor Collet, while acknowledging the progress of the Jugdeos, had conceded, in April 1919, that 'The East Indian seems to take naturally to the cultivation of empoldered lands. The East Indian immigrant is industrious and thrifty. He thinks nothing of paying a decent rent for lands which are empoldered, irrigated, and watered, as he knows that on account of the richness of the soil he can by his industry make a greater profit than he could

on most lands unirrigated and drained naturally'.⁶⁰ Yet, as was seen in Chapter 3, Collet stubbornly resisted all efforts to empolder the Corentyne; while he arrogantly and obsessively depreciated, and eventually nearly destroyed, the achievements of the Indian rice and cattle farmers.

In his numerous dispatches to the Colonial Office on the rice industry, Collet was often unapologetically blunt in explaining his opposition to the initiative and enterprise of these resilient people. Writing to the Governor of Trinidad, as early as 14 March 1918, he dismissed allegations 'by many people' that 'my policy with regard to rice is ruining the rice industry'. Collet then outlined the fundamental premise on which his policy of controlling the export of rice was based:

.... it is a fact that unless growers can be assured of a higher price for exported rice than what they are allowed to charge for local consumption, they will not be inclined to put in as much rice as will make a large quantity available for export. *I am by no means sure that it is to the interest of British Guiana that rice cultivation should be extended as greatly as it appears to have been during the war The sugar industry is feeling acutely the want of labour brought about by East Indians preferring to take up rice cultivation*⁶¹ (emphasis added).

The cruel truth was that the struggle of Indians for independence had to be discouraged, even rendered hazardous, because Collet and the sugar planters were convinced that the sugar plantations — the colony — would collapse if the Indians deserted the estates. Myriad subterfuges were devised to stem Indian initiative. In May 1918, Collet informed the Colonial Office, in his spurious, bizarre way, that 'while I am very far from hampering the rice industry, I am afraid that its extension has not been for the good of the colony at large, and is to some extent responsible for the present excess of deaths over births'⁶² Malaria primarily, was responsible for the stagnation of the population; and the canals and flood-fallowed fields on the sugar estates were probably greater havens for the anopheles than the rice fields (see Chapter 2).

In spite of the hazards of the coastland of British Guiana — floods, droughts, high costs of land reclamation, malaria, and the obsession of the plantocracy and the colonial rulers with sugar monoculture — 'the unflagging perseverance of the hewers of wood and drawers of water from the East'⁶³ was unconquerable. That is what gives the following three cases of achievement from Berbice a fresh, alluringly heroic, quality; they all went to the colony as indentured labourers.

Sheotahal (Seetahall, Sectohul)(1848-1924) arrived in the colony in December 1869 on the ship, 'St

Kilda', accompanied by his brother, Rambarran. (His ship number was 202). He was indentured to Plantation Port Mourant. He remained there for a couple of years after he had completed his indenture. With his small savings, he acquired a property at Cromarty, where he began to rear cattle, sheep, and goats. (It is possible that he kept some stock on the estate while still indentured: Port Mourant was a comparatively progressive plantation). Through obsessively hard work, a frugality bordering on miserliness, and a sharp business mind, he accumulated considerable savings. Sheotahal subsequently bought Friendship, a portion of Cromarty, half of No. 36, Wellington Park, Tarlogie, and No. 49⁶⁴ — an impressive collection of estates on the healthy, wind-swept Corentyne Coast. This enabled him to expand his lucrative stock rearing activities even further. When he died in March 1924, aged 76, he was reported to be 'the wealthiest East Indian in the colony'.⁶⁵

Whether this was true or not, Sheotahal was certainly the biggest landowner on the Corentyne. His will indicated, apparently conservatively, that he had 'more than 2,000 head of cows, beside horses, donkeys, and small stock, together with about \$20,000 in cash'. He had no children; but according to the will, he bequeathed his assets to his three step-sons. The eldest, Jeenarain, was awarded a paltry \$2,000. He countered, immediately, that the will was invalid; and that some of Sheotahal's valuable assets had been deliberately omitted.⁶⁶ This sparked off prolonged litigation, in which several other relatives became embroiled, claims and counter-claims proliferating each day. *The Daily Argosy*, at the time of his death, noted that he was 'of a retiring disposition; he possessed some humour, and was an adept at repartee'.⁶⁷ The struggle over his riches also was not without humour: several, allegedly fictive relatives also surfaced in court, concocting designs on this ex-indentured hard-earned wealth.⁶⁸

Another ex-indentured labourer who became very wealthy was Sreagobind (1854-1921). He went to British Guiana in 1872, three years after Sheotahal. He also was indentured to Plantation Port Mourant, where he settled and embarked on cattle rearing. Like Sheotahal, he was reported to have 'possessed extensive lands, a large number of cattle, and considerable wealth'. Sreagobind later bought a rice estate, Plantation Vryheid, West Canje, Berbice, where he built 'a fine residence'.⁶⁹ In January 1921, a few months before his death, *The Daily Chronicle* admonished Governor Collet for not visiting the West Canje area, noting that 'he would have seen how well populated is the district between Blendall and Anna Clementia. Deserted at one time, in recent years, East Indians and others have gone and settled down therein, building splendid homes. It has become a thriving

district, a most congenial place for planting rice, and the people are daily taking advantage of it'.⁷⁰ Sreagobind's fine achievements must have been an inspiration to his compatriots.

Hanoman (Hunooman, Hanoomansingh) (1864-1935) was taken to British Guiana as an indentured labourer in 1873, aged 9. He accompanied his aunt, Latchee (ship number 3303); they travelled in the ship, 'Mofussilite'. (His ship number was 3130). Hanoman's parents died before he left India. He was of Chhatri caste, and came from Ramnagar, near Benares, in the United Provinces. Both he and his aunt were indentured to Plantation Everton, East Bank Berbice. After leaving the estate, Hanoman worked as a shepherd and a shovelman; he later served as a butler to Manager John Haly at Sea Well, East Coast Berbice. Through hard work, thrift, and a consuming ambition for independence, he was, with his small savings, able to open a shop at Cumberland Village, East Canje, Berbice. His success in business enabled him to buy No. 9 and No. 11 Estates on the East Coast Berbice. These provided ample grazing, in a healthy, less malarious environment. By 1925, Hanoman was reportedly the owner of a substantial stock of cattle, sheep, and goats, and a supplier of milk to residents in New Amsterdam. He also leased a section of his estate to small rice growers.⁷¹

Hanoman depended heavily on his sons to assist him in his business. His wife, Sookree, of the celebrated business and professional Ramdeholl family of New Amsterdam, was the mother of 18 children — 11 boys and 3 girls survived. While extolling the merits of hard work and discipline on the farm, Hanoman was also deeply committed to the education of his sons. He built up a valuable private library, buying books from departing doctors and government officials in New Amsterdam. His eldest son, Johnny, was a sugar chemist who had been to Canada and Cuba.⁷² In 1928, James was the manager of the farm at No. 11, while Joseph and Harry were established businessmen in New Amsterdam.⁷³ His son, Robert, became a doctor in the 1930s. The story is told that while Robert was at the Berbice High School in the early-1920s, he was asked to act in the play, 'The Merchant of Venice'. He informed his father that his role required his wearing a beard. His father reprimanded him, threatening to take him out of school: he argued that the boy was sent to school to study, not to play the fool.⁷⁴ Narrow though Hanoman's perception of education might have been, it epitomised the almost puritanical conception of work and thrift among many Indians in the colony. It brought its rewards: all of Hanoman's younger sons became successful businessmen;⁷⁵ many of his grand and great-grandchildren are accomplished professionals in the Indo-Guyanese diaspora.

What emerges from the lives of many Indians in the 1920s, was a robust tendency to endure, to make sacrifices, to spot potential areas of gain, and an amazing frugality, which attracted the admiration of numerous contemporary observers. *The Daily Argosy* commented, in July 1929, that although the Indian was the newest immigrant to British Guiana, 'today he occupies an outstanding position in the community; this position has been attained, in the face of great odds and outstanding disabilities, by exercise of energy, thrift, and patience which would be commendable in any race under even more favourable circumstances'.⁷⁶

Some Indians were able to combine their entrepreneurial gifts with an aptitude for colonisation; while leading an active public life in the interest of their compatriots. Peter Ruhomon observed that 'In the reclaiming of waste lands and abandoned plantations the Indians stand unrivalled, and we have before our eyes sterling examples of his initiative and enterprise in this direction'.⁷⁷ Probably the most outstanding example of a colonist with a bewildering range of entrepreneurial interests was Caramat Ali McDoom (Makdoom), who was born in the colony on 23 September 1890. His parents went to British Guiana as indentured labourers. McDoom became a distinguished merchant, saw-miller, landed- proprietor, cattle rancher, and rice farmer.⁷⁸

In 1921, he acquired Rome, which was originally a part of Plantation Houston, and renamed it McDoom Village. The following year, he decided to reclaim this derelict sugar land in order to create a settlement for Indians. He undertook the clearing of the impenetrable bush and the demarcation of lots, having secured the co-operation of the relevant government officers. In 1923, the first building was built; the second was erected by McDoom himself. Soon afterwards, he induced several Indian settlers to throw up thatched cottages.⁷⁹ By 1930, as Peter Ruhomon noted: 'the trash buildings have completely disappeared and healthy, sanitary cottages, in some cases with architectural pretensions, may be seen dotted over the whole extent of the village contented settlers eke out a comfortable existence on the land by cultivating the soil and rearing cattle, and working, in the intervals, on the adjoining estates, whenever work is available'.⁸⁰

McDoom scrupulously supervised the affairs of the settlement; the sanitation was considered to be good — a rare achievement in a colony with an unenviable public health record. He also built several cottages, and residents were required to repay on an instalment plan 'proportionate to the value of the building erected and the capacity of the settler to pay'. They paid a nominal rent for land lease

; no rates or taxes were levied; those who bought their plot paid nothing. McDoom was described as a man of 'much courtesy and affability', who saw his relationship to the villagers as that of a father to his family; while they looked to him for advice and protection.

His business achievements were equally impressive. He was the principal share-holder in the Demerara Greenheart and Trading Co., a saw-milling enterprise, which was located in his village. In 1931, he acquired a cattle ranch and a rice estate in the Mahaicony District; in 1940, he bought Plantation Hampton Court, the last sugar estate in Essequibo, which had been abandoned in 1936. Yet he devoted much time to the affairs of his people. He was the vice-president of the British Guiana East Indian Association in 1922; in early-1924, he represented the Association as a delegate on the Colonisation Deputation to India, seeking the beginning of a different system of Indian immigration to the colony. In 1929, he was the president of the Indian Congress, a rival organisation to the B.G.E.I.A. In 1946, he was the president of the Rice Producers' Association; and in 1947, the Government nominated him to the Legislative Council.⁸²

But McDoom was also deeply involved in religious affairs. In 1926-1927, he was instrumental in the construction of a mosque for the Muslim residents of his village. It was opened in March 1927, during the month of Ramadan. A 'Delco' lighting plant was installed in the village around the same time.⁸³ In September 1927, the Hindus of McDoom Village held a twelve-day *Bhagwat*, a religious gathering, at which hundreds of people were fed daily. McDoom was a strong supporter of these proceedings.⁸⁴ He was a Muslim; but he treated Indians of both religions with commendable impartiality. This remarkable man achieved so much, while being responsible for 8 sons and 5 daughters. His wife also, must have had considerable strength of character and self-confidence.

Abdool Kadir was another successful coloniser. He was born on 22 February 1887 at Canefield, East Canje, Berbice. His father was a labourer. Nothing is known of his early years; but by the early-1920s, he ran an established dry-goods business in Pitt Street, New Amsterdam.⁸⁵ He had also acquired an abandoned sugar estate, Smythfield, on the outskirts of New Amsterdam. It went out of production in 1887, and was handed over to small farmers. It was later bought by the lawyer and legislator, Hon. E.G. Woolford. Kadir acquired the estate from him, and transformed it into 'a neat little township' in 1927.⁸⁶ By the early-1940s, as Ruhomon observed, Smythfield was 'a thriving little village and populated to such an extent that the proprietor had been encouraged to provide it with the amenities

Table 4.3
Some of the principal Indian rice and coconut growers, 1924
(Rice dealers denoted by R; coconut dealers by C)

<i>Proprietor</i>	<i>Type of Business</i>	<i>Location</i>
Abdulla	R	Fyrish, Corentyne
Edwin Bacchus	C,R	Virginia, Mahaica
Peer Bacchus	R	Weldaad, West Coast Berbice
F. Balgith	R	Whim, Corentyne
C. Balgobin	R	Lichfield, West Coast Berbice
Boodhan Maraj	C	Leguan Island, Essequibo
Boodhoo	R	Windsor Forest, West Coast Demerara
Boodhoo	C,R	Springhall, Mahaica
T. Boodhoo	R	Letter Kenny, Corentyne
Edgar Flood	C	Blankenburg, West Coast Demerara
A. Ganie	C	No. 79 Village, Corentyne
Gooligar	R	Bell Plain, Wakenaam
Hallibulla (sic)	R	No. 99 Village, Corentyne
A. and P. Hoossain	C,R,	Cotton Tree, West Coast Berbice
Mrs Insanally	C	Bee Hive, East Coast Demerara
Estate of		
Jagnaraine	R	Mahaica, East Coast Demerara
Jaigobin	R	Mahaicony, East Coast Demerara
Mrs Jagdie	C	do.
Jaundoo	R	Hopetown, West Coast Berbice
Jugdeo	R	Mahaicony Creek, East Coast Demerara
A.K. Khan	R	Leguan Island, Essequibo
Estate of Khanai	R	De Hoop, Mahaica
C. Madray	C	Mahaicony, East Coast Demerara
A. Moorbijah	R	Cotton Tree, West Coast Berbice
Mrs Naraine	C	Wakenaam Island
Neamatally	R	Port Mourant, Corentyne
H.M. Nehaul	C	Chapman's Grove, Mahaica
Dwarka Persaud	R	Cumberland, East Canje, Berbice
A. Rahaman	C,R,	Rose Hall, Corentyne
A. Rahaman	C	Hamburg, Essequibo
M.A. Rahaman	R	Tiger Island, Essequibo
Ramcharan	R	Mahaicony, East Coast Demerara
S. Ramjohn	R	Triumph, East Coast Demerara
Ramnaraine	R	Rose Hall, Corentyne
Ramsaroop [Maraj]	R	Coffee Grove, Essequibo
Rash Beharry	C,R	Adventure, Essequibo
A. Rohoman	R	Felicity, Mahaicony
R.C. Singh	C	Wakenaam Island, Essequibo
Sohan	R	Mahaicony Creek, East Coast Demerara
J.P. Viapree	R	Mahaica
Wajidally	R	No. 99 Village, Corentyne

SOURCE: *Commercial Directory of Georgetown and New Amsterdam, British Guiana* (Georgetown: The Chamber of Commerce, January 1925), pp.63,65,67.

of civilised life'. In 1939, Kadir signed a contract with the municipality of New Amsterdam to have electricity supplied to the village; meanwhile, the roads and sanitation had been improved, and a pure water system installed.⁸⁷ Kadir had nine children.⁸⁸

By the 1920s, a rural Indian middle class was present throughout the coastland of British Guiana: rice millers, shop-owners, cattle farmers, rice growers, coconut cultivators, money-lenders, milk distributors, jewellers, and bus owners, who had entered the transport business (see Table 4.3 and the Appendix). (In 1926 and 1927 Indians owned 50 and 62 motor buses respectively).⁸⁹ Often several of these activities were carried on simultaneously by the same family. The evidence reveals that Indian families were invariably large — 10 children or more were common; this reduced the cost of operation considerably, while opening the way for the diversification of the family business. The joint-family, whether it was co-residential or not, often functioned, by the 1920s, as a corporate economic unit, under a robust patriarch, among small farmers and the middle class.⁹⁰ Occasionally, as in the case of Mrs Insanally of Bee Hive, East Coast Demerara, and Mrs Naraine of Wakenaam Island, women managed the business after the death of their husbands. In many families, women acquired the competence and the confidence because they were as involved as the men in making decisions, while remaining unobtrusive.⁹¹

The emphasis, so far, has been on some of the wealthier families; but in all the Indian villages, there was an intermediate layer of men and women who had, by the 1920s, entered some form of business. As Pillai and Tivary reported in 1922: 'on a smaller scale, there are several others, who have made good in different walks of life. It would seem that an Indian in British Guiana finds full scope for his enterprise and initiative only when he leaves the estate'.⁹² In 1924, 1926, and 1927, Indians operated 427, 437, and 439 rural shops respectively⁹³ — a suggestion that an Indian general store was present in almost every Guianese village. They also owned most of the butcher shops; these were run primarily by Muslims. Indeed, the entrepreneurial achievements of the Muslim Indians were quite astounding: although they formed only about 16 per cent of the Indian population, their representation in every area of business was very impressive.⁹⁴

It is a universal tragedy that the role of women in the progress of communities is rarely recorded: the perpetuation of this ignorance impoverishes all societies. It has been most painful to face this gaping void in the records, throughout the study. But, as was noted earlier, Indian women in British Guiana made as important a contribution as men in the development of the rice industry, while bearing and maintaining immensely large families. The method of categorising occupations varied considerably from one census to another; but the cold statistics of the *Census Report of 1911* show 135 women among 572 Indian shopkeepers, 351 among 911 Indian hucksters, and 10 women among

165 Indian 'merchants, agents, or dealers'. Inexplicably, the *Census Report of 1921* records only 35 women among 445 Indian shopkeepers. There were 320 women among 845 Indian hucksters, and 11 among 331 Indian 'merchants, agents, or dealers'. In 1931, these three categories were compressed as 'merchants, shopkeepers, and agents', with 344 women out of a total of 1,454 Indians. In 1921, of 259 Indian milk sellers, 122 were women. In the same year, of 684 Indians returned as stock-minders, presumably fairly large cattle and sheep rearers, 78 were women; while of 12,465 Indians returned as rice and provision farmers, 4,842 were women. In 1931, women reportedly accounted for 3,388 of 13,700 Indian landed proprietors, agriculturalists, and cattle farmers. Although the categorising is eclectic, it does show, however inadequately, that women were at the centre of Indian achievement in the colony. In the rural shops in particular, where closing hours were adhered to only theoretically, the varicose veins of many Indian women were a painful testimony to long hours of work on cold, damp floors, during advanced pregnancies.⁹⁵

The achievements of the rural Indian middle class in British Guiana often bred a resilient jealousy and pettiness among Indians.⁹⁶ On the other hand, it fed a belief, however elusive, that through persistent effort, mobility was possible. A competitive spirit permeated these villages, sustained always by responsibilities to the family, as well as the necessity to save in order to meet their religious obligations.⁹⁷ As an observer remarked in February 1927, they had 'the vision that leads to independence'.⁹⁸

The Daily Chronicle, in a comment on the progress of Indians in 1915-1916, as reported by the Immigration Agent General, concluded: 'The East Indian combines with his great industry the also commendable characteristic of being thrifty'.⁹⁹ As Table 4.4 shows, the deposits of Indians at the Post Office Savings Bank increased by over 100 per cent between 1916 and 1929. The lower savings during the War were primarily a result of substantial expenditure on land, as the rice industry expanded. The higher savings after 1922 coincided with its contraction, and the fall in land purchases (see Table 4.1). The average deposit of the Indians in the late-1920s was thrice that of the Blacks; but their savings at the Post Office Savings Bank were a fraction of their total savings: their deposits at the two commercial banks, The Royal Bank of Canada and The Colonial Bank, were equally impressive. The Immigration Agent General noted in 1925 that while Indian accounts at these two banks were 'negligible' in 1913, 'there is today probably no less than $\frac{1}{2}$ a million in between the two institutions at the credit of East Indians'.¹⁰⁰ This was a conservative estimate. In March 1922

— a time of economic decline — Indians had \$275,588 at the Colonial Bank and \$414,472 at The Royal Bank of Canada; their total deposits in that year were \$1,381,684; and they spent \$307,541 on new lands.¹⁰¹ In 1925, their deposits at the Post Office Savings Bank were \$251,230 higher than in 1922 (see Table 4.4): their savings at the commercial banks must have been much higher than \$¹/₂ a million. Wealthier Indians had a preference for the private banks; more Blacks patronised the Post Office Savings Bank.¹⁰²

Table 4.4						
Deposits of Indians and Blacks at the Post Office Savings Bank, 1916-1929						
(Information on the deposits at the two commercial banks is unavailable, except for Indian deposits in early 1922)						
<i>Indians</i>				<i>Blacks</i>		
<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Depositors</i>	<i>Amount (Dollars)</i>	<i>Avg. per person</i>	<i>No. of Depositors</i>	<i>Amount (Dollars)</i>	<i>Avg. per person</i>
1916	7,336	411,398	56.07	19,978	501,850	25.12
1917	7,507	489,801	65.24	21,403	588,733	27.50
1918	7,824	539,265	68.92	22,911	656,332	28.64
1919	8,220	659,599	80.24	23,781	734,462	30.88
1920	8,716	795,180	91.23	26,293	928,884	35.32
1921	8,176	717,958	87.81	25,745	848,646	32.96
1922	7,669	691,624	90.18	25,373	866,975	34.16
1923	8,067	788,830	97.78	25,721	867,865	33.74
1924	8,545	855,040	100.06	25,608	880,186	34.37
1925	9,294	942,854	101.44	25,461	893,580	35.09
1926	9,731	936,109	96.19	26,430	802,960	30.38
1927	9,443	913,778	96.76	23,937	776,148	32.42
1928	9,920	959,157	96.68	24,874	669,363	26.91
1929	9,637	898,110	93.19	23,747	630,448	26.54

SOURCE: C.O. 114/158, 162, 167, 172, 177, 182, 184, 187, 192, 195, 200, 204, 205A, 207: Reports of the Postmaster General, 1916-1929.

It is impossible to make even a vague estimate of the amount of money which many Indians kept at home, hoarded in ingenious places. In 1922, Keatinge observed that although 'the habit of hoarding is relatively much less than in India the custom is certainly prevalent from time to time cases are reported in the newspapers of thefts from Indians of hoarded cash and jewellery to the extent of

\$300 or \$400 at a time'.¹⁰³ Many clung tenaciously to the ancestral idea that their wealth was safer in their homes, where obeisance could be paid to Laxshmi, the goddess of wealth, for its protection and its growth.¹⁰⁴ This led to the retention of another ancient tradition, the acquisition of jewellery: even poorer women were opulently decorated with highly stylised jewellery;¹⁰⁵ it was, and still is, a sensible form of saving.¹⁰⁶ This practice sustained many Indian jewellers and goldsmiths throughout the colony. These accomplished craftsmen took pride in their exaggeratedly rich embroidery on neck-laces, bangles, nose-decorations, etc. In 1921, there were 238 Indian jewellers in British Guiana — 134 in Berbice, 55 in Demerara, and 49 in Essequibo.¹⁰⁷ This was an accurate barometer of the generally better economic conditions on the Corentyne, in Berbice.

A rural, Indian middle class, with a diverse base, was well established by 1914. By the 1920s, an urban, Indian middle class, comprising a few families owning large general stores primarily, and a few professionals, was also established. Several owned strategically-placed properties in Georgetown and New Amsterdam (see Table 4.5). These urban businessmen had their roots in rural entrepreneurship; most of them maintained this connection, diversifying and expanding the agricultural base of their businesses. The emergence of a small, urban, Indian middle class brought a few of them into the highest layer of colonial commerce; it also marked the beginning of an embryonic political awareness. Although this stratum was thin, their achievements expanded the realm of possibilities — a beacon for the rising, rural middle class. It also bolstered the growing perception of Indians as a whole, as a progressive, industrious, enterprising, and ascendant people. This assessment was fraught with serious, long-term political implications; but it inspired and impelled Indians at all levels to make a greater effort: it bred a positive perception of themselves.¹⁰⁸ It did not spawn a millennial rush to the towns by working class Indians; it galvanised them to work harder in the rural class.

A perception that the villages offered possibilities for a good livelihood is suggested by the Census Reports. In 1911, there were 3,453 Indians in Georgetown; 4,633 in 1921; and 5,496 in 1931. There were 1,292 and 1,294 Indians in New Amsterdam in 1911 and 1921 respectively; in 1931, there were only 1,137.¹⁰⁹ Among these urban Indians, as noted earlier, were some of the outstanding merchants and professionals of the colony. These were the first Indian leaders in politics and culture.¹¹⁰

Thomas Flood (1848-1920) was probably the most celebrated early Indian businessman in the colony. He was a self-made man, 'born of humble parentage' in India. In 1855, his parents were

recruited as indentured labourers; but they both died at sea, on the voyage to British Guiana. The boy, aged 7, was sent to the Orphan Asylum, on his arrival at Georgetown. He received his formal education there; but absconded and found employment as an office boy with George Little and Co., a Georgetown firm. Unable to get promotion, and bored with the futile routine, Thomas Flood quit, having got a job as a purser on a vessel trading between the Caribbean and the Mediterranean. His adventurous spirit was kindled: he subsequently worked for several years on ships taking Spanish immigrants to Cuba and the Philippines. But his seafaring life was terminated when acute illness forced him to seek medical attention in England.¹¹

Table 4.5

Properties owned by Indians in Georgetown and New Amsterdam, 1919-1927				
<i>Georgetown</i>			<i>New Amsterdam</i>	
<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of properties</i>	<i>Value (Dollars)</i>	<i>No. of properties</i>	<i>Value (Dollars)</i>
1919	325	384,240	86	66,563
1920	326	553,950	102	86,015
1921	408	560,575	144	91,731
1922	346	549,575	110	94,341
1923	377	602,325	119	106,150
1924	372	581,799	143	103,420
1925	366	575,202	148	110,270
1926		NOT AVAILABLE		
1927	379	667,717	134	139,295

SOURCE: C.O. 114/172, 177, 182, 184, 187, 192, 195, 204: Reports of the Immigration Agent General, 1919-1925, 1927

Flood returned to British Guiana around the mid-1870s, and opened a provision stall at the Stabroek Market in Georgetown. In 1878, he started to run a butchery as well there. And in order to maximise his returns and enhance his reputation as a reliable supplier of beef, he embarked on stock-rearing in the Mahaicony Creek; his herd was very impressive. He brought a sharp business mind to all his ventures; and he was able to buy several properties in Georgetown. He later acquired an abandoned sugar estate on the West Coast Demerara, Plantation Blankenburg, from the firm of Sprostons; he empoldered it and brought it under rice, coconut, and cattle. Flood diversified his commercial base continually. He was also involved in the transport business: he won and retained the contract for the transport service in Georgetown for many years until his death. For about thirty years, he held the contract to supply foodstuffs to Government institutions, including the Georgetown Hospital: his

cattle business was central to this operation. Flood also held shares in several companies; and was the director of Plantation Mara Ltd., The New Friends Ltd, and Plantation Springlands Ltd. — the latter three were sugar companies.¹¹²

His stud farm at Blankenburg, where he had a small race course, earned him a formidable reputation as a breeder of horses. His horses won two Governor's Cups. Shortly before his death on 27 December 1920, another one, 'Joe Brunner', won the coveted Prince of Wales Cup. He was described on that day to be 'covering himself with glory'. *The Daily Argosy* noted that he was 'a very jovial man', who took 'a lively interest' in the formation of the British Guiana East Indian Cricket Club in 1915. The stupendous achievement of this humble man was attributed to his 'thrift and perseverance'.¹¹³ *The Daily Chronicle*, in a eulogy, stated that Flood was 'a man of large sympathies an example of a life well lived and duty nobly done'¹¹⁴ *The Trinidad Guardian* observed: 'From a humble start, Mr Flood worked his way up the ladder steadily and earned and maintained the respect of everybody [he] was very generous'. His race horses had made him popular in Trinidad as well.¹¹⁵ He was one of two honorary presidents of the British Guiana East Indian Association in 1919-1920.

Shortly after his death, his assets were declared at \$238,301.54, with debts amounting to \$95,095.97, leaving a net value of \$143,205.57 — a great achievement at the time. His properties were worth over \$40,000.¹¹⁶ He had 756 head of cattle at his ranch at Mahaicony; these were sold for \$30,300. The horses at his stables were reported to be highly prized. Thomas Flood bequeathed his impressive wealth to his son, Edgar, and his daughter Ada Ramdeholl, the wife of an Indian doctor., J.E.R. Ramdeholl, of the successful Ramdeholl family in New Amsterdam.¹¹⁷

Another successful India-born businessman in Georgetown was Resaul Maraj (1865-1929), whose substantial premises were located at 18 Water Street, in the heart of the commercial district. He went to British Guiana from Gorakhpur District, eastern U.P., as an indentured labourer, accompanied by his brother in the ship 'Newcastle', in 1881. He was indentured to Plantation Leonora, West Coast Demerara; and was employed on that estate until 1894, when he and his family visited India. After a year, he returned to the colony; and procured a job as a 'driver' at Leonora. Having accumulated some capital, Resaul Maraj later bought a horse and carriage and settled at Hague Village. His industry, thrift, and aptitude for business enabled him to expand his transport service: he secured a

contract with government officials on the West Coast Demerara. This made it possible for him to open a general store at Cornelia Ida, in the same district. In 1914, he started a provision shop in Croal Street, Georgetown, while maintaining his original business on the West Coast.¹¹⁸ Like Thomas Flood, he believed in diversifying his entrepreneurial interests: in 1917, he acquired Plantation De Kinderen, East Coast Demerara, for \$35,000. This estate, at the time of his purchase, was considered 'one of the largest and best established cattle farms in the colony'.¹¹⁹ Resaul invested in rice and cattle.

In 1922, he bought 18 Water Street from the Hand-in-Hand Insurance Co.. He had made it to the big league; and the delegates from India, Pillai and Tivary, observed that 'Pandit Risal Maharaj (sic) who, as a young lad of 16 years, emigrated from India, has succeeded in building up a position, as a merchant, which does credit to his integrity and enterprise'.¹²⁰ By 1925, Resaul Maraj was advertising as an 'export and import provision merchant': his exports included rice, cocoa, coffee, coconuts, and coconut oil; his imports included American, English, and Indian foodstuffs. He had also become a large rice grower and a miller, as well as an established cattle rearer. Apart from De Kinderen, he bought Bath, Quaker's Hall, Zeeland, and Planters' Hall Estates¹²¹ — an amazing achievement for this ex-indentured labourer. In 1929, he was the president of the new, orthodox Hindu organisation, The Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha. He was also a Hindu priest. Resaul was of Brahman ancestry.

On 12 June 1928, he, accompanied by his wife, Bhagmania, left the colony to undergo an eye operation in England. He died on 13 July 1929 at Golders Green, London, before he had received medical attention. *The Daily Argosy* noted that Resaul Maraj was 'of a very genial disposition and was very much loved by the poor of all races on account of his benevolence'.¹²² His will revealed a net value of \$58,083.03, probably a very conservative estimate. He bequeathed his wealth equally to his wife and three daughters.¹²³ They continued to manage the business very successfully.

Some of the other successful Indian businessmen in Georgetown in the 1920s were: H.B. Gajraj, F. Kawall, M. Panday, R. Teekah, Lalla K. Persaud, Abdool Rohoman, and K.P. Das (see Table 4.6). Gajraj, Panday, and Persaud were, like Resaul Maraj, exporters of rice, coconuts, coconut oil, etc. The firms of Gajraj, Rohoman, and Kawall were among the oldest Indian businesses in Georgetown; they were founded in 1892, 1893, and 1907 respectively. These firms were all started by

ex-indentured labourers from India or their children; and the joint-family was crucial to their success.¹²⁴

Several anonymous women also made a contribution — as shop assistants — to the progress of these businesses. In 1931, for instance, there were 197 women among 755 Indian clerks and shop assistants in the colony.¹²⁵ In business families, women were often managerial assistants. The case of Lilian R. Das was exemplary. She and her husband, K.P. Das, founded the Pradasco Cycle Store at 19 Hincks Street, Georgetown, in 1920. By 1922, they were the agent for 'Sunbeam', 'Triumph', 'Humber', and 'Hercules' bicycles. They also sold 'Brindia' and 'The Golden Sunbeam' cycles — the latter was considered the best available in British Guiana. In December 1922, 'Hercules' and 'Brindia' cycles cost \$60 and \$50 respectively; and the firm carried cycle accessories 'of every description', including 'John Bull' tyres, as well as phonographs, records, and 'Ray-o-Lite' flashlights'.¹²⁶

The Das's business was so successful, that they quickly acquired Hack's Cycle Store at 20 Hincks Street. (The firm was later renamed Pradasco and Hack's). K.P. Das died in December 1926, aged 33.¹²⁷ He was president of the Christian Indian Society; and was also deeply involved with the British Guiana East Indian Association, The Wesleyan East Indian Young Men's Society, and the British Guiana East Indian Cricket Club. After his death, Lilian Das managed the business efficiently, with the help of her uncle, Arthur Rohee, and her brothers, Duncan and Eric Rohee, who were chief salesman, manager, and book-keeper respectively. She was the Governing Director. In the late-1930s, they had a staff of 14, and the firm was a member of the prestigious Georgetown Chamber of Commerce. Lilian Das's father, John Davidson Rohee, was a first class Hindi interpreter in the civil service; he was later first marshall of the Supreme Court.¹²⁸

A competitive spirit flourished in the Das family. In October 1927, Jaypeedas, a cycle and record store located at 6 Commerce Street, was advertising 'Record' cycles at \$48 each.¹²⁹ (The proprietor was J.P. Das, the brother of the late K.P. Das). At the same time, Pradasco and Hack's were offering 'Hercules' and 'Ray' cycles at \$45 and \$50 cash respectively.¹³⁰

In the county of Berbice also, the business skills of the Indians were evident by the 1920s. As early as 1916, J.W. Permaul of Rose Hall Village, Corentyne, was cited as being 'very enterprising': his drug and dry goods store was considered 'first class'; he managed it on 'modern and commercial

Table 4.6
Principal Indian Businesses, Georgetown and New Amsterdam, 1924

<i>Name</i>	<i>Type of Business</i>	<i>Location</i>
GEORGETOWN		
H.B. Gajraj	Provisions	Water St.
A. Rohoman and Co.	do.	14 Water St.
F. Kawall	do.	13A Water St.
Panday Bros	do.	Lot BB Water St.
Lalla K. Persaud	do.	5A Water St.
Resaul Maraj	do.	18 Water St.
R. Teekah	do.	10 Water St.
J. Salamalay	Motor Accessories	19 Hincks St.
Joseph Jaikaran	Drugs	1 La Penitence Rd.
Hack's Cycle Store (K.P. Das Proprietor)	Bicycles and Phonographs	20 Hincks St.
Pradasco Cycle Store (K.P. Das Proprietor)	do.	19 Hincks St.
NEW AMSTERDAM		
(Mrs) E. Mahadeo	Provisions	Strand
R. Ramdeholl	Provisions and Hardware	10 Strand

SOURCE: *Commercial Directory of Georgetown and New Amsterdam, British Guiana*, (Georgetown: The Chamber of Commerce, January 1925), pp.7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 21.

lines'.¹³¹ A public-spirited man (he became chairman of his local authority and mobilised the hitherto apathetic Indians to exercise their franchise decisively in the controversial village elections of March-April 1921),¹³² his full life was terminated by his death in March 1924. *The Daily Argosy's* eulogy was well-earned:

As a village merchant his dealings bore the hall-mark of integrity and this gave him an honoured place His life was one of great promise and he was looked upon as a 'coming man' in the times not far distant when the East Indian will come into his own the Indian community is deprived of the services of one whose opinions were well-considered and sound and whose heart was too big to be narrow what he achieved for the betterment of others will still live and be a source of inspiration to younger members of his race.¹³³

Joseph Ruhoman, the respected Indian journalist and thinker from New Amsterdam, in remarks to the Christian Indian Society, also underlined Permaul's abundant selflessness. He noted that he was 'ardently patriotic': he loved 'the motherland', India; and 'he watched with earnest solicitude the fortunes of the race' in the colony. Ruhoman exhorted successful Indians to reshape their attitudes, by emulating Permaul's magnanimity and commitment. He reportedly said that 'They should not imagine that they were in the world to serve their own petty interest or the interests of their narrow family circle. Mr Permaul was a public-spirited man and manifested a keen interest in the progress

and welfare of the masses He could intelligently and sympathetically enter into the discussion of any aspect of colonial affairs¹³⁴

Another highly respected Indian businessman in Berbice was Robert Ramdcholl. He owned an established provision and hardware store at 10 Strand, New Amsterdam. His business was founded around 1910, and carried an excellent range of hardware and groceries. In September 1920, for instance, these items included cycle tubes and 'Dunlop' tyres, 'Hubbock's' white zinc and coloured paints, twines, 'Black and White' polish, 'Bluemel's' motor cycle pumps, 'Shinio' metal polish, 'Colgate' powder, bath soaps, 'Huntley and Palmer's' biscuits, 'Lipton's' tea, 'Bluenose' butter, 'Freeman's' custard and blanc-mange powder, and a vast stock and a bewildering variety of groceries.¹³⁵ Whatever was available in a general store in London or New York seemed to have been stocked by Ramdeholl. Esther Mahadeo's provision store in the town was also copiously stocked.¹³⁶

It has become universally fashionable to be cynically dismissive of Horatio Alger, rags-to-riches tales. However, many Indians in British Guiana in the 1920s and after, appropriated these stories of progress by their compatriots — enduring examples of industry, thrift, and achievement, feeding and renewing hope in their own lives.¹³⁷ They were repeated and embroidered upon: these models of achievement helped to sustain Indian effort even during the depressions of 1921-1922 and the early-1930s. As Keatinge observed of the Indians in the colony in 1922: 'It is clear to any casual observer that there is a rich class, a very poor class, and a large intermediate class, ranging from those enjoying solid prosperity to those just able to pay their way and live in reasonable comfort ...'.¹³⁸ In January 1934, Governor Denham informed the Colonial Office: '.... in spite of the general depression, I think that there is no doubt that the East Indians have improved their economic position in relation to the other races in the colony It may well be said that the progress which the East Indians have made in recent years, is the most striking feature of the economic and social life of the colony'.¹³⁹

II

Indian and Official Attitudes to Education

Give them some education in the way of reading and writing, but no more. Even then I would say educate only the bright ones; not the whole mass. If you educate the whole mass of the agricultural population, you will be deliberately ruining the country Give the bright ones a chance to win as many scholarships as they can; give the others three hours education a day but if you keep them longer you will never get them to work in the fields. If you want agricultural labourers and not dissatisfaction, you will not keep them longer.

A Sugar Planter to the Legislative Council of Trinidad, 1926, quoted in Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p.456.

While the achievements of Indians in agriculture and commerce in the 1920s were compelling, their educational progress was substantially less impressive. As Table 4.7 shows, Indian children accounted for only 24 and 29 per cent of the total enrolment in the primary schools in 1920 and 1925-1929 respectively, although they constituted 41 and 45 per cent of the school-going population, aged 5 to 14, in 1920 and 1930 respectively. However, the enrolment of Indian children increased by 46 per cent between 1920 and 1929; in 1911 and 1921, only 29 and 31 per cent of them attended school; by 1928-1929, 55 and 58 per cent were doing so (see Table 4.8). The situation improved slowly, but steadily, in the 1930s. Yet in 1931 only 25 per cent of Indians were literate in English; about 9 per cent were literate in Hindi or some other Indian language; while 80.8 per cent of Blacks were literate in English (see Table 4.9).

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total enrolment</i>	<i>Indian pupils on roll</i>	<i>Indians as percentage of total</i>	<i>Percentage Indians in school age population</i>
1920	35,027	8,484	24	41
1925	43,131	12,400	29	
1929	42,749	12,423	29	
1930	42,634	13,207	31	45
1932	44,359	14,374	32.5	
1933	45,493	15,298	33.6	
1935	49,544	17,855	36	

SOURCES: M.K. Bacchus, *Education and Socio-Cultural Integration in a 'Plural' Society* (Montreal: McGill University, Centre for Developing Area Studies, 1970), Occasional Paper Series, No. 6, p.7; C.O. 114/216, Report of the Director of Education, 1933; C.O. 111/693/85037 [1931], encl.: Memo., 'Education of East Indian Children in British Guiana', 23 November 1930; C.O. 111/720/35120 [1934], encl.: Memo., 'Education of East Indian Children in British Guiana, 1930-1933', 3 January 1934

<i>Races</i>	<i>1911</i>	<i>1921</i>	<i>1928</i>	<i>1929</i>
Chinese	83	86.3	} 76.3 55	} 71.9 58
Blacks and Coloureds	79	80		
Portuguese	75	77		
Indians	29	31		

SOURCES: C.O. 114/187, Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1923; C.O. 111/720/35120 [1934], encl.: Circular by the Director of Education, 9 September 1931.

Table 4.9				
Literacy among Indians, 1931				
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage of total Indian population</i>
Literate in English	22,865	9,856	32,721	25.07
Literate in Hindi	7,286	1,423	8,709	6.67
Literate in another Indian language	2,433	601	3,034	2.32

SOURCE: *Census Report of British Guiana, 1931.*

Their comparatively slight progress in education reflected negatively on the Indian community: there were few of them in the civil service and the teaching profession; and their political awareness was considerably less developed than the Blacks; even in local government, Indians were inclined to be less involved, although their economic position often entitled them to greater participation.¹⁴⁰ By 1931, they comprised only 8 per cent of the civil service; in 1924, 43 out of 1,219 teachers or 3.5 per cent were Indians — this had increased marginally to about 7 per cent in 1929 (96 out of 1301 teachers). However, in 1931, 32 per cent of the merchants, shopkeepers, and agents were Indians; as were 21.6 per cent of the store clerks and shop assistants.¹⁴¹

Ramnarine argues that the early generations of Indians concentrated on establishing a 'sound economic base which laid the foundations for the next generation's mobility aspirations'.¹⁴² The evidence from the 1920s suggests that he is correct, although their progress in education was still slow. The Indians went to British Guiana with no material resources; many were from the lowest castes; most were illiterate in their own languages. After they had saved for several years in order to buy land, there was usually little capital left for the development of their plots. The labour of children on the farm and their supplementary earnings on the sugar estates were crucial to the development of rice cultivation, cattle rearing, and other embryonic agricultural activities (see Chapter 3). Moreover, 75 per cent of the Indians in the colony in the late-1920s were illiterate in English; it was difficult to persuade them that educating their children led to greater financial security. They were pragmatic; they were aware that the remuneration of teachers and clerks in the civil service was substantially less rewarding than the returns from agriculture.

The salaries of teachers were paltry. This had led a Black critic of the education system to ask in September 1916: 'Is it not a burning shame, a standing disgrace to the Government, that nearly 25

per cent of the head teachers receive a salary of under \$20 a month? Is a head teacher to be in no better position financially than the ordinary policeman of the lowest rank?'¹⁴³ In July 1920, *The Daily Argosy* observed that 'excellent precepts' were laid down for the guidance of teachers; but doubted whether they would give them much attention because their pay was so discouragingly poor. The paper noted that uncertificated assistant teachers earned between \$4 and \$7 per month; certificated teachers between \$10 and \$20 per month; while head teachers received between \$15 and \$70 per month; only 13 teachers in the colony got over \$70. A war bonus, equivalent to an increase of 40 per cent, was being paid; but *The Daily Argosy* was not impressed: '.... such salaries, having regard to the wages earned in other walks of life, are hardly likely to attract the most suitable class of candidates.'¹⁴⁴ In September 1920, a staff writer on the same paper recalled that when G.H.A. Bunyan of the British Guiana Teachers' Association pointed out, in an address, that female teachers got 'the magnificent pay' of \$5 to \$8 per month, his audience laughed. He believed that this should have been greeted with 'groans of dismay and horror': 'A teacher not earning as much as a cook in an ordinary household! The whole thing is abominable'.¹⁴⁵

The message was not lost on many Indians. In November 1930, the Director of Education stated in a memorandum that ambitious Indian youths, with a primary and, possibly, a secondary education, preferred the civil service or commerce because they were 'much more attractive' than teaching. He added that practically no Chinese or Portuguese were employed as teachers.¹⁴⁶ In a despatch to the Colonial Office covering this memorandum, Governor Denham, in March 1931, explained perceptively why he believed many Indians still preferred to keep their children in farming, rather than send them to school. He argued:

There is an advanced standard among them of expediency and economy in all money matters, and no East Indian is prepared to expend money on anything which will not give him a good return. If he can see that he is going to benefit by education he will obtain it, as is shown by the considerable number of Indian doctors and lawyers who have been educated outside this colony by their parents, who came here as Indian labourers.¹⁴⁷

The overwhelming majority of Indian agriculturalists could see no benefit from education, unless the child was especially gifted, and was identified early as a potential lawyer or doctor. The colonial education curriculum was eloquently devoid of emphasis on practical skills; the view that it drove children away from agriculture hardened Indian prejudices against schooling.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, the Education Commission of 1925 had recommended a root-and-branch reform of the education system, to suit the needs of the colony: it emphasised the 'practical side at the expense of the literary

side'.¹⁴⁹ Wynn-Williams, the chairman, observed in his supplementary report, that the 'moth-eaten idealism' of the curriculum promoted a distaste for manual work and technical proficiency. It offered little that children in an agricultural community could find useful. His indictment was comprehensive:

The curricula both in Primary and Secondary Schools are obviously too academic and too remote for the actual facts of life. Constructive work, the training of the mind through hand and eye, is almost entirely neglected; no effort is made to penetrate the secrets of scientific husbandry or to interest the children in the countless wonders of nature in which the tropics abound, and the attractions of biology, geology, and entomology are passed by in favour of the 'Anarchy of Stephen's reign' or 'the religious difficulties of Queen Elizabeth'.¹⁵⁰

Moreover, there were no technical or agricultural schools. The teaching of craft skills, and the imparting of knowledge of animal and plant husbandry through practical experience, were the preserves of the reform school for boys at Onderneeming, in a remote area.¹⁵¹ To have access to a practical, mildly scientifically-oriented education, a boy had to be a chronic delinquent or a criminal. Industrial education, as Peter Fraser argues, had bleak associations: with the Orphan Asylum since 1852; and from 1868, with children 'found begging or intending to be, habitually in the company of thieves, homeless and vagrant, or destitute orphans, or those under 12 years of age charged with an offence not as a kind of education suitable for the colony'.¹⁵² A practical education, even to youths in British Guiana in the 1950s, was synonymous with Onderneeming, which called up a dark world of brutality and forced labour, a perversely enduring conception. In this ex-slave society, it reinforced stubborn, negative perceptions of agriculture and manual work, especially among the Blacks.¹⁵³ The education system was even more delinquent to the needs of girls. The report of the Education Commission of 1925 was almost mute on this serious question.

By late-1926, as the Wilson-Snell Commission observed, no action had been taken on any of its main recommendations.¹⁵⁴ They said that the education system was generally seen in the colony as the cause of the 'low standard of industrial and agricultural efficiency', and the lack of enthusiasm for the schools by parents, reflected in a 65 per cent attendance rate among the children enrolled.¹⁵⁵

They also, condemned the use of obsolete text-books and indicted the system in its entirety :

The teaching in these schools would be ludicrously, if it were not so tragically, unsuitable. It approximates, in ideal at all events, to that supplied in similar institutions in England during the latter part of the reign of Queen Victoria The results of this divorce of the educational system from the realities of life are acutely visible in the almost complete lack of a native class of skilled artisans and in the distaste of large sections of the population for agriculture, in a colony which is and must always be primarily agricultural.¹⁵⁶

In 1923, the Commission^{er} of Education estimated that 4,200 out of 14,500 Indian boys between the ages of 5 and 14 did not attend school; neither did 10,200 out of 13,200 Indian girls in the same age-group.¹⁵⁷ The perceived irrelevance of the curriculum perpetuated Indian indifference to education. So also did the fact that all the primary schools in the colony were run by the various Christian denominations. In Chapter 1 reference was made to the supercilious attitudes of the missionaries to Hinduism and Islam, and their general tendency to diminish and denigrate Indian culture. The Indians, however, were invariably confident of the inherent good of their own heritage; and were not usually amenable to conversion. As Kassim Bacchus argues: '..... with the initial rejection by the elites of the beliefs and customs of the East Indians and their position on the lowest rung of the status hierarchy, their way of life and their religion were the only things which gave them a sense of identity, a feeling that they were human beings in a society which virtually denied them any status and ignored their cultural identity'.¹⁵⁸

In 1922, all 225 primary schools receiving full grants-in-aid from the Government were denominationally controlled¹⁵⁹ — the buildings were owned by the Christian bodies, and the administration, as well as the appointment of teachers, were completely in the hands of the clergy.¹⁶⁰ Hindus and Muslims found it difficult to get a teaching appointment, even if they were qualified, unless they converted to Christianity.¹⁶¹ As teachers' salaries were small, many Indians felt that this price was too great. Many also feared that proselytising in the schools would wean their children from their cherished religious and cultural traditions.¹⁶² Their apprehensions were not without foundation, for clergymen invariably advocated that elementary education be underpinned by a rigorous inculcation of Christianity in the minds of young 'heathens'. In 1912, for instance, Rev. Dr. Galton, a prominent clergyman in Georgetown, had argued:

The authorities of all religious denominations, which profess and teach the Christian religions, understand the importance of training the young in principles of morality and religion Their duty is not only to lay the truths of the Christian religion before their adherents, but to train them to direct their lives by those moral principles, which are based upon the teaching of Christ.¹⁶³

This conception of the role of the school was still dominant in the 1920s; and the Education Commission of 1925, in order to encourage Indians to send their children to school, advocated the termination of church control: '.... the time has now arrived to initiate a bold and comprehensive policy which will replace the existing denominational schools by government or colonial schools

.....' They also recommended the teaching of Hindi, and that increased grants be made to primary schools to facilitate this.¹⁶⁴ The Government acted on neither of the recommendations, although 59 schools were reported to be receiving small grants for the teaching of Hindi in 1929.¹⁶⁵ These were largely ineffectual. And Maharaj Singh's suggestion that a few teachers could be recruited in India to augment the small number of good teachers of the vernacular in the colony, was never carried out.¹⁶⁷

In 1929, C.F. Andrews observed that of 1,455 teachers in British Guiana, 104 were Indians; of 864 female teachers, only 13 were Indians. He thought that the paucity of female Indian teachers contributed to the low enrolment of Indian girls.¹⁶⁸ Indians were excessively protective of their daughters; and a caste-like fear of pollution by Black male teachers survived throughout the 1920s,¹⁶⁹ when over 90 per cent of the teachers were Black. Moreover, because the legal minimum age for the marriage of Indian girls was 13 — it was changed to 14 in 1929 on Andrews's recommendation (Ordinance 42 of 1929) — many parents could not see what benefits could be derived from a few years of schooling.¹⁷⁰ Young girls were required to perform a variety of domestic chores, while other members of the family worked in the fields.

While many Indian parents were indifferent to education for economic and religious reasons, as well as a perceived irrelevance of the curriculum for anything practical, official attitudes aided and abetted the delinquency of these parents.¹⁷¹ The sugar planters, of course, were rooted in a tradition which condoned child labour; and the Government made no serious attempt to enforce the Compulsory Education Ordinance of 1876. Peter Fraser notes the connivance between the planters and the Government in the late-1870s and early-1880s in rendering it innocuous.¹⁷² The Swettenham Circular of 1902 institutionalised official abdication of any responsibility for the education of Indian children; it also legalised the delinquency of Indian parents. Issued as British Guiana Circular no. 6388, on 18 January 1902, it was endorsed by the Education Commission of the same year; and was apparently enforced from June 1904.¹⁷³ It was a backward measure, which was retained long enough to do considerable damage. This obnoxious concoction read in part:

.... His Excellency is inclined to the policy of not enforcing penalties in the case of children of Asiatic immigrants, during the first ten years after their parents' arrival in the colony. After that period the Governor-in-Council is inclined to think that no penalty should be inflicted where the parents (or parent and guardian) have a conscientious objection to the school on account of the religion taught there, or to the instruction in school of girls, on account of prejudices in favour of seclusion.¹⁷⁴

Both Joseph Ruhoman (1921) and Kassim Bacchus (1989) have argued that the Swettenham Circular was designed to keep Indian children away from school so that their labour could be exploited by the sugar planters.¹⁷⁵ For the thirty years that it remained in force (1904-1933), Government officials invariably argued that child labour was a blessing to Indian children. The Immigration Agent General, R. Duff, stated in 1910 that work on the sugar estates led to an improvement in the physique of the children; he doubted whether compulsory education and their consequent 'confinement within doors will permit of this physical improvement being maintained.' Duff considered child labour an idyllic experience: '.... the very appearance of the children, as cheerfully singing and laughing, they run along transporting earth, picking up and transporting cane tops, or other such work, would quickly drive from the mind of any observer the idea, if such ever existed, that the children were over-worked'. And he 'strongly deprecate(d)' any pressure being put on Indian parents to deprive their children of this privilege, or else 'we shall have on our hands an idle, half-educated, and discontented community, seeking employment only in offices and stores, and with a steadily declining physique'.¹⁷⁶

In 1913, Duff, seeking another line of defence, argued that Indian children should retain their enviable position as workers in the interest of their parents, who constituted 'a thrifty, energetic, hard-working peasantry'. He added: '.... any steps which may tend to the withdrawal of a single individual from the soil are to be deprecated'.¹⁷⁷ In October 1917, the acting Immigration Agent General, R.P. Stewart, saw no reason to revise Duff's assessment of child labour. He explained to Governor Collet: 'It consists of transplanting earth or other material in little trays carried on the head, or in light weeding. The hours of work appear long — 7, 8, sometimes 9 hours, but it is, I am convinced, only so in appearance'. He also, opposed the withdrawal of the Swettenham Circular: providing a few hours were set aside for school, Indian children could continue to enjoy their work in the fields.¹⁷⁸ Collet endorsed this view, arguing that 'the most that is necessary is to secure that the children put in a minimum number of school hours each week'. Child labour on the estates should not be discouraged, because 'None of the children suffer in health by reason of their work in the field, and the amount of work which they do does not, I think, amount to very much'. Moreover, the Governor saw no need to accommodate the religious sensibilities of Indian parents: '..... the religious instruction given by Hindoos and Moslems to their own people is little but superstition with little reference to rules of conduct, and the rising race will come to little good unless it is christianised'¹⁷⁹ In short, Collet, too, believed that the Indian child's place was in the cane fields.

In May 1919, the second issue of the revived *Indian Opinion*, the official organ of the recently-revamped British Guiana East Indian Association, noted that of 20,000 Indian children of school age, only 6,000 were enrolled. (In fact, 7,788 were in school in 1919). The paper cited Duff's reasons for the poor attendance: the indifference of parents to education in English because they thought it would be useless if they returned to India; their desire to get their children to earn wages; and their aversion to having them taught by Black teachers. *Indian Opinion* deemed these 'stupid and frivolous', and submitted that 'it is the duty of the State to provide the best education for its children, irrespective of the personal tastes and prejudices of their parents, which are often the result of ignorance and settled traditional convictions'. The paper added that it was best for Indian children to be educated in English, but suggested that 'special state-aided schools, strictly undenominational and in charge of by teachers of Indian nationality' be set up. The curriculum should be that of the elementary schools in the colony, with the addition of Hindi grammar and literature.¹⁸⁰

This obviously made no impression on Governor Collet: Ordinance 13 of 1919, an amendment to the Elementary Education Ordinance of 1876, made no viable provisions for the teaching of Hindi; and it discriminated against Indian children. Compulsory attendance was to be enforced on children 6 to 14 years of age in Georgetown and New Amsterdam; in the rural areas, where most Indians lived, this was restricted to children between 6 and 12 years.¹⁸¹ Significantly, the Swettenham Circular was not withdrawn. This, as the Commissioner of Education reported in 1923, nullified the compulsory attendance provisions: it made 'the law a dead letter with respect to a large proportion of the population consisting of the East Indian element'.¹⁸² In 1925, W. Bain Gray, the Director of Education, noted that 'in accordance with the Swettenham Circular East Indian parents are never prosecuted for the non-attendance of girls'.¹⁸³

But the Ordinance of 1919 had other loop-holes, which rendered it innocuous to curb the non-attendance of Indian boys as well: its provisions did not apply to children living more than 2 miles away from a school; and boys in the rural areas needed only a 60 per cent attendance record to avoid prosecution; while children in the urban areas had to make 76 per cent. Moreover, there was only one compulsory attendance officer in each district; and he was precluded from summarily apprehending loitering children until he had ascertained their attendance record.¹⁸⁴ He, like the law, was toothless.

Throughout the 1920s, a diverse aggregation of opinion advocated the withdrawal of the Swettenham Circular; but the colonial administration resisted, feigning a rare sensitivity to the feelings of Indians — they could not, they argued, override those who opposed the educating of girls. On 29 July 1920, the British Guiana East Indian Association passed a resolution, requesting Governor Collet to enforce the Education Ordinance ‘against the parents of East Indian girls for their non-attendance at school, as the acquisition of education will be of material benefit to them in their future life’. Francis Kawall, in supporting the resolution, argued that the educating of boys, while neglecting the girls, would promote mixed marriages, as the former would be inclined to seek literate partners of other races; this should be avoided. He noted that those who opposed compulsory education for Indian girls were ‘illiterate and ignorant’; it was therefore the responsibility of the Government to see that both sexes were educated.¹⁸⁵

Collet dismissed the resolution, as well as the ‘so-called British Guiana East Indian Association’,¹⁸⁶ which he deemed a ‘self-appointed kind of East Indian Chamber ^{of} Commerce.’¹⁸⁷ He claimed that he was unaware of any Hindus who were members; neither had he met any Hindu who approved of girls attending Christian schools, much less the use of compulsion to achieve attendance. He conceded that ‘a good deal’ of the opposition to the education of their children was based on mercenary grounds: ‘the religious objection was mere pretext’. Yet he could not accede to the resolution because of a ‘numerously signed petition’ which he claimed to have received, and a delegation which met him, both having objected to compulsory attendance on ‘religious grounds’.¹⁸⁸ In fact, several prominent Hindus in the B.G.E.I.A. had supported the resolution, among them Resaul Maraj, Sookdeo Persaud, Ram Persaud Sawh, and Beesoon Dyall.¹⁸⁹ It was most extraordinary that Collet did not publish the ‘numerously signed petition’, neither was a copy apparently sent to the Colonial Office: manifestations of support for him, because they were sparse, were usually highly publicised.

Collet’s opposition to the education of Indian children had deeper promptings: like his rice policy, it was rooted in his obsession with sugar monoculture.¹⁹⁰ In November 1917, as noted earlier, he supported Indian child labour, and ‘a minimum number of school hours each week’.¹⁹¹ In May 1921, Collet submitted a draft bill to the Colonial Office, ‘The Estates Schools Ordinance, 1921’, which was designed to legalise child labour on the sugar plantations. The Bill provided for the ‘minimum hours at school’ for children on the estates — ‘three hours in the aggregate not later than 12

o'clock on each day'; for the rest of the day, they could work on the estate. Most significantly, it proposed to make it 'lawful for the manager of any such estate to employ on the estate any child over the age of 9 years attending such school'¹⁹² This bill was virtually an abrogation of the Compulsory Education Ordinance of 1919, which had provided for the compulsory attendance of boys in the rural areas, between the ages of 6 and 12. The three hours' mandatory attendance was a ruse to divert attention from the unlawfulness of the measure.

Collet's rationalisation of this travesty was transparently spurious. He argued that while small farmers obtained 'pecuniary benefit' from their children when they were kept away from school, labourers residing on sugar estates had no such opportunities for making profitable use of the labour of their children. (This was false: child labour was even more prevalent on the estates. The ordinance of 1919, with its provisions for compulsory education to the age of 12, and no limitation on school hours, was a potential threat to the use of child labour). Collet concluded: '... it is not to the best advantage of children that their compulsory attendance at school should prevent them from getting the practical knowledge of agriculture which they could not obtain otherwise'.¹⁹³ In September 1922, he noted that the increase in attendance in recent years was 'principally amongst East Indians, and is the result of compulsion';¹⁹⁴ yet he continually created opportunities for the weakening of the compulsory provisions; and rejected appeals for the withdrawal of the Swettenham Circular. It seemed like a policy to keep Indian children in the sugar-cane fields.

In 1923, the Commissioner of Education, H.W. Sconce, reported that 'the prosecution of East Indian girls is viewed with disfavour by the Government no steps are taken against this numerically strong section' for non-attendance. He added: 'Although the Compulsory Attendance Law applies to children of every race and creed and is put into operation, so far as is practicable, in every part of the colony, yet, one of the chief reasons for the continual evasion of the law by East Indians is the advantage they take of the Swettenham Circular There is no longer any need for it'. Sconce noted that the Education Code provided for the withdrawal of children from any religious instruction or observance, if parents so desired, without forfeiting any of the benefits of the school.¹⁹⁵ In 1925, the new head of the Education Department, W. Bain Gray, reproduced Sconce's report calling for the withdrawal of the Swettenham Circular, in his memorandum to Maharaj Singh, the delegate from India.¹⁹⁶ The Government did nothing.

In 1924, the Pillai-Tivary Report deplored the domination of the education system in the colony by Christian denominations: they considered this 'most disastrous' for Indian children, since many parents preferred their children to 'grow up in ignorance rather than run the risk of their being converted' They recommended state-control of the primary schools. Pillai and Tivary also condemned the wide-spread use of child labour on the estates. They blamed illiterate parents and the estate authorities for this; but they disapproved of the 'apathetic' attitude of the Government with regard to the education of Indian children.¹⁹⁷

In 1925, Maharaj Singh noted that among Indian children, those attending school as a proportion of those who were of school-age, had risen from 30.6 per cent in 1920 to 38.8 per cent in 1924. He also, felt that if the compulsory education provisions had been rigidly enforced, enrolment would have been higher.¹⁹⁸ He observed that this was a matter on which 'educated Indian opinion feels very strongly'; and he believed that 'the time had come for education to be made compulsory in practice for Indian children (boys and girls) throughout the colony'. Maharaj Singh was optimistic because the prestigious Education Commission of 1925 had recently made radical proposals for educational reform, which, he thought, would stem the 'leakage' among Indian children after the elementary classes, and lift the education of Indian girls out of its 'backward condition'.¹⁹⁹

The report of this Commission, as noted earlier, was a most comprehensive document, fearless and imaginative in its critique of the denominational system, as well as the curriculum. They noted that the average attendance for 1924 was 65 per cent, and recommended that 'all circulars tending to discriminate between East Indians and other races be withdrawn', a clear reference to the Swettenham Circular. They also advised that 'as soon as practicable the age for compulsory attendance should be fixed by law at from 6 to 14 years for all parts of the colony'.²⁰⁰ Ernest Wynn-Williams, an inspector of schools in England, who chaired the Commission, was convinced that 'No tinkering with the present machine can possibly be effective; reconstruction alone will serve the very necessary purpose of bringing the colony abreast of modern conditions and development'.²⁰¹

While the report was being digested, the Commissioner of Education reported that in October 1925, 22 sugar estates were employing children under 12 years of age; they worked all year on some plantations. The youngest child employed was under 6 years. The usual working hours was 6 a.m.

to 6 p.m. The average distance between the children's homes and their places of work in the fields was 3 miles; the maximum was 8 miles.²⁰²

Although Wynn-Williams spent less than two months in British Guiana, his perception of the character of the rulers in the colony was remarkably accurate. On 7 January 1925, shortly after he returned to England, he wrote prophetically to the Colonial Office:

..... there is an inherent and marked reluctance on the part of those in authority to translate words and speeches into action. There is no difficulty in getting good resolutions accepted, but I have an uneasy suspicion that when the time comes for carrying them into effect, there will be delay, compromise, or even repudiation

And possibly alluding to the entrenched belief that the local administration was a pawn of the sugar planters, Wynn-Williams added: 'The danger lies in inaction and I can only express the earnest hope that a new and stronger Executive will be established which will act fearlessly and with vigour'²⁰⁴

On 6 March 1925, he wrote to R.A. Wiseman at the Colonial Office with regard to the new Director of Education in British Guiana, W. Bain Gray²⁰⁵: '..... I don't think he is the kind of man who can easily accommodate himself to colonial surroundings. He is too academic for British Guiana and too great a stickler for the rigidities of army etiquette'. The civil servants at the Colonial Office were rarely amenable to external counsel; but Wynn-Williams was vindicated.²⁰⁶

More than two years after the Commission had reported, the Swettenham Circular was still in place; child labour flourished; no action had been taken on the major recommendations. In September 1927, *The New Daily Chronicle* remarked that while some illiterate Indian mothers could not appreciate the value of education, 'a certain type of employer' exploited the labour of children who did not attend school; and added:

..... we feel sure that awakened opinion among the leaders of East Indian thought will no longer allow them to wink at Government's connivance in this matter. In fact it is more than connivance, since the Government has actually directed education officers not to prosecute East Indian parents omitting to send their daughters to school. The circular must be withdrawn. The old caste objections have no longer their ancient force, and parents merely seek refuge in them to exploit the labour of their children. The East Indians, who are realising that they must take an increasing part in the government of the country, will, we are sure, see that it is a terrible handicap to have an illiterate motherhood for their race.²⁰⁷

At the end of 1929, the Director of Education reported that 20 sugar estates were still employing children under 12 years; the youngest child employed was 7 years old. They usually worked from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and travelled an average of three miles to work; the maximum was 5 miles.²⁰⁸ (In 1928, 2,555 'juveniles' were reportedly working on the sugar estates).²⁰⁹ It is noteworthy that while

the number of Indian children attending school increased from 8,484 in 1920 to 12,400 in 1925, an increase of 46 per cent, by 1929, enrolment stagnated at 12,423 (see Table 4.7). The non-attendance of Indian girls was largely responsible for this; yet the Swettenham Circular was not withdrawn. In fact, the Education Commission's recommendations were practically consigned to the archives. This was no surprise. In September 1925, E.R. Darnley at the Colonial Office, had minuted that while the report was 'a valuable document embodying a welcome reaction against academicism', its implementation was fraught with 'serious political difficulties'. His argument was that because teachers in the colony had 'great influence upon the elections', they would oppose its proposals which tended 'to depreciate the value of their present mental equipment', demanding additional qualifications. He communicated this to the new Governor, Sir Cecil Rodwell.²¹⁰ So the moribund system was retained.²¹¹ Darnley made no mention of their sensitivity to the reaction of the plantocracy if the far-reaching proposals were carried out.

A conference organised by the Government in June 1931 failed to agree to the withdrawal of the Swettenham Circular. Several prominent people in Georgetown soon launched a campaign for its removal. J.I. Ramphal, the principal of the Modern High School and a member of the executive of the British Guiana East Indian Association, wrote several articles against the Circular in support of the education of Indian girls; in *The New Daily Chronicle*; Francis Kawall, the honorary president of the B.G.E.I.A., and Rev. J.R. Hudson, who was associated with the Wesleyan East Indian Young Men's Society, were also resolute campaigners for its withdrawal.²¹² On 29 April 1933, the Government, after consulting with Indian leaders at another conference, decided to withdraw the Circular, in the interest of the education of Indian girls; it also agreed to take greater care in enforcing the compulsory education provisions. It was officially removed on 15 July 1933.²¹³ Bain Gray observed that 'the withdrawal of the Swettenham Circular is not merely an educational measure; it is an advance desired by the Indians themselves, and an acknowledgement of the position they hold in the community today'.²¹⁴

Education was the area in which Indians in British Guiana had made the least progress; but from the 1930s, a new perspective was taking shape. As Governor Denham wrote in March 1931: 'The desire of the average East Indian in the colony is to learn English and to obtain local employment. He fully realises that his chances of making money and of obtaining lucrative employment rest principally on his knowledge of English and on his being able to adapt himself to the life of this country'.²¹⁵ In

1931, 106, 453 of the 130,540 Indians in the colony were local-born (81.5 per cent); only 23,236 were born in India (17.7 per cent).²¹⁶ In 1933, the Director of Education observed that since 1930, there had been an increase in the enrolment of Indian children: it rose from 12,423 in 1929 to 15,298 in 1933, an increase of 23 per cent. In 1932-1933, of 1,134 new pupils in the fully-aided primary schools, 1,014 were Indians — 530 were Indian girls, the largest category.²¹⁷ As they were an overwhelming majority in regulation 80 schools, run by the Canadian Mission, the increase was more impressive. By 1935, there were 17,855 Indian children in the primary schools, a rise of 43 per cent since 1929. With the withdrawal of the Swettenham Circular, there was an increase of 16 per cent between 1933 and 1935 (see Table 4.7).

This new attitude to education sprung from the economic achievements in the 1920s, as well as the educational progress of a small, but visible, group of Indian professionals, and the excellent work by the Canadian Mission. The withdrawal of the Swettenham Circular opened the way for the education of Indian girls. It was a water-shed in the education of all Indians; child labour was not terminated; but the compulsory attendance provisions were enforced more rigorously.

III

Changing Attitudes To Education And The Emergence Of Indian Professionals, With Special Reference To The Work Of The Canadian Mission

The missionaries were the pioneers in education in British Guiana They took the torch of Christianity to all parts of this country and erected schools to educate the Indian immigrants. It may have been a means to an end, but the fact remains that denominational schools have done much for the Indians of this country. It cannot be disputed that most of our outstanding men are products of Mission Schools. In keeping with our modern outlook in education we wisely advocate state-controlled schools free from denominational control, but let us not in our enthusiasm for reform kick down the ladder by which we have ascended.

Sugrim Singh, 'One Hundred Years in British Guiana', *The Daily Chronicle*, 5 May 1938.

The Canadian Presbyterian Church is concerned primarily with the East Indians and is the only body that gives any serious attention to these people.

James Dunn, *Glimpses of Guiana* (New Amsterdam, British Guiana: Canadian Presbyterian Mission, 1938), p. 31.

The Canadian Mission is best remembered for its work in education. Many successful Guyanese got their start in Canadian Mission schools, and still pay tribute to the roots of their prosperity Able, well-trained East Indians from the Guyana Presbyterian Church have gone to all parts of the world and have contributed significantly to their new homelands. Many Guyanese East Indians who live in Canada, for example, can trace their roots to the schools and churches of the Canadian Mission.

Zander Dunn, 'The Canadian Mission to the Guyana Presbyterian Church', in *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience*, Frank Birbalsingh, (ed.), (Toronto: Tsar, 1989), pp. 221,223.

In 1921, the foremost Indian journalist and thinker in British Guiana, Joseph Ruhoman, commenting on the Government's indifference to the education of Indian children, argued that 'in the interest of a certain class of employers of labour it recognises the expediency of keeping the people at such a mental standard as to make them practically incapable of extending their outlook beyond the field of agricultural labour'.²¹⁸ While Ruhoman's argument is irrefutable, it would be a distortion to assume that the colonial rulers succeeded: that the horizon of the Indian people did not extend beyond the cane fields and the rice beds. By the end of the 1920s, through western education, a small, but disproportionately influential, body of Indian professionals — doctors, lawyers, head teachers — was already established. These were the path-finders: their achievements were undermining the resistance among Indians to education in Christian-run schools, while expanding conceptions of educational possibilities.²¹⁹ Their success also gnawed away at the stubborn, dark stigma of indentureship, the popular notion of the cringing, alien 'coolie'.²²⁰ These few Indian professionals were known to, and claimed by, all Indians.

As early as 1912, E.A. Luckhoo, the first Indian solicitor in the colony, had noted that three of his compatriots were already doctors, two were lawyers [solicitors], and that three or four more would soon join them. He added that two Indians were connected with the Church of England Mission; one was a B.A. (Cantab.); another was a Fellow of Fowler's Phrenological Institute, London. Many were dispensers and book-keepers on the sugar estates; several were interpreters to the Immigration Department and the judiciary. Luckhoo was optimistic; he believed that a process of exciting, evolutionary change had begun among the Indians: 'At the one end — humble and illiterate, and even despised immigrants, come to make a living as tillers of the cane fields; at the other end — property holders and cattle farmers, and shopkeepers, and doctors, and lawyers, and ministers Professional life is becoming an irresistible attraction to the educated and aspiring young East Indian creoles'.²²¹

Indeed, at the intermediate level, small advances were being made by Indians in jobs for which some formal education was required. Their contribution to professional occupations was 5.8 per cent in 1891, 8.2 per cent in 1911, and 12 per cent in 1931. They held 10.6 per cent of commercial occupations in 1891, and 23.6 and 30.5 per cent in 1921 and 1931.²²² These parallel advances were not fortuitous: it is most probable that as greater numbers achieved a degree of economic security and self-confidence, the aversion to western education lifted progressively. While there were 43

Indian teachers (37 men, 6 women) in 1924, in 1931, there were 100 (81 men, 19 women).²²³ By 1922, there were 12 Indian head teachers in the colony — 10 were employed at Canadian Mission schools. (A.H. Baburam of De Hoop School was the first Indian to be trained at Mico College in Jamaica).²²⁴ It is significant that at four of the nine Canadian Mission schools receiving full grants-in-aid in 1922, the head teachers were Indians; while at the six, smaller Canadian Mission schools receiving grants under regulation 80 (schools in 'remote' areas), all the head teachers were Indians. In all of these schools, Indian children represented an overwhelming majority: in the grants-in-aid schools, 1,165 of the 1,348 pupils enrolled, or 86 per cent, were Indian;²²⁵ it was probably higher in the regulation 80 schools, which were located in almost exclusively Indian areas.

Between 1922 and 1924, an average of 10,500 Indian children were enrolled in schools of various denominations; many did not go to Canadian Mission schools. But the contribution of the Canadian Mission in minimising the apprehension of Indian parents to education in denominational schools was a remarkable achievement, an enduring area of brightness in the social history of the Indians. What was peculiar about their approach to enable them to gradually, successfully beat back Indian intransigence?

The Canadian Mission (the Presbyterians of Canada),²²⁶ under John Morton, had worked exclusively among the Indians in Trinidad since 1868; they had begun to attract many Indian children to their mission schools, although their rate of conversion was minimal. The Scottish Presbyterians, established among the Blacks in British Guiana, had, for several years, been trying to spread the 'word' among the Indians in the colony. Their work, like that of the Anglicans and the Wesleyans, yielded little; they were disillusioned. In 1883, they requested John Morton, who had visited British Guiana in 1880, to procure a minister from his church in Canada to take over their work among the Indians. In July 1885, Rev. John Gibson of the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia went to the colony to set up the Canadian Mission to the Indians.²²⁷ Progress was glacial during the first decade: the Indians were largely immovable in the face of proselytising; while malaria and generally bad sanitary conditions eroded morale, with a consequently high turn-over in the personnel of the Mission.²²⁸ John Gibson died of yellow fever in November 1888, and all work seemed to have ceased.²²⁹

The arrival of Rev. J.B. Cropper in November 1896, however, was a water-shed in the work of the

Canadian Mission to the Indians in the colony. He was as well-equipped as possible to attempt this daunting task. His father had been the Protector of Indians in St. Lucia; he spoke Hindi fluently; he had worked briefly among the Indians in Trinidad.²³⁰ Cropper spent nearly 50 years in British Guiana: his contribution to the promotion of education among the Indians is an enduring legacy. Rev. Zander Dunn, whose father was the principal of the Berbice High School in the late-1930s, explains why the Canadian Mission showed a partiality for the Indians:

.... they considered [them] to be superior to the Africans. While they had no use for Hinduism and only a grudging admiration for some aspects of Islam, they respected the culture of India — the language, music, organisations and history The Canadian missionaries paid the Indians the highest compliment: they called them 'Anglo-Saxons toasted by the sun'.²³¹

Cropper and his colleagues were very astute. They did not stridently denigrate Indian religions and culture, as Bronkhurst of the Wesleyan Mission had done obsessively in the 1870s and 1880s (see Chapter 1). The Canadian missionaries manipulated some of the religious and cultural symbols of the Indians, in an effort to reshape and adapt their Christian message. They encouraged the wearing of *dhoti* and *sari*, the use of Hindi, the singing of *bhajans* (Christian hymns in Hindi), the holding of cottage meetings in Indian homes, where *Yesu Kathas* (the story of Jesus) were presented. (These were patterned after Hindu *kathas*, where stories from the *Ramayana* were rendered).²³² Interesting Bible stories were translated into Hindi.²³³ In fact, it was mandatory for Canadian missionaries to speak Hindi. Indian catechists also were trained; and as Rev. Dale Bisnauth notes, these Indian preachers often used the Hindu classic, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, as 'the authority for the claims for Jesus Christ', thus rendering Him worthy of worship by Indians. *Yisu Masih* (Jesus Christ) was lauded as *Ishwari-ji* (Lord) and *Sri Bhagwan* (God).²³⁴

But the reward was an excruciatingly slow drip. In 1906, Rev. Gibson Fisher reported that the 'opposition of the Hindus and Mohammedans' in Essequibo was frustrating their work. In 1909, J.B. Cropper observed that 'a spirit of strong opposition' had developed among the Muslims; while Hindu resistance to conversion was strengthened by the rising popularity of the *Ram Lila* performances, the dramatisation of the story of Lord Rama as narrated in the *Ramayana*. The following year, Cropper referred to the 'aggressive' response of the Muslims, who were building mosques on the estates and in the villages. And he betrayed an element of despair when he wrote to his superiors in Canada of the 'Godliness of the religionless Indo-Guianese'.²³⁵ Some years later,

Rev. E.H. Johnson showed a deeper understanding of Indian response to the Mission; he reflected: 'Christian work in the colony has never been easy, and one of the major difficulties has been the opposition of the East Indians to anything that appeared to draw their children away from their customs Isolated among strangers, they seem to feel the need of vigorously preserving their national identity'.²³⁶

Possibilities of converting Indians almost dried up in the 1920s as they advanced materially. In April 1925, for example, *The Presbyterian Record* complained that Hindu *pujas* were becoming 'more numerous and conversions fewer'.²³⁷ Growing economic security fed a renewed confidence in Hinduism and Islam; and this was reflected in the construction of several beautiful temples and mosques throughout the colony, the proliferation of seven-day *yajnas* (religious readings) among Hindus, and opulent feastings at *Eid* among Muslims. Middle class Indians played a prominent role in these ceremonies²³⁸; through organisations such as The Hindu Society (founded in 1922), the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, and The Young Men's Muslim Literary Society,²³⁸ they brought order and dignity to their Indian tradition. Resistance to Christian evangelism had been of crucial importance in preserving their identity and sense of self-worth, which gave them the will and the confidence to achieve.

Even among the converted minority, as Bisnauth remarks: 'There were many cases in which Christian parents organised the marriage ceremonies of their children according to Hindu rites at which Hindu Gods were invoked For many converts, it was not so much that they were christianised; it was more that they understood Christianity in Hindu terms! They acknowledged *Yisu Masih* as their special manifestation of *Brahma*, but this did not prevent them from recognising other Gods and even participating in their worship'.²⁴⁰ By 1918, thirty-three years after the mission was started, only 1,933 Indians were reported to be Canadian Presbyterians; but there were 59 congregations, 46 Sunday Schools, 39 day schools, and one high school. Twenty nine catechists, 79 school teachers, and 2 high school teachers were employed by the Mission²⁴¹: its credentials in the education of Indians were already unassailable. In 1931, when 9,045 Indians were returned as Christians (6.9 per cent), 3,465 were Anglicans, 1,958 Catholics, 1,275 Scottish Presbyterians, and only 1,055 were Canadian Presbyterians.²⁴²

Bisnauth detects an element of opportunism among some Indian Presbyterians - conversion offered

opportunities for employment in the Canadian Mission schools.²⁴³ Hindus and Muslims, as noted earlier, found it hard to get teaching jobs in the colony, although most of the funds for the administration of schools and the payment of teachers came from general revenue. The poor rate of conversion produced much agonising within the Mission. This spawned an ongoing debate on the emphasis which should be placed on evangelism, on one hand, and its work in education, on the other. Cropper considered education 'the hand-maid of evangelism'. In August 1920, he stated emphatically: 'I will not stand for placing the educational work in the foreground and concentrating means and energy on it. It must be secondary to the all important work of soul saving'²⁴⁴

Rev. J.A. Scrimgeour, however, countered passionately that while Christian principles should prevail in the schools run by the Canadian Mission, the education of Indian children was a rewarding endeavour for the Mission, even if they were not converted.²⁴⁵ His view was certainly dominant throughout the 1920s; and in Berbice, where he worked from 1914 to 1927, the Berbice High School and the primary schools administered by the Mission, profited immeasurably from his less tendentious, enlightened attitudes.²⁴⁶ These had been shaped by the progress he witnessed among Indian children at Naparima College (Trinidad), a high school founded by the Mission, where he taught for five years before his appointment in British Guiana in August 1912.²⁴⁷ Bisnauth believes that 'Only the highest tribute can be paid to [Scrimgeour's] long and dedicated service among the East Indians in British Guiana'.²⁴⁸ *The Daily Argosy* noted in July 1922 that he was 'very much esteemed by all especially the East Indians among whom he has laboured. Always ready to render assistance to the needy, he has endeared to all'²⁴⁹

But it would be an act of historical ingratitude to depreciate Cropper's contribution to the education of the Indians, in spite of his Eurocentric tendencies. He headed the Mission in the colony from 1896 to his retirement in September 1936 — (he stayed on for the rest of his life; he died in 1945);²⁵⁰ and he, almost single-handedly in the early years, built up the Canadian Mission schools in Indian areas. He founded the first school at Helena, an Indian settlement in the Mahaica District, in 1897, ten months after his arrival.²⁵¹ By 1906, Cropper had four schools, two of which received Government grants; the Mission had to fund the others. He reported in 1908 that it was difficult to procure state-grants because the regulations precluded such assistance to new schools which were near to established, aided schools, unless the latter could not provide sufficient accommodation. He believed that more schools were needed for Indian children, as the existing ones were staffed and attended

primarily by Blacks; this tended to perpetuate Indian indifference to education.²⁵² In the late-1930s, Peter Ruhomon, the 'Indian Centenary' historian, acknowledged Cropper's efforts:

The Policy pursued by Mr Cropper of planting schools in East Indian centres, as an important adjunct to evangelistic work, was endorsed by all the missionaries who joined the staff, as the work extended throughout the colony, and became a settled policy. The church in Canada spent freely in the maintenance of these schools and the fruit of this policy is to be seen today²⁵³

Cropper was indomitable: in spite of the paucity of Indian converts, the financial limitations of the Mission, the inflexibility of official regulations on support for schools, he was able to get the sugar estates to assist in the opening of small schools for Indian children. But this had a price. The capacity of the Canadian Mission to defend the interests of the Indians was reduced considerably. As Zander Dunn observes:

Wherever the missionaries went establishing schools and churches they looked to the estate owners for help. In most cases, they got some material aid from the estates. Land, buildings, and financial grants were provided — enough to make the Canadians feel obligated and dependent [they] were so busy and so beholden to the estate owners for whatever they received that, while they criticised the actions of individual planters, they seldom stood against the system which gave white landowners so much power. Unintentionally, they became part of the system which kept down the East Indian people.²⁵⁴

It is significant that although the Swettenham Circular was 'a grave detriment to the inroads which the Canadian Presbyterian Church proposed to make',²⁵⁵ they were conspicuously silent on the retention of this obscurantist measure.

Yet it would be a distortion to conclude that Cropper was indifferent to the honour and welfare of the Indians in British Guiana. In 1912, as noted earlier, he recorded, with obvious pleasure, the progress of Indians who had settled in the villages.²⁵⁶ In February 1922, when the editor of *The Daily Argosy*, Sam Lupton, an Englishman who wallowed in Anglo-Indian bigotry (he had worked in Karachi), alleged that the Indian immigrant was 'a poor type of labourer' with neither 'technical nor physical qualities', Cropper was indignant. He castigated Lupton for biting the hand that fed him, as the Indians were 'a leading factor in the success of the colony's life Without the labour of the East Indian, the colony would today have been little more than a mangrove swamp fringed with courida bush'.²⁵⁷ In mid-1929, Cropper intervened promptly to correct an impression of generalised degradation, formed by C.F. Andrews, after he and the distinguished visitor had seen Indians on a backward estate on the West Bank Demerara. As Andrews reported: [Cropper responded] 'that I had seen one of the depressed areas and that I must not take this to be typical of the whole colony'.

He added that while Cropper was not in favour of labourers from India going to British Guiana, he thought that the retention of links with India was vital to the preservation of the dignity of the local Indians.²⁵⁸

Cropper's invariably positive perception of Indians permeated the Mission. While their strategy of manipulating Indian cultural symbols brought few converts to the church, it eroded Indian apprehension of denominational education : it attracted many Indian children to their schools. Paradoxically, their recognition of many features of the Indian tradition reinforced Indian belief in the inherent strength, richness, and antiquity of their own culture.²⁵⁹ This empathy with aspects of the Indian heritage, coupled with unprecedented opportunities for employment as teachers in the Canadian Mission schools, spawned an increasingly positive attitude to education.

Rudolph Grant notes the change fostered by the Mission:

As they realised the value of education, the East Indians embraced the opportunities which were available to them. These opportunities were, by and large, to be found within the walls of the Canadian Mission. But the mission not only provided schools for East Indians, they stuck to a policy of employing, almost exclusively, East Indian teachers as these became available..... When the occasions demanded, they become Christians, but they retained contact with Allah and Buddha (sic).²⁶⁰

Although this policy created almost exclusive Indian schools, retarding their integration into the broader society, it accelerated the employment of Indian teachers — hitherto the preserve of Blacks. As Table 4.10 shows, in 1927, at schools receiving grants-in-aid, nine of the head teachers were Indians — seven of these were at Canadian Mission schools in predominantly Indian areas. Meanwhile, of the 39 schools receiving grants under regulation 80, (smaller schools, 'in remote or sparsely populated areas'), 16 were run by the Mission; and the head teachers of 13 of these were Indians. In the same year, five other schools, run by the Mission, got small grants from the Government for the teaching of Hindi (under regulation 78): Windsor Forest (West Coast Demerara), No. 48 and No. 56 (Corentyne), Zeelandia, and Golden Fleece (Essequibo).

Although only 11 of the 221 grants-in-aid schools were run by the Canadian Mission, their smaller regulation 80 schools reached many hitherto neglected areas, offering Indian children an education.²⁶¹ And the presence of several Indian head teachers in the villages, did much to reshape Indian attitudes to education. It also gradually lessened the prejudice against educating girls. In 1924, of 10,700 Indian children in the primary schools, about 3,000 were girls; 3,504, 3,615, and 3,782

Table 4.10
Indian head teachers in British Guiana, 1927
(all schools are Canadian Mission unless stated)

FULL GRANTS-IN-AID SCHOOL

<i>Name</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>No On Roll</i>	<i>Certificate (class)</i>	<i>Monthly Salary</i>
DEMERARA				
E.C. Parvatan	Helena	201	III	\$49.50
Edward Bissoo (Bishu)	Noitgedacht	211	III	\$49.50
J.C. Chandisingh	Uitkomst	54	III	\$39.60
BERBICE				
H.M. Ramdeholl	Bohemia	118	II	\$45.00
H.A. Baburam	Albion	425	I	\$81.00
A.M. Nathoo	Rose Hall (Scots)	492	I	\$100.00
Cameron Nathoo	Kildonan (Scots)	239	II	\$54.00
J.R. Lachmansingh	Massiah	134	II	\$49.50
ESSEQUIBO				
E.S. Birbalsingh	Mackay Memorial	126	III	\$45.00
Schools Receiving Grants Under Regulation 80				
DEMERARA				
W.B. Nanprashad	Unity	78	Uncertificated	\$19.00
S.C. Gopaul	Esau and Jacob	73	do.	\$20.00
J. Bhawansingh	Biaboo	49	do.	\$22.00
D.M. Veerasawmy	Canal No. 2	123	Uncertificated	\$18.00
Matadin Raghoo	Clarksdale	36	do.	\$15.00
Neil Ramsaroop	Hague	49	do.	\$16.00
BERBICE				
Arnold Singh	Crabwood Creek	73	do.	\$17.00
J. Inasi	Bush Lot	163	do.	\$25.00
ESSEQUIBO (LEGUAN AND WAKENAAM)				
H. Sahai	Maryville	83	do.	\$23.00
E.J. Ramballi	Endeavour	47	do.	\$24.00
Thomas Gherawo	Success	88	do.	\$21.00
Charles Pooran	Bank Hall	9	do.	\$12.00
James Bharat	Ridge	46	do.	\$20.00

SOURCE: C.O. 114/204, Report of the Director of Education, 1927.

Indian girls were enrolled in 1925, 1926, and 1927 respectively.²⁶² As noted earlier, this rose sharply with the withdrawal of the Swettenham Circular in July 1933.

It would be inaccurate to assume that Indian children did not enroll in other denominational schools. In fact, in 1927, only 3,636 children attended the 34 Canadian Mission schools — (a small minority

were non-Indians); whereas 13,555 Indian children were attending primary school.²⁶³ Several outstanding Black teachers also contributed to the education of Indian children. As no mass conversion, no radical deculturalisation followed, many Indian parents, by the late-1920s and early-1930s, saw nothing sinister in denominational schools. The Canadian Mission made a unique contribution to this change in attitudes.

However, as Table 4.11 shows, the number of Indians receiving primary education declined markedly from the preparatory through the upper division. But by the latter half of the 1920s, the proportion of those in the lower, middle, and upper divisions was rising. It is clear that many Indian parents were extremely reluctant to keep their children in school beyond the age of 12; many beyond the preparatory division : as noted earlier, boys could be employed on the sugar estates from the age of 9; girls, up to 1929, could be legally married at 13. They obviously calculated that the financial sacrifices incurred by sending their children up to the sixth standard, could not be compensated by the rewards. In the early-1920s, the failure rate at the Primary School Leaving Certificate examination, the minimum required for a teaching job, was discouragingly high; (qualitative evidence suggests that it remained so for the rest of the 1920s) (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.11				
Primary school enrolment of Indian children per 100 children of other racial groups, by division, 1920, 1925, 1930, 1935				
<i>Divisions</i>	<i>1920</i>	<i>1925</i>	<i>1930</i>	<i>1935</i>
Preparatory	54	50	68	89
Lower	29	40	43	58
Middle	20	31	33	40
Upper	15	22	24	22

SOURCE : M.K. Bacchus, *op. cit.*, [1970], p.8.

These results could not have inspired confidence in the system. Consequently, as Bacchus argues, Indian parents adopted 'a policy of rigid re-selection : at each level of the children's primary school career, choosing those who were to proceed further up the educational ladder'.²⁶⁴ Their approach was, understandably, often bluntly pragmatic : unless a child demonstrated consistently compelling academic ability, he/she was rarely allowed to proceed beyond the middle division.²⁶⁵ There was an enduring belief that teaching and civil service jobs were too bound up with colonial patronage — 'godfatherism'²⁶⁶ and conversion to Christianity; besides, the remuneration, as noted earlier, was

Table 4.12			
Results of the primary school leaving certificate examination, 1915-1923			
<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of candidates entered</i>	<i>No. of candidates passed</i>	<i>Percentage passed</i>
1915	61	7	11.4
1916	64	5	7.8
1917	43	5	11.6
1918	40	0	0.0
1919	43	4	9.3
1920	316	71	22.4
1921	384	93	24.2
1922	551	105	19.0
1923	699	121	17.3

NOTE: This examination was first held in 1915. The increase in the number of candidates after 1920 was due to the payment of a \$5 bonus paid to teachers for each pupil who passed.

SOURCE: C.O. 114/187, Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1923.

not attractive.²⁶⁷ But the opening of the Berbice High School for Boys, in September 1916, by the Canadian Mission, encouraged the idea of a secondary education, while suggesting possibilities for progress into the potentially lucrative independent professions of medicine and law. By 1919, there were already several, celebrated examples to emulate : a few Indian doctors, lawyers, and solicitors, having studied in Britain, were practising in the colony. Bacchus notes that 'The prestige of being members of one of these professions considerably improved their status and this was often reflected on the family as a whole when they returned home they were expected to help the brightest members of the family pursue further studies, usually overseas'.²⁶⁸

As early as 1912, as E.A. Luckhoo had noted, there were three Indian doctors and two solicitors in British Guiana. Dr William Hewley Wharton, the son of Indian indentured labourers, entered the University of Edinburgh in 1893 to study medicine; he graduated in 1899. He was apparently the first Indian, born in the Caribbean, who pursued professional education in Europe. A pharmacist before he left the colony, Dr Wharton was described as 'the pioneer of the East Indian professional ranks in these waters'. He was registered to practise in the colony on 24 February 1900.²⁶⁹

The second Indian doctor in British Guiana was David Lawrence Luckhoo, the brother of E.A. and J.A. Luckhoo. He was considered 'a man of indomitable will'. When he died on 9 June 1930, his cousin, Peter Ruhomon, noted: 'He conceived the idea, in early youth, of studying for the medical profession and subordinated every other idea to that great objective Starting under his uncle,

John Ruhomon, who initiated him into the mysteries of British pharmacopoea, he diligently pursued his studies until success as a sicknurse and dispenser was achieved'. David Luckhoo proceeded to the University of Toronto, where, during the course of his medical studies, he became ill. He was forced to return home to convalesce; he returned to Canada shortly afterwards, and graduated as a doctor of medicine. He went on to the University of Edinburgh in order to procure the necessary British diplomas that would enable him to practise in the colony. In 1908, he returned to his home town, New Amsterdam, where he developed a 'lucrative' practice. Dr Luckhoo acquired a reputation as 'a careful and accurate diagnostician', and won a wide circle of patients. He died, while still at the peak of his powers, from an old injury sustained in a street fight in Calcutta in 1896 : he had visited India while serving as a compounder (dispenser and sick nurse) on a ship which took indentured labourers to British Guiana and repatriates to India.²⁷⁰

James Edwin Rampersaud Ramdeholl was the third Indian doctor in the colony. He graduated for the University of Edinburgh in 1909, aged 24. He started his practice in British Guiana in January 1910. He was the brother of Robert Ramdeholl, the prominent New Amsterdam businessman, and Mrs Hanoman, the wife of the successful stock-rearer of No.11, East Coast Berbice. Another brother, G.T. Ramdeholl, graduated as a lawyer around 1914.²⁷¹ J.A. Viapree (1883-1929), a solicitor, another Berbician who studied in Britain, also graduated around 1914. He was active in the British Guiana East Indian Association : in 1919-1920, he was vice-president, under J.A. Luckhoo, of the reconstituted Association; he was the president in 1921-1922.²⁷² E.A. Luckhoo had been practising as a solicitor since 1899; J.R. Wharton, the brother of Dr W. Hewley Wharton, became a solicitor in 1912. (He died in September 1922).²⁷³ In 1912, J.A. Luckhoo graduated as a lawyer; in 1913, J.A. Veerasawmy joined the local bar.²⁷⁵ In 1916, Balgobin Persaud, a student at Queen's College, won the Guiana Scholarship which entitled him to free university education. He was the first Indian to win this prestigious award; he graduated from Cambridge with a B.A. around 1921. All these successful Indians had received their secondary education in Georgetown.²⁷⁶

This, then, was the context in which the Canadian Mission founded the first high school in Berbice, the Berbice High School for Boys, in New Amsterdam, on 5 September 1916. The head of the Mission, Rev. J.B. Cropper, who presided at the opening ceremony, said that 'The institution is formed primarily for East Indians, but we desire by no means to have it selfishly confined to them, but hope to be able to supply the needs of all sections of the community'. E.A. Luckhoo, the first

Indian councillor of New Amsterdam, said that he hoped that Indians, who were half the population of the colony, would support the school, 'as it stood primarily for them'. The acting Governor, Cecil Clementi, called on Indians to learn Hindi, and be proud of their 'mother country', India. Hon. E.G. Woolford, the member of the Court of Policy for New Amsterdam, said that he expected the 'progressive' people on the Corentyne to give generously to the new institution.²⁷⁷ The progressive minister, J.A. Scrimgeour, was instrumental in founding the Berbice High School; he was its first manager; C.A.Pugsley, another Canadian, was its first principal.²⁷⁸

The school was of immense value not only to the Indians in Berbice, but to other races as well : before 1916, any boy who desired a secondary education had to go to Georgetown. This had led many Indian boys in particular to terminate their education; there were no boarding schools in the city. The Mission opened a dormitory at the Berbice High School for Indian boys from the Corentyne.²⁷⁹

There were 27 boys in attendance in 1916; by 1918, there were 50. Indians were a majority; but boys of all ethnic groups were admitted. It was certainly not an Indian school. However, in this racially sensitive environment, several people immediately tried to make capital from the fact that the school was founded 'primarily' for Indians. A.A. Thorne, the Black Financial Representative for New Amsterdam, might have been expected to express satisfaction at the creation of the first secondary school in Berbice, in his constituency. Instead, in January 1917, Thorne, who was also the principal of the Middle School, in Georgetown — he had founded it in 1894 — placed an advertisement in *The Daily Chronicle*, which was permeated by a tendentious allusion to potential Indian domination:

The East Indians have just had opened for them in New Amsterdam by the Canadian Presbyterian Mission a *Separate and Distinct High School* blessed for them by the Officer Administering the Government. Why should parents fail to see what lies before them, that 'Unity is strength', and that it is their duty to stand by the Middle school, which *alone* has fought for them.....?
(Emphasis in the original)²⁸⁰

In fact, in 1917, only 68 per cent of the boys at the Berbice High School were Indians; the rest were Blacks, Coloureds, and Whites.²⁸¹ It was not a 'separate' school. However, the reaction of Thorne and presumably some of his influential supporters in New Amsterdam, worried the Mission. On 10 April 1917, Scrimgeour wrote to his superiors in Canada:

Owing to the pressure of public misunderstanding and racial feeling, we have felt constrained to abandon our first plan of giving reduced fees to East Indians and have made all fees level. I do not think it will help us before the general public, and remove what has been a strong criticism among the Elected Members of the Combined Court, who might refuse us Government support on that ground.²⁸²

In September 1922, when Edgar Mittelholzer (1909-1965), the Guyanese novelist, started at the Berbice High School, he found that the boys were 'a mixture of every class, creed and race in the colony. Anglican Chinese, Roman Catholic Portuguese, Hindu-Moslem..... Christian East Indians, black boys of Wesleyan, Presbyterian, Anglican or Congregationalist origin, and Coloured middle-class boys ditto'. He added that the masters were originally all Canadians; but by the early-1920s, there were 'olive-skinned local-born' ones as well.²⁸³ This was apparently not the case at Thorne's school : there is no record of any Indians having been associated with it.

The Berbice High School acquired an impeccable reputation for discipline and scholarship. Mittelholzer recalls, with evident pride, the sense of order which pervaded the school, and the joy of learning which flourished there :

..... what impressed me most was the fact that here was no chanting, squalling mass of boy-and-girl humanity as at the free school..... Here there was silence — and discipline. Everything had a clockwork precision..... that appealed to my innate sense of orderliness. I began to realise that where the other schools had failed as an attraction for me was in their lack of organisation; things had been run on too chaotic a basis..... [here], arithmetic was taught simply and in a way that struck straight at the reason; not merely as something that involved a mass of formulae to be memorised parrot-fashion..... Nature Study classes were often supplemented by practical stunts in the open air..... I began to take an interest in lessons for the first time in my life..... lessons began to take on an aura of romance. I wanted to please the masters by doing good work.²⁸⁴

Many of Mittelholzer's Indian contemporaries were equally motivated : throughout the 1920s, the achievements of several Indian students were exemplary; some became professionals of distinction. The prize list for 1920, for instance, reflected their progress : the Form 2 prize was awarded to Rambharath (Rambharat Singh), Form 4 to M. Birbalsingh, and Form 5 to M. Ramdeholl; and the Teachers' Training prize to J.I. Ramphal. Rambharath also won the Geography prize, Birbalsingh the Mathematics prize, and M. Ramdeholl the prizes for French and Latin. Cecil Ramdeholl got the prizes for English and the neatest work, as well as the Principal's prize for the second time. J.I. Ramphal also won the Literature prize for the teachers' training class.²⁸⁵ (The Ramdeholl boys were the sons of businessman Robert Ramdeholl, and nephews of Dr J.E.R. Ramdeholl and the lawyer, G.T. Ramdeholl).²⁸⁶

These achievements did not take place in a vacuum : the continuous progress of a few Indians, who had gone abroad to study — this was reported regularly in the press — must have been an inspiration; it also made a contribution to the lessening of resistance to western education. In 1919, three Indian doctors returned to the colony.²⁸⁷ Dr Archibald Bissember, from Berbice, had left for Canada in August 1911. He studied at McGill University, Montreal, then proceeded to the University of Edinburgh, where he graduated in 1917.²⁸⁸ Dr Jung Bahadur Singh (1886 -1956) left British Guiana in 1914; he graduated ^{from} Edinburgh in 1919. Like Dr W. Hewley Wharton in the late 1890s, Dr Singh was a prominent member of the Edinburgh Indian Association, which comprised students from India primarily. In 1928-1930, he was president of the British Guiana East Indian Association; and was one of three Indians elected to the Legislative Council in 1931. His younger brother, Mungal Singh, also studied at Edinburgh, before proceeding to Lincoln's Inn.²⁹⁰ He graduated in 1918, and was admitted to the local bar the following year. Another Indian, Paul Milton Benson, qualified as a lawyer around the same time. He studied at London University and the Middle Temple.²⁹¹ This was the back-drop to the achievements of Indian students in the colony in the early 1920s.

Meanwhile, in 1919, with the departure of C.A. Pugsley, the principal of the Berbice High School, the brilliant teacher and progressive administrator, Rev. J.A. Scrimgeour, was forced to act as principal. This brought him closer to the school; his impact was profound and imaginative. In August 1920, it was announced that the school had proved so successful that the Mission had decided to start a high school for girls on the same premises. On 1 September, the Berbice High School for Girls was opened, with Miss G.D. MacLeod, M.A., a Canadian educationist, as principal.²⁹² A year later, two other Canadians, Mabel Mac Kay and Christine Mac Dougall, joined the staff.²⁹³

In 1921, 73 boys were enrolled at the school. Joseph Ruhoman noted : 'The Berbice High School — of which Rev. J.A. Scrimgeour is Principal — is proving more and more its immense usefulness..... the exceptional advantages it offers are eagerly availed of by a large and increasing number of East Indians all over the county of Berbice'.²⁹⁴ The same year, a new building and a dormitory were completed at a cost of \$13,500. The public contributed \$3,000, the Government \$1,500, and the Presbyterian Church of Canada \$9,000. The Government also gave a grant of \$1,200 towards the administration of the school; fees collected were \$1,456; while the principal's salary was paid by the Church in Canada.²⁹⁵

During Scrimgeour's principalship, he was instrumental in the formation of an Old Boys' Association; and was elected honorary president. In 1921-1922, the president was Cecil Ramdeholl; Victor Ramsaran was secretary-treasurer.²⁹⁶ Scrimgeour placed considerable emphasis on the development of character, and encouraged students to participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. In June 1921, for instance, the trial scene from 'The Merchant of Venice' was performed at the school. Several Indians played their parts with apparent accomplishment : Harold Ramdeholl (Duke), J. Persaud (Portia), R. Lachmansingh (Shylock), D. Dharry (Antonio), Cecil Ramdeholl (Bassanio).²⁹⁷

In 1922, Cecil Ramdeholl left British Guiana for Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada 'to pursue a course of studies in medicine'.²⁹⁸ In 1924, like many of his Indian predecessors, he entered Edinburgh University. He graduated in 1928; the following year, he completed a diploma in tropical medicine and hygiene at Liverpool. Dr Ramdeholl worked for many years in the Government Medical Service; in 1930, he was based at the hospital in his home town, New Amsterdam.²⁹⁹ His class mate, Victor Ramsaran, of Sheet Anchor, East Canje, Berbice, graduated in law from the Middle Temple in 1928 : he placed sixteenth in a class of 110.³⁰⁰ His wife, Gladys Sarran, was the first Indian woman in British Guiana to qualify as a lawyer. In the 1930s, they were both practising in Trinidad.³⁰¹

Throughout the 1920s, many Indian students at the Berbice High School performed with distinction. In 1925, Robert Hanoman, the son of Hanoman, the proprietor of No. 11 Farm, won the Governor's Silver Medal, a prestigious prize. (This was awarded to 'the boy who on completing his senior work has for three years had the best average').³⁰² He graduated in medicine at Queen's University, Belfast, in the mid-1930s. His brothers, Harry (born 1902) and Cecil (born 1916), who also attended the Berbice High School, became merchants in New Amsterdam;³⁰³ so did another old boy, Harold Ramdeholl, the brother of Dr Cecil Ramdeholl. In June 1929, when C.F. Andrews visited the school, he presented a prize to Jeenarine Singh, who was successful at the Cambridge School Certificate. He went on to the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture in Trinidad. In the mid-1940s, Singh was president of the British Guiana East Indian Association, and editor of its organ, *Indian Opinion*.³⁰⁴

In September 1927, 101 boys were enrolled at the Berbice High School; and, for the first time, two

Indians joined the Staff : J.I. Ramphal and Mongul Beramsingh, both products of the Canadian Mission's educational efforts.³⁰⁵ Ramphal, as noted earlier, had received his training at the same school; he was an experienced elementary school teacher; he was the head teacher at Noitgedacht Canadian Mission.³⁰⁶ Beramsingh was trained at Mico College, Jamaica, in 1924-1926.³⁰⁷ However, in July 1929, Ramphal, Beramsingh, and another colleague, C.A. Jansen, left the staff, having accused the new principal, Charles F. Wilson, a Canadian, of 'inefficiency and maladministration'.³⁰⁸ On 8 September 1929, Ramphal founded the Modern High School, in Georgetown, the first such institution founded by an Indian in British Guiana. He began with 9 students; one year later, he had 60; and it was reported that Hindi would be included in the curriculum.³⁰⁹

Several Indian girls also, did excellent work at the Berbice High School for Girls. When the school was started in September 1920, 10 girls were enrolled; a year later, there were 30; in 1928, 41 were attending.³¹⁰ In January 1922, Miss Mac Kay, the Principal, announced that the new premises, 'The Brick House', would soon be opened; adding that 'Ample dormitory accommodation for East Indian girls is now available on the same premises'.³¹¹ This offered substantial inducement to Indians on the Corentyne to give their daughters a secondary education. Scrimgeour's role in the provision of this facility was, as usual, immeasurable.

In 1923, the Commissioner of Education reported that of 147 candidates at the Primary Scholarship Examination, the basis of awarding nine free tuition places at high school, only six reached the required standard. He noted that 'one child, a girl of East Indian parentage' was the only successful candidate from Berbice. Her name was Maria (Marie) Khan, from Providence Congregational School;³¹² she enrolled at the Berbice High School. By 1925, 35 girls were attending; several Indian girls were doing well : prizes were awarded to Irene and Clara Ramdeholl, (sisters of Cecil and Harold Ramdeholl), Marie Khan, Helen Khan, and Katie Kowlessar. In September of that year, Clara Ramdeholl got an acting appointment on the staff; at the end of the year, the Headmistress remarked that 'she gave every satisfaction and promises to do well as a teacher'.³¹³ Clara later secured a permanent appointment at the school.³¹⁴ (During the early years of the War, she qualified as a lawyer in London. While returning to British Guiana, the ship in which she and her brother, Cecil, were travelling, was torpedoed by the Germans; she did not survive).³¹⁵ In 1929, her sister, Irene, was awarded the prize for the 'best all — round girl'; Marie Khan got the highest average in Form V,

and won the Mathematics prize; Mary Singh had the highest average in Form IV, and was awarded the Latin prize.³¹⁶

The achievements of these girls were a catalyst for change in the Indian community; but the educational achievements of many Indians in Berbice might not have been possible without the enlightened, pioneering work of Rev. J.A. Scrimgeour. Edgar Mittelholzer has sculpted a wonderful portrait of this great Canadian, who had returned briefly to the Berbice High School, as principal, in 1925 — 1926; he had been diverted to train catechists for the Canadian Mission since 1922. Mittelholzer recalls :

..... he was a man we all admired and wanted to work for..... Rev. James Scrimgeour, a slim, taut man with a narrow face, thin-lipped and blue-green-eyed. He never canted. He had no need to. His eyes and his voice were enough. When he stared at you in rebuke his eyes emitted an icy fire shrivelling in its effect, and no leather could sting like the timbre of his voice loaded with the most delicately distilled sulphuric acid of sarcasm. He was a power-house of vitality. Every word he uttered registered, for there was the force of a strong will behind it. In his classes we never wanted to skylark because we were too engrossed in listening to him. He made everything interesting. Often he paused to illustrate some point with a crisp anecdote — always very crisp and very brief — but he never lost the trend of what he was talking about. He had a perfect sense of form. He never sat down, but moved about the room as he spoke in quick, controlled bursts of activity, halting abruptly at the blackboard to scribble something in relation to the subject under discussion, darting round, snapping his fingers as something else occurred to him. Brief anecdote..... 'Did you see in your newspaper recently what happened in Italy.....?' And back to the subject.³¹⁷

Through the work of Scrimgeour and the Canadian Mission, Berbice, a backwater in education, had arrived; but in other districts as well, a number of Indian professionals were being thrown up. Their departure, their progress at university, and their triumphal return, after graduating in medicine or law, were topics of animated pontification even among humble villagers, in this small community.³¹⁸

Many promising Indian students did not have the means to study overseas; but the achievements of their compatriots fed a sense of purpose, and inspired and impelled them to greater effort in their own work : by the 1920s, a sound secondary education enabled some Indians to enter business, the civil service, and teaching; the dispensers and book-keepers on the sugar estates were almost exclusively Indians.

On 17 June 1920, it was reported that G.M. Kerry, an Indian, the son of R.R. Kerry, a dispenser at Plantation Providence, East Bank Demerara, had returned to the colony as a doctor.³¹⁹ The following day, it was reported in the press that Cecil R. Subryan, son of Johnson Subryan of the Immigration Department, had left the colony for England 'to pursue the study of medicine' — (this particular

expression acquired magical associations of high achievement). It was noted that he was accompanied by his friend, Ganesh Sawh, son of Indian businessman, Parbhu Sawh, 'who will receive his education in London'.³²⁰ When Cecil Subryan, who graduated in medicine from the National University of Ireland (Dublin), returned to the colony in April 1926, it was also reported in the press.³²¹ On 3 November 1921, *The Daily Argosy*, in its 'Berbice News' column, reported the arrival in New Amsterdam, from Canada, of Rev. W. Rattee, the new principal of the Berbice High School; it also noted that W.C.A. Luckhoo of Chapel Street and Strand, New Amsterdam, 'who had been reading law at Middle Temple, England', had passed his final.³²¹ In May 1922, the same paper reported that Mr Walter Clarence Arthur Luckhoo was admitted to the local bar, and that he was the third member of his family to qualify as a lawyer. Among those present at this function were several Indians : lawyers Mungal Singh, J.A. Luckhoo, J.A. Vecrasawmy, and G.T. Ramdeholl; and solicitors W.D. Dinally, J.A. Viapree, and J.R. Wharton.³²²

On 31 May 1925, *The Daily Argosy* noted that Bindrabund Persaud, who had left the colony in October 1924 to study medicine at the University of Edinburgh, had passed his preliminary examination. It added : 'He secured 1st place in English and honourable mention in Higher Mathematics'. Three days later, it was reported that A.E. Seeram, the former head teacher of Helena Canadian Mission School, Mahaica, who had left British Guiana in 1922, 'for England with the object of pursuing the study of law', had returned as a barrister. The Indians in his district gave him 'a hearty reception' at a function held in the school-room at Helena. The chairman of the proceedings was the popular rice and coconut grower from Virginia, Edwin Bacchus, one of the first Indian Justices of the Peace in the colony.³²³

While 'to pursue the study of medicine' or 'the object of pursuing the study of law', in England, were unassailable credentials, feeding notions of high achievement, there was the occasional reference to Indian success in America. In January 1921, for example, an article captioned 'Successful Berbician Returns Home', revealed that Mr William T. Gunraj, B.A., was visiting his home town, New Amsterdam. He had passed 'with honours' — another magical phrase — ; at Harvard. The article concluded : 'It is understood that Mr Gunraj contemplates writing two books to be published on his return to the United States'.³²⁴

In May 1926, Rambharat Singh, a graduate of Berbice High School, son of Ramdohney (sic),

proprietor of Plantation Phoenix, West Coast Berbice, was reported to be leaving the colony shortly 'to qualify himself for the Medical profession'.³²⁵ He graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 1933. In the late-1930s, Dr Singh worked at the Mental Hospital, Berbice, a quarter of a mile up the road from his alma mater, the Berbice High School.³²⁶ These associations were never lost in this small community : at Queen's College, in Georgetown, as well, several Indian boys did excellent work. Among these were Sydney Hewley Wharton, the fourth son of Dr W. Hewley Wharton, the first Indian doctor in the colony; and Samuel Jaikaran and I.H. Premdas, who won the Guiana Scholarship in 1923 and 1929 respectively. Sydney Wharton graduated in medicine from Edinburgh in 1936; in 1932, he was a medallist in pharmacology.³²⁷ An elder brother, Laureston Hewley Wharton, who had also attended Queen's College, qualified as a doctor from the University of Bristol in 1930.³²⁸ Two other Indians graduated as doctors in 1930 : J.P. Lachmansingh and F.A. Viapree,³²⁹ the brother of solicitor, J.A. Viapree, who died in 1929. Samuel Jaikaran graduated in medicine from Cambridge around 1933.³²⁰ In 1923, there were 10 Indians studying at the Universities of Cambridge, Edinburgh, Dublin, London, Bristol, and Halifax (Canada).³³¹ These had all graduated by the early-1930s : a tradition of professional education was established among the Indians of British Guiana; young, ambitious Indians acquired a greater degree of self-confidence.

In 1928, it was noted that Premdas, Chunnillall, D.P. Debidin and Hardutt Singh had done well at the Higher Certificate Examination of the Oxford and Cambridge Joint Board; while B.B.G. Nehaul did excellent work at the Lower Certificate Examination.³³² The following year, three Indian children won Government Primary Scholarships: Harry Kawall, Claude Lloyd Luckhoo, and Evelyn Armogun, a girl from Rose Hall, Corentyne.³³³ In 1928, an Indian girl from Georgetown, Subadrie Lall, passed the Junior Cambridge Examination, with a distinction in Latin; the [Wesleyan] East Indian Young Men's Society presented her with a copy of Rabindranath Tagore's poems. In 1929, she qualified for exemption from the Matriculation Examination of London University.³³⁴ The fine example set by Indians in law and medicine was percolating through the community, kindling what became, from the 1940s, an obsession with educational attainments.

These achievements by the Indian middle class, as noted earlier, were claimed even by poor Indian labourers and peasants as manifestations of their arrival: they had started much later than the Blacks and Coloureds on the educational and professional ladder; a blanket perception of them as cunning, alien, unsophisticated 'coolies' lingered. As Mittelhozer notes, his people, the 'coloured admixture

..... looked down upon the East Indian "coolies" we called them, whether they were labourers or eventually became doctors or barristers or civil servants'.³³⁵ So did others. Consequently, Indians expressed unabashed racial pride in the educational and professional accomplishments of their compatriots.

In November 1921, for instance, shortly after J.A. Luckhoo's re-election to the Combined Court as Financial Representative for South-East Essequibo, a number of his Indian constituents, including two tailors and a chauffeur, congratulated him 'on being the only member of our race in the Court'.³³⁶ When J.A. Veerasawmy was selected to act as magistrate in the West Coast Demerara judicial district in August 1922, his colleague, Mungal Singh, speaking in court, reportedly said: 'So far as the East Indian section of the country was concerned His Worship's appointment was unique, as never before has an East Indian filled such a responsible position as he now held'.³³⁸ Veerasawmy replied that he was 'very much honoured' to be 'the first Indian to sit on the magistrate's bench in British Guiana'; and he hoped that members of 'his race' would conduct themselves with decency.³³⁹ In September 1930, when Veerasawmy became the first, permanent Indian magistrate, J.A. Luckhoo, speaking at a dinner at the British Guiana East Indian Cricket Club to celebrate this achievement, reportedly observed that 'Mr Veerasawmy's appointment to the Magisterial Bench was not only an honour to himself, but also to the race to which they all belonged'.³⁴⁰

These conspicuous cases of high professional success among the Indians tended, sometimes, to obscure the fact that the illiteracy rate among them was still the highest in the colony. As early as February 1919, W.S.A. Richards, writing from Lad Lane, New Amsterdam, argued that Indian children 'are given preference to ours as distillers, book-keepers, dispensers, and even in the Government Service'.³⁴¹ It was true that because they were an overwhelming majority on the sugar estates, they were preponderant in the first three professions listed — essentially jobs on the estates; but they certainly got no preference in the public service: in 1925, they formed 4 per cent; Blacks accounted for 87 per cent.³⁴² Even a perceptive observer as the Black head of the Independent Congregational Church, Rev. R.T. Frank, could over-estimate the educational progress of Indians, sounding a note of apprehension in remarks made to Black parents at Fearn School, West Bank Berbice, in May 1926. He reportedly said that 'The East Indians were educating their children and they should do likewise'.³⁴³ However inflated, this positive assessment by a prominent Black observer would have been welcomed by the Indians. And there was a slow, but steady, crop of Indian

doctors, lawyers, book-keepers, dispensers, distillers, etc. to feed a racial pride, eroding the resistance to western education, and sustaining effort.

Indians appreciated the prestige, material rewards, and independence that accrued from the study of law and medicine. Professor Bacchus points out that in spite of the comparatively low enrolment of Indian children at primary schools in the 1920s, 19 per cent of the doctors in British Guiana in 1924, and 37 per cent of those registered between 1925 and 1934, were Indians; they accounted for 25 per cent of the lawyers called to the bar between 1907 and 1930.³⁴⁴ Bacchus attributes much to the character of the Indian family in the remarkable rise of this professional stratum. He describes the process thus:

Those who were withdrawn from school joined in the income-earning activities of the family while, for the son who was allowed to continue his education, the total family efforts and resources were pooled to meet his expenses. The pooling of the family resources was possible because of the strong family solidarity which was characteristic of East Indian families. Though often nuclear in structure, the family was closely knit, with the father usually responsible for the total financial resources of the entire family After the family had successfully put one son through his professional training, he was expected, on his return to the country, to assume the financial responsibility for the education of his younger brothers, or if they were too old, for his brothers' or even his sisters' sons.³⁴⁵

This strategy worked. It enabled Indians to sustain and advance their rice, cattle, commercial, and other interests (in spite of the hostility of the plantocracy and the colonial rulers to their efforts at independence): these were the foundation for the emergence of a professional class. Family effort and thrift earned a growing financial security for a large intermediate layer, which facilitated a religious and cultural revival in the 1920s. An increasing number of pretty, comfortable mosques and temples, estimated at about 100 in 1926,³⁴⁶ sprung up in villages and on the sugar estates; there was also an upsurge in the communal celebration of Hindu and Muslim festivals — among the Hindus, the 7-day *yajnas*, to which the contributions of the Indian middle class were crucial, were a common feature of rural life. Indian self-confidence grew; they felt sufficiently fortified against Christian proselytising. Young Indians could try to emulate the professional examples of their christianised/creolised compatriots, without fear of having to surrender their cultural heritage. By the 1920s, as the Gandhian non-violent resistance to imperial rule advanced, educated Indians in British Guiana started to look to Indian history and culture for their moorings. A conception of an heroic, ancient India of high culture fused with notions of an idyllic India of unimpeachable religious honour and benevolent rulers, fed by the *Ramayana* and other classics. The attitudes of the 'coolie' were being reshaped; all indentures were cancelled in April 1920; the stigma was lifting.

In these developments, the Canadian Mission, unwittingly, played a major role; Indians associated with the Wesleyan East Indian Young Men's Society, consciously and consistently, contributed to this achievement.

IV

Creolised Indians And The Shaping Of An Intellectual Vision: The [Wesleyan] East Indian Young Men's Society (E.I.Y.M.S.)

..... in 1934, I was fortunate in being in Mr [Peter] Ruhoman's company along with Wycliffe Armogan and the late Ramcharitar Lalla, well known poet. The group met informally, and these meetings were real treats, for in our conversations we traversed wide fields, covering particularly literature, philosophy, and ideology. I always came away from these get-togethers impressed by the wide sympathies of this man, his literary background, and his suavity of manner Peter Ruhoman's interests were not confined to literary pursuits. He played a leading role in several social and cultural movements which aimed at ameliorating the conditions under which East Indians lived. He was a founding member of East Indian Young Men's Society and was actively associated with the Hindu Society which was founded by the late Ramsaroop Maraj

J.W. Chinapen, 'Peter Ruhoman', *Kaie*, No. 2 (Independence Issue), (1966), pp. 59-60.

..... because of their psychology as immigrants wanting to 'make good' in the new country; and because, too, they came speaking the language of the tribe without (unlike the slave Africans) having it suppressed, the East Indians generated a group identity and mobility which the ex-slaves could not match. Out of this, following post-indenture emancipation and modernisation, has come a new Indian development selective creolisation. Here the Indian relates his own notion of cultural norms to the master-culture of Euro-America, and selects/adapts in order to modernise. The Afro-Saxon 'imitates', not modernises, because unlike the Indian, he has no core culture to adapt from.

Edward Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Mona, Jamaica: Savacou Publications, 1974), p.54

Peter Ruhomon's elder brother, Joseph Ruhoman (sic), was unquestionably the first modern Indian intellectual in British Guiana: he made the transition from a purely Indian religious and philosophical outlook, grounded in the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*, to an intermediate position, incorporating aspects of Western philosophical rationalism.³⁴⁷ This equipped him to reflect upon, and critically challenge, the community's attitudes to learning, as well as the inadequacies of the colonial environment. He believed that the reshaping of the intellectual vision of the Indians was crucial for the humanising, the civilising of a society which was rooted in slavery and in indentureship, and was still subordinated to an unconscionable, materialistic, plantation system. Joseph Ruhoman could not be a passive observer.³⁴⁸

Professor Edward Shils has written, with empathy, on the development of a modern intellectual tradition in India, while delineating the principal points of departure from India's ancient conception of intellectual life, the Brahmanic tradition. He argues:

The former is open, empirical, experimental, as well as metaphysical. It is more cognitive than the Indian intellectual tradition; it seeks to discover hitherto unknown principles which govern the universe while the Indian intellectual tradition seeks to attain a fusion with the principle, already known, which governs the universe. The modern intellectual tradition assumes the existence of an ego, a concrete individuality which retains its own boundaries while discovering, exploring and contemplating the universe of which it is a part. The Indian tradition postulates a self striving to transcend itself and to dissolve those boundaries by a feeling of *oneness* with the dominant principle of the universe which has already been disclosed to great spirits in the past.³⁴⁹

Joseph Ruhoman's intellectual vision was permeated by this modern, empirical way of apprehending reality; but it was modified by an enduring appreciation of the richness of his ancestral tradition.³⁵⁰

The forces which shaped this remarkable man were rooted in both traditions. His father, Ruhoman, aged 11, along with his brothers Pahalad, aged 13, and Lokhooa, aged 7, were taken to British Guiana in 1859, unaccompanied by their parents. Nath relates that the boys were sight-seeing in Lucknow when they were approached by a recruiter. He adds: 'The recruiter painted a bright picture of the prospect of travelling to a strange land called 'Damra Tapu' (Demerara), where in five years they could make a fortune and return to their native country. The boys could not allow an opportunity like that to slip them, and they accompanied the recruiter to a sub-agency and entered into agreements to serve on a sugar plantation in the colony. They arrived by the ship 'Victor Emmanuel' and were allotted to plantation Albion. Pahalad, the eldest remained a Hindu, but Ruhoman and Lokhooa later embraced the Christian faith, and were known as John Ruhoman and Moses Luckhoo, respectively'.³⁵¹

John Ruhoman, 'by his own initiative', became competent in English and Hindi, while acquiring a bit of Tamil and Arabic. With the help of Pahalad, he became a sicknurse and dispenser, a chemist and druggist, and a 'dentist', working consecutively at Plantations Albion, Port Mourant, and Smythfield, in Berbice. He later opened a drug store in New Amsterdam.³⁵² So Joseph Ruhoman, born in 1873 at Albion, though influenced profoundly by Christianity, showed an unquenchable enthusiasm for Indian philosophy and culture; he was literate in Hindi. Like his father, he was largely self-educated; and, as his lectures in the 1920s reveal, read omnivorously, especially the vast literature on India: the writings of the Oxford-based, German Indologist, Professor Max Müller, who

lifted Sanskritic culture to the level of European scholarship, while establishing its Indo-European provenance, fascinated him; they also fed a racial pride.³⁵³ He later came under the influence of Rev. H.J. Shirley, a radical, English Congregational minister, who worked among the Blacks in New Amsterdam in 1900-1903; but also manifested strong pro-Indian sentiments. This association left him with an enduring sense of social responsibility, especially with respect to the condition of his compatriots under indentureship on the sugar plantations. Joseph Ruhoman became the editor of *The People*, a progressive newspaper founded by Shirley in New Amsterdam in October 1901.³⁵⁴ In 1908, he became sub-editor of *The Daily Argosy*. Between 1916 and 1925, he was the manager of Davson's Printery and Bookstore in New Amsterdam. He was involved with work which fed his intellectual curiosity and facilitated the articulation and refining of his ideas.³⁵⁵ Rodney notes that during the first decade of this century, New Amsterdam had 'become the virtual political capital of the country.'³⁵⁶ Ruhoman was a unique Indian participant and shaper of these momentous changes in the town.

He was also a writer and thinker, 'a litterateur of outstanding ability'.³⁵⁷ In early 1894, aged 21, he delivered a lecture in Georgetown — 'India: the Progress of her People at Home and Abroad and how those in British Guiana may Improve themselves'. It was published as a pamphlet, later in the year. This was the first piece by an Indian in the colony to be published. In it he deplored the high illiteracy among his compatriots, and advocated the formation of a social organisation which could work towards their moral, social, and intellectual improvement. Rev. H.V.P. Bronkhurst, who worked for 34 years as a Wesleyan minister to the Indians (1861-1895), was impressed with Ruhoman's lecture, and was instrumental in getting it published; he also wrote a foreword to it, underlining the author's call for an Indian social organisation.³⁵⁸

Some years later, this pamphlet came into the hands of Rev. H.M. Yates, another Wesleyan minister, who worked among the Indians between 1912 and 1925. Like Cropper, and to a greater extent Scrimgeour, Yates nurtured a compulsion to encourage the intellectual upliftment of young Indians,³⁵⁹ although his labours had yielded few converts. (In 1931, only 741 of 11,195 Indians returned as Christians, were Wesleyans).³⁶⁰ In early 1919, he approached Joseph Ruhoman's brother, Peter Ruhomon (sic), (born 1880), in an effort to redress this gaping deficiency.³⁶¹ In September 1919, a few months after the resuscitation of the British Guiana East Indian Association, it was announced that the [Wesleyan] East Indian Young Men's Society (E.I.Y.M.S.) would be started

shortly; and that the 'Susamachar' building on South Road, Georgetown would be used for the training of Indian catechists, while providing a reading room and lecture hall for young Indians. (In the report of the Wesleyan East Indian Mission for 1918-1919, four Indian catechists were listed: James Heeralall, G. Ladoo, Paul Chattersingh, and Paul Ramgatton (sic). It is interesting, that at the annual meeting, Miss P. Philipps, an Indian girl, sang 'Yes, Jesus loves me', in Hindi).³⁶²

Peter Ruhomon was the secretary of the E.I.Y.M.S. from its formation in October 1919 until the late-1930s. He remarked later that the Society rendered 'valuable services in the cause of Indian intellectual uplift'.³⁶³ It did more: it initiated a few young Indians into the art of discussion, debate, and research, while inculcating a respect for democratic principles. It fostered regular re-appraisals of local issues through the expansion of their knowledge of Western and Indian thought. Indeed, Peter Ruhomon brought to the Society several ambitious and inquisitive Indian youths in Georgetown; and he exposed them to the wonders of Western intellectual inquiry, inculcating an enduring curiosity, while broadening their conception of individual freedom — this was greatly circumscribed within the Indian joint-family, and the rather introspective, narrow, religious framework of Indian thought, controlled by the Brahman and Muslim priests.³⁶⁴

But Ruhomon, a man of much erudition, subtlety, and tact, went beyond this. Although most of the members were apparently Christians, he strengthened their cultural moorings and lifted their self-confidence by directing their new, capacious vision to their rich, ancient Indian tradition of high culture and splendid secular attainments.³⁶⁵ This was a notable departure from the established pattern of intellectual endeavour in the colony. While several Black and Coloured professionals - educationists, doctors, lawyers, etc. — had been long initiated into the exciting world of western thought, the dissolution of all links with Africa, and the denigration and virtual annihilation of African culture in the ex-slave society, meant that their efforts were essentially 'imitative'. The Indians had a core culture from which to adapt. As Professor Edward Brathwaite argues, Indians in the Caribbean experienced 'selective creolisation', what he calls 'in-culturation' — their core culture, however attenuated, conditioned and enriched their adaptation of the received Anglo-Saxon heritage.³⁶⁶

The evidence suggest that Indian 'in-culturation' in British Guiana was, indeed, aided by the retention of contact with the great Indian tradition. In December 1910, for instance, Bhai Parmanand,

a leading missionary of the reformist Hindu Arya Samaj movement, visited the colony and delivered a series of lectures on India. In an address at the Georgetown Town Hall, he spoke on 'Ancient India'. So paranoid were the colonial authorities, that they had refused him use of the Immigration Department to address his many local admirers. The Government of India deemed him 'a dangerous man', and requested information on his activities overseas, including British Guiana. His crime was that he was articulating pride in an ancient, pre-Moghul, Hindu India; feeding a resurgence of Indian self-confidence, rooted in a Hindu, Aryan atavism; thus cultivating notions of the Indian's capacity to govern himself.³⁶⁷

Another Indian who was under surveillance in British Guiana was Dr Ram Narayan Sharma. In 1911, his mails were impounded; and Governor Hodgson requested special legislation to have him deported: he, also, was deemed subversive, 'a declass  (with some brains) but with the prestige of a high Brahman family'. The Government of India did not support his deportation; it felt that this step would be interpreted in India as an act of discrimination against Indians in the colony. In 1916, the surveillance of Sharma and censorship of his mails were increased because he was 'under suspicion in connection with the propagation of sedition amongst East Indians in the colony, with certain classes of whom he appears to have influence'. Meanwhile, the Government, especially during World War I, seized Indian nationalist newspapers, addressed to local subscribers — *The Free Hindustan, India, Ghadr, and Bande Mataram*. (Several Black publications, originating in the United States, were also seized). Fear was rife among the rulers that these newspapers, while enhancing the Indian nationalist cause, would disseminate radical, 'subversive ideas' in the colony, conducing to a rebellious spirit and potential subversion among Indian students.³⁶⁸

Such obsessive imperial bigotry, inevitably, bred an irrepressible curiosity, among Indians in British Guiana, in the 'Mother Country', India. There was a visible awakening, especially among middle class Indians: from the 1890s, the achievements of a few Indians and their international acclamation had kindled a discernible racial pride. Swami Vivekananda had startled many in the West, in the 1890s, by the profundity and accessibility of his expositions on Hindu philosophy; and the masterly communication of his thoughts to non-Indian audiences helped to reshape perceptions of Hinduism, and India.³⁶⁹ The prodigious elegance of Prince Ranjitsinhji, who first played Test cricket for England in 1896, enchanted fans in England and Australia. (This received much coverage in the local press). Rabindranath Tagore had won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913;³⁷⁰ and from around

1919, Gandhi was challenging Imperial domination in India, and in the process, creating a new pride in India. Gandhi's activities, his imprisonment, and his denigration by the local press, especially *The Daily Argosy*, famed for its raucous treatment of India, accelerated the elevation of Gandhi to virtual sainthood by Indians in the colony.³⁷¹ (His picture won a place with those of Hindu Gods and Goddesses in many Indian homes).³⁷² A new India — an India seen to be in revolt — bred pride in an ancient, idyllic India, culled from the *Ramayana* — distance and ignorance of contemporary India enhanced the utopian vision, and rendered it believable. (The real, decaying India remained inaccessible).

This was the context in which the East Indian Young Men's Society functioned in the 1920s. It is interesting that at the inaugural meeting of the Society, in October 1919, the acting Governor, Cecil Clementi (1875-1947), gave a lecture on 'The Kinship of the Indian and British Peoples'. He argued that 'The ethnical conclusion is that the inhabitants of the British Isles and India are of the same origin, far off it is true, but nonetheless real'.³⁷³ Clementi was a respected classical scholar, and his linking of Aryan India to Europe, as Governor Egerton had done at the opening of the East Indian Cricket Club in December 1915, must have given his young Indian audience much pride. This, however, would have distanced them further from the Blacks, for whom a caste-like feeling of polluting inferiority was harboured.

Throughout the 1920s, Peter Ruhomon and his colleagues in the E.I.Y.M.S., while eschewing direct involvement in politics and religion, fed their curiosity for the land of their parents. This, probably unwittingly, shaped an embryonic political awareness. The lectures delivered to the Society reflected a deep interest in India (see Table 4.13 — the list is incomplete). J.A. Luckhoo, in August 1920, lectured on the future of India; he had spent several months there in 1919-1920, trying to induce more immigrants to go to the colony under the Colonisation Scheme; he had met Gandhi and several other prominent Indian leaders. Pandit Sokul spoke on Tagore, Ruhomon's favourite poet; the delegate from India, Tivary, on 'Young Indians'; Rev. Edwards gave his impressions of India; Rev. William Mackin of Benares, who spent four months in the colony in 1925, lectured on six Moghul kings; Staff Captain Hackett also shared his impressions of India; while Peter Ruhomon gave an address, 'Christ in relation to India'. Of course, the exhaustive daily reports in the local press, of the activities of Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, sustained their interest in India, while forging an identity with its rebellious spirit.

But such was the breadth of the intellectual curiosity of the members of the E.I.Y.M.S., that the lectures ranged over a very wide area: for example, Dr Secraj on anatomy, E.O. Pilgrim on heat, James Rodway on pests and nuisances in the colony, Rev. Denny on R.L. Stevenson, A.R.F. Webber on differences in the psychology of the various local communities, Madhoo Lall Bose on local Indian psychology, J.I. Ramphal on fiction, Dr Bailey on Indian foods, etc. Meanwhile, debates and essay writing were encouraged: K.P. Das, Peter Ruhomon, C.R. Jacob, and P. Iloo were apparently the most accomplished debaters. These provided an opportunity for critical thinking on a variety of subjects which were considered relevant to the Indian community. In 1923-1924, for instance, four debates and two essay competitions were held. The titles of the essays were: 'Why should Indians be proud of the Mother Country, [India]?', and 'How best may the colony's resources be developed?'

Although the Society had only about 50 members by 1924, Peter Ruhomon was very pleased with their intellectual development, and the emergence of several competent public speakers. In February 1924, he remarked on the progress of the debaters:

Our members are learning the value of the opportunities of public speech afforded them in this direction, and are making encouraging progress in the art of 'thinking on their feet' This is a feature of our programme which is always looked forward to with very great interest, and which affords admirable scope for our members to exercise their debating skills.³⁷⁴

The Indian community as a whole benefited from the unique preparation for public life, which the Society provided. Membership was not restricted to Wesleyan or Christian Indians; and at no time did the Society manifest an interest in narrow, parochial, religious issues; nor did it become embroiled in the old evangelical obsession with winning Indian souls. Its role was exclusively secular and intellectual;³⁷⁵ but apprehensions of its motives seemed to have lingered. Ruhomon tried to allay these fears:

.... the Society always keeps an eye open to matters of interest happening in the East Indian community, in the belief that its capacity for good can be considerably enlarged and its sphere of influence extended We cannot too often emphasise the fact that this Society, though conducted under the auspices of the Wesleyan East Indian Mission, is undenominational in its scope. Our object is to afford an opportunity, so much needed in the colony, to young Indians to improve their minds and character to profitable advantage to themselves and for the good of the community to which they belong.³⁷⁶

Table 4.13		
Some of the lectures, debates, and essays delivered to the [Wesleyan] East Indian Young Men's Society (E.I.Y.M.S.), 1919-1932		
<i>Lecturer</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Where cited</i>
Cecil Clementi	The Kinship of the Indian and British Peoples	DC, 12 October 1919
Dr F.G. Rose	Personal Hygiene	DC, 8 February 1920
E.O. Pilgrim	Heat	DA, 26 June 1920
Dr M. Seeraj	Elementary Anatomy	DC, 30 July 1920
Peter Ruhomon	Poetry and Nature	DA, 14 August 1920
J.A. Luckhoo	The Future of India	DA, 26 August 1920
James Rodway	Pests and Nuisances	DA, 5 November 1920
K.P. Das	That the Lack of Unity and Mutual Self-Help among East Indians is Due to the Lack of Education	DA, 20 November 1920
Peter Ruhomon		
Rev. J.F. Denny	R.L. Stevenson as Novelist	DC, 2 December 1920
Deva Ram Sokul	Rabindranath Tagore: the Poet and His Message	DA, 6 January 1921
C.R. Jacob	That the Co-education of East Indian Boys and Girls Would Solve the East Indian Social Problem	DA, 22 January 1921
P. Iloo		
Rev. J.B. Hill	The Origin of Social Institutions	DA, 11 February 1921
A.R.F. Webber	The Psychology of Communities	DA, 25 February 1921
V.N. Tivary	Young Indians and Social Service	DA, 21 February 1922
Rev. S. Edwards	Impressions of India	DC, 9 March 1922
Joseph Ruhoman	The Transitory and the Permanent	DA, 14 July 1922
J.P. Coghlan	Citizenship: its Duties and Privileges	DA, 11 October 1922
J. Bowen	Why Indians Should be Proud of their Mother Country?	DA, 26 May 1923
A. Pillay		
K.A. Yerrakadu	How Best may the Colony's Resources be Developed?	DA, 21 February 1924
P. Iloo		
C.R. Jacob		
Rev. William Mackin	Six Kings of India	DA, 20 March 1925
Rev. J.D. Brindley	Is the World Growing any Better?	DA, 7 October 1925
Madhoo Lall Bose	Local East Indian Psychology	NDC, 2 March 1926
Rev. E.S. Cheesewright	Womanhood in English Poetry	NDC, 20 June 1926
Staff Capt. Hackett	India	NDC, 5 June 1927
Peter Ruhomon	Christ in Relation to India	DA, 19 June 1927
Mehta Jaimini	The Fundamental Basis of Religion	DA, 14 May 1929
Dr J.P. Lachmansingh	Functions of the Blood	DC, 6 July 1930
J.I. Ramphal	The Facts of Fiction	DC, 13 July 1930
Ayube Edun	A Visit to England	DC, 19 June 1932
Dr Bailey	Indian Foods	DC, 26 June 1932

DC — *Daily Chronicle*, DA — *The Daily Argosy*, NDC — *The New Daily Chronicle*.

This approach released in its members a compelling urge to serve the broader Indian community. A few examples are worth mentioning. In January 1921, C.R. Jacob, the treasurer of the Society, denounced the Government for its retention of the Swettenham Circular, and its refusal to implement the Compulsory Education Ordinance with respect to Indian girls. While conceding that illiterate parents demanded separate schools for their daughters and the provision of female teachers, he

indicted the officials for sitting, 'supinely and let things go along'. He believed that they were determined to keep the people 'in ignorance so that they can rule autocratically'.³⁷⁷ In an address to the Society in June 1927, Jacob reportedly stressed the necessity for better sanitation and education if his 'Indian brethren' were to advance; and he counselled them to avoid 'frivolous litigation'.³⁷⁸ The politician was taking shape: in 1935, Jacob was elected a member of the Legislative Council for the North Western District, Essequibo; in 1938, he became the president of the British Guiana East Indian Association.³⁷⁹ On the occasion of the centenary of Indian arrival in the colony, 5 May 1938, Jacob returned to the question of Indian education with the old conviction and fearlessness, bred in the E.I.Y.M.S.:

We are desirous of raising the educational standards of our community and removing the stigma of illiteracy The removal of the obnoxious Swettenham Circular has cleared the way for an intense propaganda both by the people and the Government. We are pleased to observe the extensive voluntary efforts that are being made by individual members of the race all over the colony to establish schools We regret, however that on many sugar estates the operation of the 'creole gangs' with the connivance of the Authorities is minimising our efforts to remove the blot of illiteracy. We are out for a literate Indian community, believing that by this means only can we increase the capacity of our children for a fuller enjoyment of life, and extend their sphere of usefulness as citizens of the colony.³⁸⁰

Like Jacob, R.R. Kerry, a leading chemist and druggist, was also a Christian, and a member of the E.I.Y.M.S.; but he also was interested in the welfare of all Indians. In the late-1920s, he was the chairman of the village council at Peter's Hall, East Bank Demerara; and was instrumental in raising \$3,000 for the construction of an elegant Hindu temple at Providence, in 1927. It was described as 'the most beautiful in the colony, being octagonal (sic) in structure, and exceedingly ornate'. Kerry stressed that although he was a Christian, he belonged to the Indian race; he thought it his duty to use his influence among his Christian brethren for the good of his Hindu compatriots.³⁸¹

In 1923, K.P. Das, David Iloo, James Bowen, M.H. Khan, and C.R. Jacob of the E.I.Y.M.S. were all members of the British Guiana East Indian Association. K.P. Das, one of the vice-presidents of the former, was the secretary of the Association, from its resuscitation in Georgetown in 1919 to his death in 1926. He, Bowen, Jacob, and M.H. Khan were also on the committee of management of the British Guiana East Indian Cricket Club.³⁸² In January 1923, Peter Ruhomon had appealed to 'every young Indian with pretensions to education' to join the Society and 'add to the intellectual welfare of our community'. He assured them that their mind and character would be improved, thus

enabling them to advance the condition of others through their knowledge and experience. He was not overstating his case.³⁸³

Throughout the 1920s, it is possible to discern the shadow of that patriarch of Indian intellect, Joseph Ruhoman, in the deliberations of the E.I.Y.M.S.; as well as in the new spirit of commitment among several young, educated Indians.³⁸⁴ In 1921, Ruhoman had praised Indian achievements in rice cultivation, stock farming, and landownership. He also expressed pleasure in their accomplishments as book-keepers, pan-boilers, chemists and dispensers, as well as artisans and mechanics on sugar estates. He remarked on the latter's 'marked ability to master quickly the working of the most highly organised and intricate machinery'. Ruhoman added that Indians in commerce 'find a profitable field for their industry and their natural shrewdness; and in these pursuits their plodding, persevering habits never fail to bring them their reward'. But on the question of community work among the Indians, he concluded on a sombre note, as he had done in his pioneering lecture in 1894:

Believing that the future of the colony is largely in the hands of the East Indian creole, I should like to see him taking a greater and more active part in public affairs. His varied interests demand this. It should not be all shopkeeping and money-making, while the higher interests of life are neglected. Efforts should be made on a well-organised and co-operative basis to work for all that would lift the race to a higher plane of thought and action.³⁸⁵

In July 1922, in a lecture to the E.I.Y.M.S. — 'The Transitory and the Permanent' — he was, as usual, critical of what he considered an absence of magnanimity, and the enthronement of materialism among successful Indians. He reportedly said 'It should not be a question of shop-keeping or money-making. They wanted a well-organised policy for the benefit of the race'. Joseph Ruhoman opposed rampant materialism and unbridled nationalism; he contended that spiritual values and racial tolerance were infinitely more desirable and worthy of cultivation. The decay of civilisations, he argued, was due not to the dwindling of knowledge, but to the corruption of morals.³⁸⁶

It is interesting that a decade later, in May 1932, Peter Ruhomon was bemoaning what he saw as the poverty of 'altruism' among local Indian leaders. He wrote, somewhat despairingly, that 'My study of the character of our leaders has led me to the conclusion that their offering themselves as leaders is dictated more by a desire to be in power and prominence than by a desire to serve'.³⁸⁷

Peter Ruhomon was a man of wide learning, discerning and civilised; the imprint of his elder brother ran deep; it was visible. In August 1920, for instance, in his lecture, 'Poetry and Nature', he spoke of the riches earned by those who cultivated the higher sensibilities: a rare, often ineffable, but attainable, gift for apprehending and appreciating beauty, and enhancing life. He said:

.... nature has afforded a wonderfully inexhaustible subject for the poet's art and no one could gaze upon her fair face without having his higher emotions awakened and his finer sensibilities stirred to an exalted sense of beauty and harmony. Man is possessed of faculties which relate him to the outer world and without which nature was a lifeless blank. But a great many people pass through this world heedless of its beauty and harmony. Its vast repository of song and colour is to many a closed book.³⁸⁸

Joseph Ruhoman must have been proud of the efforts of Peter and his colleagues in the E.I.Y.M.S. to stimulate and feed the intellect of young Indians. In the early-1930s, Peter Ruhomon wrote a weekly page, captioned 'Indian Intelligence', in the Sunday Magazine Section of *The Daily Chronicle*. He used the pseudonym, 'The Pandit', possibly an allusion to his Hindu roots.³⁸⁹ He covered a wide range of issues of relevance to the Indian community; and he focussed on the growing achievements of his people. But he also offered a corner for young Indian poets, such as C.E.J. Ramcharitar Lalla (born 1906). In 1934, Lalla, who was educated at the Berbice High School, edited *An Anthology of Indian Verse*.³⁹⁰ Ruhomon was active in the execution of this small, but significant, project³⁹¹: it was the first such publication by an Indian in the colony. Earlier, in September 1930, Lalla had published a poem to the memory of the Indian nationalist and social reformer, Lalla Lajpat Rai, in Ruhomon's column. The poem shows how deeply the nationalist struggle in India permeated the minds of aspiring Indian intellectuals in British Guiana. It reads in part:

Give ear to Mata's call distressed and
haste to soothe her heart,
To take from her the yoke 'neath
which she groans in misery;
O: forward march my brothers all, let
each man play his part,
But with the Olive, not the sword,
demand your country free.

Would you to whom your sires be -
queath a spotless heritage,
Hand over to posterity, a birthright
full of shame?
Would you who have descended from
so noble parentage,
Let in the dust any longer roll your
country's glorious name?³⁹²

Towards the end of the 1930s, Peter Ruhomon started work on his *Centenary History of the East Indians in British Guiana*. The Indian Centenary Number of *The Daily Chronicle*, on 5 May 1938,

noted this, and designated him the 'Centenary' historian. It observed that a number of 'Improvement Societies' had sprung up; and these were accelerating the cultural advancement of Indians. The paper added that the E.I.Y.M.S. was the oldest such organisation, noting the contribution of Rev. H.M. Yates, Peter Ruhomon, and David Iloo to its success and longevity — the latter two were still active in its affairs. It concluded that the Society was 'still wielding its influence in the community', many of its members having worked in the interest of the welfare of the Indian people.

In 1966, on the eve of Guyana's Independence, J.W. Chinapen, a poet and teacher, who was a virtual disciple of Peter Ruhomon, remarked, in a tribute to his late mentor: 'He felt the way to full citizenship of the country was open to Indians only when they were on level with the other sections of the population'.³⁹³ Indeed, Ruhomon had argued in June 1932 that 'If we are to move as a united and self-respecting community, the education of both our boys and girls must take precedence over all other subjects'.³⁹⁴ He would have taken great pride in the intellectual attainments of the Indian people in British Guiana on the eve of Independence.

Peter Ruhomon was deeply influenced by the Indian renaissance: the growing literature on India's rich, ancient heritage; the rise of the freedom movement; the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Rabindranath Tagore in 1913. Chinapen, in his Guyana Independence tribute to Ruhomon, noted that his favourite poem was the celebrated one by Tagore, 'Gitanjali', which had become virtually the national prayer of India. He added that Ruhomon felt it should be Guyana's national prayer as well:

Where the mind is without fear and the head
is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into
fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depths of
truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards
perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost
its way into the dreary desert sand of dead
habit';
Where the mind is led forward by Thee into
ever widening thought and action -
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let
my country awake.³⁹⁵

In 1988, the East Indians 150th Anniversary Committee republished Ruhomon's *Centenary History*. However, they were unable to 'unearth' any of his immediate relatives, to share in this special tribute to this great man.³⁹⁶ They had apparently all fled this dark country, where words certainly do not come from the depths of truth.

V

Indians At Play: Cricket And Indian Unity

To the ordinary late Victorian, India was still a land of mystery, rope tricks, and magical spells. It was appropriate, therefore, that his introduction to [English] cricket had about it an air of magic. From the moment he burst upon the scene in 1893 until the outbreak of the First World War, Kumar Shri Ranjitsinhji used his cricket bat with a deftness and grace which savoured of the movements of a conjurer's wand.

Ian Peebles, 'Ranji and Co.', in *The Guardian Book of Cricket*, Matthew Engel, (ed.), (London: Penguin Books, 1986), p.215.

A glance at the world showed that when the common people were not at work, one thing they wanted was organised sports and games. They wanted them greedily, passionately.

C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London: The Sportsmans Book Club, 1964 [1963]), p.150.

A true measure of the extent to which many Indians in British Guiana had adapted to their new environment was their consuming passion for cricket as early as the late-19th century. The game was, by far, the dominant sport in the colony; it was as old as the English presence; it had given them a distinct identity from the hated, apparently cruel, Dutch, the first slave-owning colonisers. By 1778, during the Dutch period, English settlers from Barbados, who had moved to Demerara, were playing 'a game with a small ball and sticks'. On 15 and 16 February 1865, a team from British Guiana lost to Barbados by 143 runs: this was the first Intercolonial cricket match in the West Indies. Although all the British Guiana cricketers were apparently Whites, from the commercial and planting class, the game already had a mesmeric appeal on Black and Coloured youths; on Portuguese creoles as well (the Lusitania Cricket Club was founded in Georgetown in 1895); even the Chinese.³⁹⁷

Cricket represented the highest, popular manifestation of English culture;³⁹⁸ and the working classes of all races claimed it because it was accessible; it cost nothing — bats and wickets were contrived out of tree-trunks, twigs, the branches of the coconut palm, wooden crates, pieces of wood 'liberated' from a neighbour's fence; at times, a ball made from balata was procured.³⁹⁹ Often, as Ignatius Scoles observed in the mid-1880s, young Blacks were even more ingenious:

.... an old paraffin tin, all bruised, battered and just managing to stand, does excellent duty as both bails and wickets. The red leather ball resigns the honour to some old rags tightly twisted and fairly rounded, or at a great push, an oblong mango-stone supplies its place.⁴⁰⁰

Pads, or other forms of protection for more vulnerable areas, were unknown, thus heightening the element of danger; this made the game infinitely more alluring. A cocky ostentation flourished, even at this rudimentary stage; cricket thus played, endowed a mundane boyhood with fantasies of heroism.⁴⁰¹

Cricket in British Guiana, as in the West Indies, was a medium for the expression of pent-up sociological and psychological feelings of hurt in this ex-slave environment;⁴⁰² but the White ruling class did not suppress it. In fact, many planters and businessmen promoted it: it was probably identified as a safe means by which notions of oppression and injustice among the lower classes, with their potential for feeding 'subversion', could be canalised and dissipated. By the last quarter of the 19th century, several cricket clubs were founded in Georgetown: many gifted Black and Coloured cricketers could demonstrate their superiority over White players, in this fairly open environment. This enhanced the popularity of the game, and broadened its appeal.

Indian boys, born in the colony, took to cricket with as much enthusiasm as their parents embraced rice and cattle farming.⁴⁰³ The impact of the game on the community as a whole was profound. On every plantation, in every village — on patches of ground between 'logies' on the estates, and reefs in the cattle pasture — from the late-19th century, these boys, whether of Brahman or Chamar origins, Hindu or Muslim, played cricket together, with unbridled enthusiasm. Indeed, it would not be far-fetched to suggest that cricket did much to accelerate the eradication of whatever notions of caste superiority lingered into the early years of this century. It also helped to undermine the wall of incomprehension between Black and Indian boys in the primary schools.⁴⁰⁴

These cricket matches possessed the coastal landscape of British Guiana. As Comins observed in 1891, during his tour of several sugar estates: 'Many of the sons of East Indians born in the colony play cricket regularly. On Saturday afternoons, on most estates, a game can be seen going on, the players being partly cooly (sic) boys and partly black, and the game is played with great spirit. Many managers encourage them to play, and some even get up rival matches with neighbouring estates'.⁴⁰⁵

Comins related a story told to him during his visit to Plantation Port Mourant, on the Corentyne, on

15 August 1891. It revealed the depth of the cricketing obsession on this progressive estate, which, from the 1940s, produced several gifted players for Berbice, British Guiana, and the West Indies: John Trim, Rohan Kanhai, Basil Butcher, Joe Solomon, Ivan Madray, and Alvin Kallicharran were the most celebrated.⁴⁰⁶ Comins learnt that in July 1891:

Fifteen or sixteen colony-born cooly (sic) youths (Creoles) asked for a three-day pass to plant rice on their own lands. Instead of doing this, they went to cricket matches for three days, and then were absent for three more days on their own ground. Mr Murray, [the manager], summoned them, and they were fined \$3 or seven days in jail These were some of his best shovelmen, born on the estate, and in receipt of high wages, and all took money with them to pay their fines, but when they heard their stay in jail was to be short, they all decided to go to jail.⁴⁰⁷

This obsession must have deepened as an avalanche of news reached the colony, telling of the meteoric rise of an Indian cricketer in England, from around 1895: Prince Ranjitsinhji (Ranji) (1872-1933). A mercurial player, with an abundance of mesmerically delicate glances and cuts, and respected for his batsmanship on impaired pitches, Ranji scored 154 not out in his first Test match, England v Australia at Old Trafford, Manchester, in 1896. The following year, against Australia, in the Test at Sydney, he made 175. For many years afterwards, until the War, he played for Sussex, enchanting his fans all over England.⁴⁰⁸ In 1940, seven years after Ranji's death, Eric Gill, the sculptor, allowed his memories to craft an inviolable portrait of the master at his best. He wrote:

Even now, when I want to have a little quiet wallow in the thought of something wholly delightful and perfect, I think of Ranji on the county ground at Hove There were many minor stars, each with his special and beloved technique, but nothing on earth could approach the special quality of Ranji's batting or fielding such craftsmanship and grace entered into my very soul.⁴⁰⁹

Professor Shils states that intellectuals in India have told him on numerous occasions that two of the greatest events 'in the establishment of India's national self-esteem' were Ranji's success at international cricket, and the award of the Nobel Prize to Rabindranath Tagore. In both cases, he adds, the West was 'forced to acknowledge the merits of India'.⁴¹⁰ In British Guiana, too, especially among literate Indians, these achievements brought great pride in India; pride in themselves too. But Ranji's acclamation was more widely felt: the fact that he was a Hindu prince, fed visions of divine rule and the India of the *Ramayana*; and his ennobling performances before white crowds, in England and Australia, heightened the enchantment, the mythical associations.⁴¹¹

This was the context in which Indian boys in British Guiana, before the War, embraced cricket. One

such boy was J.A. Veerasawmy, who was born on 12 May 1891. In 1910, he became the first Indian to represent the colony in an Intercolonial match. J.A. Luckhoo (born 1887), also, was probably enthralled by reports of Ranji's excellence. In 1909, he scored a century in a representative match at Queenstown, New Amsterdam; he was considered a very promising batsman.⁴¹² However, the progress of these two young Indian cricketers was interrupted, possibly irreparably, with their departures for London, to study law — Luckhoo in 1909, Veerasawmy in 1910. The latter was an accomplished batsman, and a medium-pace bowler of some distinction. In 1911, he was an elected member of the Surrey and Middlesex County Cricket Clubs. He played regularly for the Clapham Ramblers Cricket Club; on several occasions he was selected to play for The Gentlemen of Surrey. One of his greatest boyhood dreams was realised in 1911: he was presented to Prince Ranjitsinhji at the Oval.⁴¹³ Luckhoo graduated in 1912; Veerasawmy in 1913. They both returned to British Guiana and made an enduring contribution to the organisation, promotion, and advancement of cricket among Indians of all classes.

By 1914, the game was played, with evident competence, by Indians throughout the colony; but it was still a haphazard affair; it was not properly organised. However, the emergence of an increasingly self-confident Indian middle class, with a compulsion for recognition at the highest levels of colonial society, was conducive to the formation of a cricket club, with facilities to ensure admission to organised competition. In 1914, Veerasawmy, with the support of several of his prominent compatriots, founded the British Guiana East Indian Cricket Club (E.I.C.C.). In 1915, he leased his property in Queenstown, Georgetown to the Club; and by the end of the year, a pavilion was constructed and the ground laid out.⁴¹⁴ The ground was opened on 13 December 1915. *The Daily Chronicle* remarked on 'the indefatigable efforts' of the secretary-treasurer, Veerasawmy, 'who, in season and out of season, has always striven for the interests of his cricketing protege'. The paper added that the captain of the Club, J.A. Luckhoo, was 'a power of strength', whose 'determined spirit will assuredly in the future make for the success of the Club'. The piece concluded with praise for Alladat Khan, a book-keeper at Plantation Providence, East Bank Berbice, 'no mean cricketer', who also attended the opening ceremonies: 'His presence served to prove how united is the sturdy East Indian stock to which he has the honour to belong'.⁴¹⁵

The President of the E.I.C.C., from its inception, was Thomas Flood, the popular businessman; (he held the position until his death in December 1920). At the opening of the Club, Flood, in the presence

of Governor Egerton, observed that it was the first time in the history of the colony that Indians — 'Christians, Hindus, and Mohamedans' - had founded such an organisation; and that he expected it to be of great benefit to Indian youths. He explained: 'It will tend to bring about, not only better feelings amongst themselves, but also amongst the other members of the community with whom they will, during their games, be bound to come into contact'.⁴¹⁶

The East Indian Cricket Club filled a yawning chasm in the Indian community. While it lifted the confidence of the Indian middle class, it also brought pride and recognition to all Indians: cricket was not merely a game in the colony; it was a noble endeavour; a non-cricketing group could not really be accepted there. Ignorance of the game was an inexcusable flaw. Governor Egerton, in his remarks at the opening of the Club, suggested that the Indians had arrived: 'You belong to a race which is of ancient civilisation The presence of East Indians in the colony has been a great factor in its prosperity, and one great thing you have done within recent years is to introduce your own native industry of rice planting. I am glad to think that not only have you benefited the whole population and the colony by doing that, but that you have benefited yourselves, and you have made the poorer classes of your race a much more contented lot than they were before the rice began'. The Governor made reference to the rising proficiency in cricket in India, noting that 'one of your chiefs, Ranjitsinhji, was one of the best players'. Although he was no longer playing, he added, he was 'fighting for the Empire'. Egerton concluded on the fine contribution of India to the War effort, observing that 'they came of a fighting stock — (hear, hear) — and can always give a good account of themselves'.⁴¹⁷ *The Daily Chronicle* endorsed his praise for the community, adding that 'The whole population has benefited by the enterprise of the East Indian'.⁴¹⁸

Egerton's observations were very perceptive: progress at cricket could not be divorced from other achievements. The rice industry, primarily, had been the basis of the rise of the Indian middle class; but it also brought a degree of comfort and self-confidence to many ordinary Indians as well. And the achievements of Ranji and notions of the antiquity of Indian tradition were rooted deeply in the imagination of the emergent middle class, inducing pride and impelling greater effort.

The formation of the E.I.C.C. had a dramatic effect on the game among Indians in Berbice also. In 1915, Alladat Khan (born 1888), was a principal force behind the founding of the E.I.C.C. in that county. Indeed, his role in the development of cricket in Berbice was a towering one. He was a

graduate from the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture in Trinidad, where he studied sugar technology and management. Between 1908 and 1925, Khan was an accountant and sugar chemist at Plantation Providence, Berbice; between 1925 and 1932, he was an accountant with Davson's Estates and Factories at Plantation Blairmont, West Coast Berbice. His strategic position, at the intermediate level of estate management, enabled him to get the support of the managers for the promotion of the game among Indians on the sugar estates, especially the Davson estates — Providence, Blairmont, and Bath. Khan also played a major role in the inauguration and management of the Davson Cup Competition, the symbol of cricket supremacy in Berbice. He was a Muslim; but he earned the respect of Hindu players throughout the county. His leadership qualities must have been very impressive: he was routinely elected captain of the Berbice East Indian Cricket Club between 1915 and 1936. In 1919 and 1929, he toured Trinidad with the British Guiana East Indian cricket team.⁴¹⁹

In 1916, the Port Mourant Sports Club was formed. Its aim was unambiguous: 'To foster the playing of cricket'.⁴²⁰ The main organisers were a few prominent Indians from the Port Mourant-Rose Hall, Corentyne area. The chairman of the sports committee was the highly respected Indian businessman from Rose Hall, J.W. Permaul; J. Kattick was the secretary of the Club; M. Sewdin, a landed proprietor, was an active member; while the liberal manager of Port Mourant estate, J.C. Gibson, was the president.⁴²¹ Later, from 1919, Sherlock Sabsook (born 1880), who had been the chief pan-boiler at Basseterre Sugar Factory, St. Kitts, between 1912 and 1919, returned to British Guiana, and did valuable work as an administrator of the Port Mourant Sports Club. He was the chief pan-boiler at Plantation Rose Hall, Canje from 1919 to 1940.⁴²² Like Alladat Khan, he used his contact with the estate administration to promote cricket at Port Mourant. His task was reduced significantly because of the unfailing magnanimity of Manager Gibson, a keen supporter of Indian cricket. For many years, the captain of Port Mourant was James Kempadoo, Gibson's chauffeur.⁴²³

What emerges is that by the 1920s, in the rural areas, Indians who had important jobs on the sugar estates — sugar boilers, dispensers, book-keepers, etc. — were the principal organisers and promoters of cricket on these estates; and the planters were usually supportive. And several Indian workers had an incentive to play the game because good players were often given better jobs on the estates. The passion for cricket also developed in Indian villages, both in response to the

achievements of their compatriots on the estates, as well as those of the East Indian Cricket Club in Georgetown.

The progress of the E.I.C.C. was impressive; and the detailed reports, in the press, of their performances must have invested several of their players with an aura of wonderment and pride. From 1915, the Club was admitted to the second division Garnett Cup competition. They won it in 1918, and were one of four teams that tied in 1919,⁴²⁴ The E.I.C.C. were victorious in 1925, 1926, and 1927 also, becoming the first team to win the cup on three consecutive occasions.⁴²⁵ But the challenge was diminishing; and in 1927, they sought admission to the prestigious, first division Parker Cup: the request was not granted because their ground at Queenstown was considered too small. However, as a result of representation made to the Government by Maharaj Singh, the delegate from India who visited the colony in 1925, the Club had acquired a lease on a substantial block of land at Camp Road, Thomas Lands. Governor Rodwell had expedited the process; and this 'veritable swamp' was transformed quickly into a beautiful ground, with a spacious pavilion.⁴²⁶ On 30 April 1928, the Governor opened the new premises;⁴²⁷ in 1929, the Club was admitted to the Parker Cup, the symbol of cricket supremacy in British Guiana.⁴²⁸

The consistently high performances of the E.I.C.C. were a testimony to the application of the players, as well as the proficiency of the administrators: the latter were all accomplished professionals and successful businessmen.⁴²⁹ In 1916, as noted earlier, J.A. Veerasawmy was its best player; but his substantial all-round talent was being squandered in second division cricket. In a match against the Guiana Cricket Club (G.C.C.), in September 1916, he made 148 in a score of 365 for 5 declared. E.I.C.C. demolished G.C.C. for 39; Veerasawmy got 7 wickets for 10 runs. His batting in this match was described thus: 'He treated the bowling with supreme contempt with a wealth of strokes played all around the wicket'.⁴³⁰ In 1917, he joined the British Guiana Cricket Club (B.G.C.C.) in order to play in the Parker Cup; (he captained the team in 1917 and 1918); but he continued his excellent work in the E.I.C.C.⁴³¹ Veerasawmy thrived at the highest level of the game: his bowling in a B.G.C.C. v. G.C.C. match, in October 1920, underlined the quality of his skills and his stamina; it brought effusive praise: 'He is regarded as our most destructive bowler on impaired wickets, but on Saturday last he showed that he can command respect even on the perfect pitches which the Bourda Club produce He bowled throughout with great judgment and skill, and required as much circumspection in his 28th over as in his first. The balls that beat and bowled C.V. Hunter and Parker

would have puzzled better batsmen'.⁴³² Greater recognition came in May 1922, when a knowledgeable observer remarked: 'C.R. Browne and Veerasawmy are the only two bowlers amongst our local cricketers who could have any chance of being selected in a West Indies team for his bowling alone.' Browne toured England with the West Indies team in 1923, as well as in 1928, when the West Indies played their first Test series.⁴³⁴ Veerasawmy played for British Guiana in the Intercolonial Tournament in 1921 and 1922, as he had done in 1910; but his successful legal practice made a disproportionately heavy claim on his energies: he never made the West Indies team.⁴³⁵

Veerasawmy's contribution to the development of cricket among the Indians of British Guiana was an epic achievement; it is an aspect of their social history. He was their best cricketer; but his work as an organiser, promoter, and administrator, coupled with his impeccable sportsmanship and civilised conduct at the highest levels of colonial society, made him an epitome of the purest ideals of this noble game.⁴³⁶ In January 1920, *The Daily Chronicle* observed that he 'takes a keen interest in the welfare and development of his race [and] has been instrumental in arranging Intercolonial cricket fixtures between East Indians of the colony and Trinidad, and also Inter-county fixtures'.⁴³⁷ Indeed, the first Indian team from Trinidad visited British Guiana in 1914;⁴³⁸ and in May 1919, the British Guiana Indians, on a return tour of the island, defeated the Trinidad Indians in their 'test' match at San Fernando. On their return to British Guiana, the E.I.C.C. presented a gift to M. Ally [Mohamed Insanally], the captain. Veerasawmy, the architect of Trinidad's destruction, received a ball on which was mounted an embossed silver plate. The insignia read:

Demerara v. Trinidad			
May 1919			
J.A. Veerasawmy — 2nd innings			
O	M	R	W
11	0	23	9

Speaking at a banquet in San Fernando, at the completion of the 1919 tour, Veerasawmy said that it represented 'an important step in the progress of East Indians in the West Indies'; the tour provided an opportunity for 'showing their worth in spheres of life other than business, to command the respect of other sections of the community in which they live' He exhorted the Indians to uphold 'the honour of the noble race to which they belong'; and he appealed to them 'never to stop striving for the advancement of the name of India and never to forget, wherever you roam, however wealthy

you may be, however trained and accomplished you may become, you will always be considered as sons of India'.⁴⁴⁰

In January 1920, it was reported that Veerasawmy would be approaching the Government for assistance to take an Indian team from the West Indies to India. This idea was spawned during a meeting he had with some gentlemen from India, in London in 1919. The object of the proposed tour was to forge closer ties between Indians in the West Indies and their ancestral land; it was hoped that it could be undertaken in 1922 or 1923.⁴⁴¹ Nothing came of it; as the collapse of the proposed colonisation scheme, with provisions for the establishment of a steamer service to India, marked the rapid decline in links with the homeland. This must have caused Veerasawmy much pain. His father went to British Guiana as an indentured labourer, from Madras, and rose to considerable prominence in Government service. He himself went to India in 1914; and had visited Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, Benares, Lucknow, Agra, Delhi, etc. He was very proud of his Indian heritage. In 1922, he advocated the teaching 'of a complete course of Indian History' in the schools of British Guiana.⁴⁴²

Veerasawmy continued, throughout the 1920s, to promote cricket among the Indians. (In 1924, Trinidad Indians visited the colony; visits were made by local Indian cricketers to Trinidad in 1925 and 1929). He gave his immense administrative and cricketing experiences to the E.I.C.C.; so did the Indian middle class in Georgetown, whatever their religious background. In 1917, the members of the executive of the Club were: Thomas Flood (president), R.R. Kerry (vice-president), M.H. Khan (secretary), M.K. Khan (treasurer), F. Kawall, H.B. Gajraj, J.A. Veerasawmy, M. Ishmael, S. Dindial, M. Ally [Mohamed Insanally] (committee members), and J.A. Luckhoo (captain), A.S. Rohoman (vice-captain).⁴⁴³ In 1923, the members of the executive were: J.A. Luckhoo (president), R.R. Kerry (vice-president), James Bowen (secretary), J.A. Veerasawmy (treasurer), C.R. Jacob, K.P. Das, F. Kawall, H.B. Gajraj, M.H. Khan, A.S. Rohoman, M.K. Khan (committee members), and M. Ally [Mohammed Insanally] (captain).⁴⁴⁴ In 1928, when the new E.I.C.C. ground at Thomas Lands was opened, the executive comprised: H.B. Gajraj (president), F. Kawall, S. Rampershad (vice-presidents). D. Iloo (secretary), J.A. Luckhoo, J.A. Veerasawmy, M. Panday, J.P. Das (committee members), and A.S. Rohoman (captain).⁴⁴⁵

It is noteworthy that several members of the executive of the Club were active in the East Indian Young Men's Society. Of even greater significance, however, was the fact that, from its inception,

Hindu, Muslim, and Christian Indians worked harmoniously in its administration, as well as in the team. At no time did a quota system, based on religious persuasion, operate in the E.I.C.C. This was also the case in Berbice. Cricket made a major contribution, (hitherto unacknowledged), to the persistence of extraordinary tolerance among Indians in British Guiana: Hindu-Muslim relations remain possibly the best in any community where Indians have settled since the 1830s.

Mohamed Insanally (born 1885), a Muslim, was for nine years (1919-1927), the captain of the E.I.C.C. He led them to victory on several occasions in the Garnett and Flood Cups. He was, as noted earlier, the captain of the British Guiana Indians on their successful tour of Trinidad in 1919; in 1924, he led them in their victory, by one run, over the latter, at Bourda, Georgetown. Insanally was a principal force in the development of the new ground in 1927-1928.⁴⁴⁶ His successor, A.S. Rohoman, was also a Muslim. In 1929, seven of the 14 cricketers who toured Trinidad, were Muslims: A.S. Rohoman, the captain, M. Rohoman, K. Rohoman, B. Saddick, M. Deen, Assad Khan, and Alladat Khan from Berbice.⁴⁴⁷ The Rohoman family were immersed in the game: the three brothers were among the main shapers of the achievements of the E.I.C.C. in the 1920s; in June 1927, their family firm, A. Rohoman and Co., in Georgetown, were advertising cricket bats, bails, leg-guards, stumps, and wicket-keeping gloves. The bats were described as '3 and 4 spring handles, made from specially selected Indian willow — thoroughly seasoned and beautifully balanced'.⁴⁴⁸

In May 1938, *The Daily Chronicle*, in its Indian Centenary issue, noted that 'The British Guiana East Indian Cricket Club stands as a monument to the East Indians for their enterprise in sports'; and proceeded to underline the contributions of Thomas Flood, its first president, and J.A. Veerasawmy, to the progress of Indian cricketers throughout the colony. The former had donated the Flood Cup in 1917. This became the symbol of cricket supremacy among Indians in the counties of Essequibo, Demerara, and Berbice; and the competition and sportsmanship which it promoted did 'much to create a harmonious relationship' among Indians in the colony, as *The Daily Chronicle* observed in 1938.⁴⁴⁹ The same paper, at the inauguration of the Flood Cup, twenty one years earlier, had commented prophetically:

Since the establishment of the E.I.C.C., a large number of East Indians have taken a keen interest in cricket and some, as a result of constant attention to the game, have shown marked improvement. It is felt that this competition will have the effect of bringing together those East Indians residing in the two counties of Berbice and Essequibo, and that in the future, there will come from their midst men who will make a name for themselves in the cricketing world.⁴⁵⁰

Berbice won the Flood Cup in 1917; Demerara in 1918; the competition was not held in 1919 because of the Trinidad tour. Already, by May 1920, the team which represented Berbice comprised primarily cricketers from the sugar estates: Alladat Khan and P.R. Barran (Providence), G.H. Khan (Blairmont), Somar, Wailoo, A. Shabid (Bath), Balkaran (Albion), James Kempadoo, Nanan, and Samaroo (Port Mourant).⁴⁵¹ As noted earlier, estate managers were very supportive of the game; and middle class Indians employed on the estates brought much enthusiasm and energy to its promotion and organisation. In October 1920, another channel for the advancement of estate cricket was provided: as a result of the efforts of J.A. Veerasawmy, a 'Silver Challenge Cup' was acquired. The declared aim of the new competition was to promote 'the cult' of cricket among Indians on the sugar estates.⁴⁵² The Cup cost \$110 — \$63 were donated by Indian sportsmen, while \$40 were pledged on the subscription list of Sherlock Sabsook of the Port Mourant Sports Club.⁴⁵³ *The Daily Argosy* saw the Challenge Cup as another milestone in Indian cricket; and noted that several good grounds had been laid out on the estates. It concluded that Flood Cup cricket had demonstrated that 'East Indians are not one whit behind the rest of the community in their enthusiasm for the noble game'.⁴⁵⁴

The improved quality of play among cricketers on the sugar estates was evident: Berbice regained the Flood Cup in 1921; they defeated Demerara, whose players were drawn primarily from the E.I.C.C. in Georgetown. The backwoodsmen had arrived. Manager Gibson of Port Mourant presented the top scorer for Berbice, A.B. Dukhan, with a bat.⁴⁵⁵ Proficiency at cricket brought other, more enduring rewards: good estate players were likely to get lighter, better jobs; this was a compelling inducement for young Indians to work harder at their game.⁴⁵⁶ By 1925, many of them were also playing in the Davson Cup, first division cricket in Berbice. There were at least three in the Davson's Sports Club team; several represented the Berbice Cricket Club; while the teams from the sugar estates — Bath, Blairmont, Providence, Albion, Port Mourant — were almost exclusively Indian.⁴⁵⁷ In 1926, Bath won the Davson Cup. This was an important achievement: Indian cricketers, by the mid-1920s, were winning representative matches, against teams which were predominantly Black.⁴⁵⁸

The sports historian, Brian Stoddart, has remarked on the role of team sports as an instrument of conformity in Victorian public-schools, as well as in similar institutions in the British Empire:

..... participants were thought to learn teamwork, the value of obeying constituted authority, courage in the face of adversity, loyalty to fellow players, and respect for the rules. To *play cricket* or *play the game* meant being honest and upright, and accepting conformity within the conventions as much as it meant taking part in a simple game.⁴⁵⁹

It is doubtful whether the plantocracy in British Guiana possessed the intellect or the inclination to consciously frame such a lofty conceptualisation of the role of cricket among their workers. But, as observed earlier, in a rudimentary, but no less tendentious, way, they must have seen the game as a means of canalising and neutralising disaffection, and what they perceived as a tendency to subversion. To belabour this, however, would be mere pedantry. Indian cricketers on the estates did not agonise over the planters' motives in supporting the game: they made full use of the facilities provided, and in Berbice especially, the standard of play advanced steadily in the 1920s. On the Essequibo Coast, where all the sugar estates, except Hampton Court, had collapsed by 1927, organised cricket was dead. In that year, Essequibo was unable to field a team in the Flood Cup because, as *The New Daily Chronicle* reported, only 'a small percentage of East Indian youths [take] part in the game on the coast.'⁴⁶⁰

In Berbice, on the other hand, cricket was developing rapidly and impressively in the villages as well, away from the estates. The Berbice team which played in the Flood Cup in 1925 had several non-estate players.: E. Emambaccus (Sheet Anchor), J. Etwaroo (Cumberland), A.B. Boodhoo, M. Mootoo (Rose Hall, Corentyne), A. Emambaccus (Adelphi), and Johnny de Groot (No. 2).⁴⁶¹ Meanwhile, several Indians played for the villages of Sheet Anchor and Cumberland, in the Davson Cup.⁴⁶² In March 1925, the naturalist, Harold Moore, observed the irrepressible, rampant joy of Indian boys on the Corentyne, possessed by the cricket 'cult'. Not even the monsoonal deluge could put out their passion:

..... I was greatly amused at the action of a number of East Indian lads who were playing on the neighbouring pasture a game of bat-and-ball, which though but a caricature of cricket, none the less laid the foundations for the subsequent glorious performances of some of the colony's best cricketers of the past Ordinary cricketers would have run for shelter from such a downpour. Not one of the country boys thought of doing such a thing The bowler continued to bowl in the teeth of the driving rain, the batsman to bat, the fielders to chase the ball. Three of the players seized favourable opportunities during the progress of the game to strip themselves hurriedly of all clothing except their lap cloth. They would not have their movements curbed by heavy, wet cloth. I may say that the rural districts abound with embryonic cricketers, both Black and Indian, of similar unquenchable enthusiasm and physical stamina

This was the spirit which spawned several good Indian cricketers in the 1920s, thus establishing a tradition in which the great, international batsmen from Port Mourant, in the twenty years after the mid-1950s, were rooted: Rohan Kanhai, Basil Butcher (he was Black), Joe Solomon, and Alvin Kallicharran. (The other great batsman from Berbice, Roy Fredericks, was from Plantation Blairmont).

In October 1925, *The Daily Argosy* remarked that 'a true Britisher is at his best when on a field of sport, which teaches him respect and consideration for his opponent, unselfishness, playing for the team and not individual kudos. That kindly comprehension and respect for the views and achievements of his rivals does not end when the game is lost and won. It is carried on to more serious affairs when cricket days are over'⁴⁶⁴ On 30 April 1928, Governor Rodwell, in his speech at the opening of the E.I.C.C. ground, observed that on the committee of the Club and in the audience, there were 'members of different Indian associations who do not always, on all matters, take the same view'. He considered it most gratifying that these political rivals made 'a common ground of the cricket field'.⁴⁶⁵ A few days later, *The New Daily Chronicle* endorsed Rodwell's remarks, noting that 'East Indians who fly at each other's throats in matters political, now gather in their capacious club house near the Sea Wall, play cricket together, and meet each other just as M.P.s do in London The committee of the E.I.C.C. includes leading members of the British Guiana East Indian Association and the Indian Congress, whose antagonism throughout political life is as unyielding as in any factional dispute in the colony'⁴⁶⁶

In June 1929, Rev. C.F. Andrews, in an address to members of the E.I.C.C., appropriately, spoke on the question of Indian unity. He referred to the twin problems of untouchability and Hindu-Muslim intolerance, which poisoned the social life of India; but expressed optimism that the work and example of Gandhi, their 'greatest saint', were undermining bigotry and shaping a sense of nationhood. Andrews expressed pride in the situation in British Guiana, where, 'as far as he could see [they had] completely obliterated that old, wrong, deep-seated division' between Hindus and Muslims. It was deeply satisfying, he said, to see that Hindu, Muslim and Christian Indians 'sat at the same table shared the same meals shared friendship in harmony and love' He was also lifted when he saw Brahmans 'with great love and affection welcoming and embracing their brothers, who in India, might be regarded as outcasts'. He considered these changes, in such a short time in the colony, 'a great and noble victory'. But he regretted the petty political differences in the Indian

community; and appealed to them to support the East Indian Cricket Club because 'through cricket and by playing good cricket they would achieve unity more quickly'.⁴⁶⁷

Middle class Indians seemed to have embraced the reigning imperial idea, however embryonically, that the true cricketing spirit bred a nobility of purpose, a refining of attitudes: team work, dignity in defeat, tolerance — these were inviolable. This altruism was difficult to sustain when the game was over; on the cricket field, however, among people of all classes, all races, it was an unwritten code; it seeped into the society. The tolerance and mutual respect between Hindus and Muslims, shaped by a common indentureship, expanded. Cricket also provided a rare opportunity for Indian and Black youths to compete (often in the same team), interact, and socialise. And the legendary, necessary sessions in the rum-shop, after the match, helped to undermine the wall of incomprehension between these two peoples of fundamentally different cultures. Cricket was, indeed, more than a game. As Joseph Ruhoman remarked in May 1938, during the Indian Centenary: 'The sporting spirit — particularly as expressed in cricket competitions — has long been a happy medium of frequent intercourse between Indians widely diversified in status'.⁴⁶⁸

APPENDIX
A SAMPLE OF MIDDLE CLASS INDIAN MEN IN
BRITISH GUIANA, 1928

<i>NAME</i>	<i>ADDRESS,</i>	<i>PROFESSION</i>
DEMERARA		
Edwin Bacchus	Virginia	Storekeeper
Nadir Bacchus	Diamond	do.
Cyril Batoolall	Lusignan	Shopkeeper
Bechulall	Enmore	do.
Bedessy	Helena	Rice Farmer
Bickramlall	Herstelling	Shopkeeper
Bishunchand	Helena	Rice Farmer
John Boodhan	Ogle	Planter
Boodhoo	Spring Hall	Rice Miller
Sheik Mohamed Boodhoo	Agricola	Landed Proprietor
Dindial	Victoria	Dry Goods Dealer
Robert Doobay	Bagotville	Shopkeeper
Mohamed Ayube Edun	Georgetown	Goldsmith
Edgar Thomas Flood	Plantation Blankenburg	Manager
Wahid Ali Gadwah	Triumph	Gold and Silversmith
Abdool Gafoor	Georgetown	Cycle Dealer
Abdool Azeez Gajraj	do.	Storekeeper
H.B. Gajraj	do.	Merchant
Noormohamed Gajraj	do.	do.
Ganga	Nabacalis	Rice and Padi Dealer
Mohamed Ghanie	Unity	Shopkeeper
James Edward Goorahoo	Soesdyke	Grocer
Ernest Adolphus Gunraj	Vreedenhoop	Shopkeeper
Philip Guyadeen	Georgetown	Landed Proprietor
Abdool Hack	Hague	Merchant
S.M.E. Hack	Peter's Hall	do.
Hoosaney	Victoria	Storekeeper
Hooseinbaksh	Clonbrook	Goldsmith
Mohamed Ibrahim	Triumph	Storekeeper
M. Ishmael	Vergenoegen	Jeweller
William Henry Kailan	Georgetown	Furniture Dealer
Karimbaksh	Ann's Grove	Storekeeper
Mohamed Kassim	Cane Grove	do.
Francis Kawall	Georgetown	Merchant
C.A. McDoom	McDoom Village	Landed Proprietor
Gool Mohamed	Triumph	Shopkeeper
Noor Mohamed	Goed Fortuin	Shopkeeper
Harry Manghan Nehaul	Buxton	Landed Proprietor
Mahadeo Panday	Georgetown	Merchant
Sahadeo Panday	do.	Manager (Panday Bros.)
Parbhudiyal	Haarlem	Landed Proprietor
Permayswardin	Peter's Hall	Shopkeeper
Authur Persaud	Goed Fortuin	do.
Hansa Persaud	Paradise	Storekeeper
Nandlall Persaud	Bagotstown	Merchant-Tailor
Sarabjit Persaud	Kitty	Landed Proprietor
Ramlochan Rai	Triumph	Shopkeeper
Ramdass	Kitty	Milk Vendor
Kanhoi Ramjohn	Triumph	Rice Farmer
Robert Ramjohn	do.	do.
Sarjoo Ramjohn	do.	Rice Miller
Ramkissoon	Plaisance	Shopkeeper

Archibald Noel Gainer	Plantation Greenfield	Manager
Ramotar		
Ramprashad	Georgetown	Landed Proprietor
Abdool Rayman	Vreedenhoop	do.
Abdool Azeez Rohoman	Plantation Felicity	do.
Abdool Samad Rohoman	Georgetown	Merchant (A. Rohoman and Co.)
Britton Ahmad Rohoman	do.	do.
Seelall	Clonbrook	Rice Dealer
Lalbahadur Singh	Mahaicony	Storekeeper
Mohabir Singh	Vreedenhoop	Dry Goods Dealer
Soorat Singh	Triumph	Shopkeeper
Sirikissoon	Clonbrook	Planter
Sheik Abdool Subhan	Triumph	Shopkeeper
Surujdin	Vergenoegen	Goldsmith

BERBICE

Abdulla	Fyrish	Landed Proprietor
Tombi Arnamanthodoo	No.2 (East Canje)	Shopkeeper
Mohabir Arjune	Rose Hall	Cattle Dealer
Armoogan	Albion	Foreman/Engineer
Francis Armogan	Rose Hall	Farmer
Edwin Bacchus	No.6 (West Coast Berbice)	Cattle Farmer
Peer Bacchus	Plantation Washington	Landed Proprietor
Mangar Bajan	Rose Hall	Rice Miller
Boodhoo Bajan	do.	do.
Balkissoon	do.	Rice Dealer
Solomon Bankay	Bush Lot	Shopkeeper
	(West Coast Berbice)	
Basdew(sic)	Fyrish	Goldsmith
Ramjattan Beepath	Rose Hall	Trader
Robert Chundun	Maida	Landed Proprietor
David Chundun	Whim	Retail Spirit Dealer
James Chinsamy	Albion	Laboratory Assistant
Russell Chhangur	Fyrish	Tailor
Charles Chinatomby	Rose Hall	Estate Superintendent
James Alexander Churaman	Port Mourant	Distiller
Ian Ingram Dhajoo	do.	Shopkeeper (Rose Hall)
J.A.Drepaul	Kilmarnock	Cattle Dealer
Chandica Persaud	Rose Hall	Sewing Machine Agent
Dwarka Persaud	Cumberland	Rice Miller
Frederick Gobin	Lichfield	Rice Farmer
Charles Gobin	do.	Rice Miller (Golden Grove)
Robert McKenzie Gopaul	Blairmont	Shopkeeper
Hafiz Mohamed	Rose Hall	Tailor
James Edwin Hanooman	No.11 (East Coast	Farm Manager
(Hanoman)	Berbice)	
Joseph Hanooman(do.)	New Amsterdam	Garage Proprietor
Harry Hanooman(do.)	do.	Garage Manager
Harry-Narine	Fyrish	Shopkeeper
Harry-Paul	Letter Kenny	do.
Ishmael	Fyrish	do.
Bajan Itwaru	Rose Hall	do.
Itwaru	Fyrish	Tailor
J.P. Jaundoo	Hopetown	Rice Miller
Robert Lakhan	Germania	Shopkeeper
Peter William Laljie	Rose Hall(East Banje)	Distiller
Nackched	Rose Hall	Rice Miller
Thomas Narsayah	Albion	Storekeeper
Benjamin Owtar	Rose Hall	Merchant
Luke Radhay Persaud	New Amsterdam	do.
Beharry Pritam	Whim	Shopkeeper
Rambarran	No.27 (Corentyne)	Cattle Dealer
Rambharose	Bush Lot	do.
	(West Coast Berbice)	

Ramcharitar	No.27 (Corentyne)	Village Overseer
Robert Ramdeholl	New Amsterdam	Merchant
Phekku Rampersaud	Hopetown	General Trader
Ramprasaud	Gibraltar	Shopkeeper
Ramroop	Rose Hall	Rice Miller
Ricknath	Courtland	Shopkeeper
Ramnarine Sahdhoo	Fyrish	Goldsmith
Edwin Sahadeo	No.2 (East Canje)	Merchant
F.W. Sarran	Port Mourant	Retail Spirit Dealer (Lancaster)
W.V. Tennessee	Alness	Village Overseer
Babulall Tiwari	Plantation Friends	Factory Overseer

ESSEQUIBO

Syad Amjdally	Danielstown	Shopkeeper
George Annamanthadoo	Dartmouth	do.
George Bacchus	Queenstown	do.
Rahim Bacchus	Lima	Rice Miller (Richmond)
Bhagwan	Noitgedacht	Shopkeeper
Bissessar	do.	do.
William Augustus Dookwah	Danielstown	Goldsmith
Abdool Ganny	Huis't Dieren	Shopkeeper
Henry Gopaul	Richmond	Goldsmith
James Gray Guyadeen	Enterprise (Leguan)	Rice Farmer
H.S. Kumar	Anna Regina	Book-keeper
Ramsaroop Maraj	Coffee Grove	Landed Proprietor
Sase Narine	Johanna Cecelia	Manager, Rice Factory
Omar Khan	Danielstown	Soda Water Manufacturer
Gour Persaud	Better Success	Landed Proprietor
Ganga Persaud	Richmond	Shopkeeper
Isri Persaud	Marionville (Wakenaam)	do.
Rajkumar	Affiance	do.
Ramdhan	do.	do.
Ramlogansingh	Danielstown	Rice Farmer
Rampersaud	Johanna Cecelia	do.
Ramsoondar	Huis't Dieren	Shopkeeper
Rashbeharry	Adventure	Rice Farmer

NOTE: The professions listed are the principal occupations; most middle class Indians were engaged in a variety of economic activities.

SOURCE: C.O. 115/147: From the list of men qualified and liable to serve as jurors in British Guiana, 1928-1929, *The Official Gazette*, 4 August 1928.

Notes

1. Brian Moore is at variance with Walter Rodney (1981) for 'downplaying race as a key factor in explaining socio-political developments in 19th century Guyana'. He argues that although the settlement of Indians on the land from the 1870s, was a manifestation of their desire to be incorporated into colonial society, 'they remained as sharply differentiated racially and culturally from the other ethnic groups' at the end of the century, as when they first arrived. He adds that this condition was perpetuated by their isolation on the sugar estates, and their settling primarily in 'racially exclusive villages'. Moore concedes that there was some 'interculturalisation' between Indians and Blacks in 'peripheral aspects of cultural life'; but this 'did not extend to the core culture of each ethnic section..... religious beliefs, marriage and family, ideas and values'. He concludes: '..... despite significant changes which occurred within the social system after emancipation, Guyanese society towards the end of the 19th century has to be classified as being closer to the plural model'. See Brian L. Moore, *Race, Power and Social Segmentation in Colonial Society: Guyana after Slavery, 1838-1891* (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1987), pp. 217-218, 222.
2. It is the underlying assumption of this study that while the creolisation of Indians in British Guiana accelerated in the 1920s, with the termination of immigration from India, it differed significantly from Black creolisation. The former was a case of 'selective creolisation': the received Anglo-Saxon tradition — its Caribbean variant — was filtered through a core culture, rooted in the Indian great tradition. By the 1920s, even Christian Indians in the colony were identifying with the latter, as conceptions of an ancient, Hindu India of high secular achievements advanced with the rise of the nationalist struggle in the homeland. Indian creolisation in the Caribbean, as Professor Edward Brathwaite sees it, was shaped by 'in-culturation', rather than 'interculturalisation'. The plural character of society in British Guiana remained essentially intact. See Edward Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Mona, Jamaica: Savacou Publications, 1974), p.54.
3. C.F. Andrews, 'The Indian Centenary in British Guiana', *Modern Review* [Calcutta], (April 1938), p.378.
4. Rodney cites the case of an Indian landlord and rice miller, Guyadeen, who opposed the installation of a co-operative rice mill in 1918: 'His intention was that the peasants should be entirely dependent on him, and he issued a thinly-veiled threat to increase the rent of the ground and the houses of the East Indian peasants over whom he held the whip hand'. — Walter Rodney, 'Masses in Action', *New World* (Guyana Independence Issue), (1966), p.32.
5. *The Daily Argosy*, 29 October 1921.
6. *The Daily Argosy*, 9 March 1922.
7. *The Daily Argosy*, 17 April 1923.
8. Lesley M. Potter, 'Internal Migration and Resettlement of East Indians in Guyana, 1870-1920', Ph.D. Thesis, McGill University (Montreal), 1975, pp.293, 310.
9. *Ibid.*, p.284.
10. Marilyn Silverman, *Rich People and Rice: Factional Politics in Rural Guyana* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), pp.51-52.
11. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 9 December 1928.
12. Tyran Ramnarine notes that Indians were often maligned for their thrift; but it was an important factor in their economic progress: 'The retention of some habits, customs, and virtues of rural India enabled.....[them] to achieve economic well being. Thrift was the principal virtue that allowed some Indians to establish their independence from the estates and build up their capital resources. Creole society despised Indians for this trait..... Their isolation on the estates and remote settlements insulated them from the conspicuous consumption patterns of the rest of the society'. — 'The Growth of the East Indian Community in British Guiana, 1880-1920', D. Phil. Thesis, University of Sussex, 1977, p.110 (emphasis added).
13. Leo A. Despres, 'Differential Adaptation and Micro-cultural Evolution in Guyana', in *Afro-American Anthropology: Contemporary Perspectives*, Norman E. Whitten and John F. Szwed, (eds.), (New York: The Free Press, 1970), p.282; Mohammad A. Rauf, *Indian Village in Guyana: A Study of Cultural Change and Ethnic Identity* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), p.102.
14. Rauf argues that in the late-1960s, Indian effort at Crabwood Creek, Corentyne, was underpinned by pride in past achievements and a sense of indebtedness to their ancestors; the latter was articulated through rituals, offerings, etc., thus establishing a spiritual and secular continuity with the past. He observes: 'One cannot fail to be impressed by the villagers' feeling of pride in their local tradition, in the memories of their past labour and efforts towards the establishment and development of the village, and in retaining what they call the "tradition" and "values" which, in their understanding, are characteristic of their "Motherland" — India'. Rauf adds: 'The Hindu home becomes a place where not only the living members of the family reside, but also where the forefathers are to be remembered at the time of 'Pitri-yajna'.... The unbreakable ties with the past ancestry protect the living and provide additional prosperity for the future members of the family'. — *op. cit.*, [1974], pp.76, 78.
15. Information on the embryonic achievements of the Indian middle class is taken primarily from Potter, *op. cit.*, [1975], Chapters 7 and 8; Ramnarine, *op. cit.*, [1977], Chapters 3-5.
16. Potter, *op. cit.*, [1975], pp.275-276.
17. J.B. Cropper, 'Our Villages and Country Parts', *Timehri*, Vol. II, (third series), (1912), pp.257-258.
18. In August 1923, a correspondent noted that '25 years ago' Blacks owned most of the land between Eversham and Ainess, on the Corentyne. He regretted, however, that they were being 'elbowed out' by the Indians, 'who, as a race, are to be commended for their thrift and frugality.....' - *The Daily Argosy*, 5 August 1923.

19. *The Daily Chronicle*, 10 March 1921.
20. *The Daily Chronicle*, 5 May 1921.
21. *The Daily Argosy*, 3 May 1921.
22. *The Daily Chronicle*, 5 April 1921.
23. See Chapter 5.
24. *Reports on the Scheme for Indian Emigration to British Guiana, Part II — Report by G.F. Keatinge* (Simla: Government Press, 1924), pp.163-164. (For a report of the visit of Keatinge and his colleague, V.N. Tivary, to the Mahaicony Creek, see *The Daily Argosy*, 6 April 1922).
25. *Ibid.*, p.165.
26. Charles E. Douglas, *Report on the Cultivation, Treatment and Prospects of Rice in British Guiana* (Empire Marketing Board, no.32) (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1930), p.22.
27. *The Daily Argosy*, 27 March 1923.
28. C.O. 115/147, *The Official Gazette*, 4 August 1928.
29. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 5 February 1926.
30. *The Daily Argosy*, 24 January 1925.
31. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 4 February 1926
32. Earlier, in March 1928, on the occasion of the Hindu festival of *Phagwah*, Rash Beharry gave a dinner for 500 Indians at his residence at Anna Regina. — *The New Daily Chronicle*, 11 March 1928.
33. C.O. 111/689/75141 [1930], encl.: C.F. Andrews, 'Impressions of British Guiana', mimeo., p.93.
34. Ramnarine, *op. cit.*, [1977], p.107. In 1918, the secretary of the Local Government Board observed that 'there are miles of coastlands in which considerable property exists but in respect of which the Board has no actual connection whatever and consequently has no means of obtaining information' — C.O. 114/172, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1919.
35. *Ibid.* (C.O. 114/172).
36. C.O. 114/182, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1921.
37. Ramnarine, *op. cit.*, [1977], p.130.
38. C.O. 111/658, O.A.G. (ag.) to Wiseman, s.o., 13 November 1925, encl.
39. Following their visit to British Guiana in 1922, the delegates from India, Pillai and Tivary, remarked on the contribution of the Indians to the survival of the colony: 'It is admitted on all hands that but for them, the sugar industry of the colony would have collapsed years ago; and that they have saved the colony from utter ruin and bankruptcy but they have also contributed materially towards the development and exploitation of the colony, by building up the rice industry, and that under the most adverse circumstances. They have cleared jungles and converted marshy swamps into rice fields'. - *Reports on the Scheme for Indian Emigration to British Guiana, Part I — Report by Dewan Bahadur P. Kesava Pillai and V.N. Tivary* (Simla: Government Press, 1924), p.69.
40. In January 1928, it was reported that an English syndicate was trying to acquire several large coconut estates on the East Coast Demerara, owned by Indians, in order to set up a soap and confectionery business. Nothing came of this; but some of the offers allegedly made were very impressive: \$125,000 for Plantation Springhall, owned by Boodhoo; \$140,000 for Chapman's Grove, of which H.M. Nehaul was the proprietor; and \$60,000 for A.N.G. Ramotar's Plantation Greenfield. Rajnarine Maraj, the owner of Plantation Orange Nassau apparently also received a substantial offer. — *The Daily Argosy*, 1 January 1928.
41. C.O. 114/172, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1919.
42. *Commercial Directory of Georgetown and New Amsterdam, British Guiana* (Georgetown: The Chamber of Commerce, January 1925), p.65.
43. C.O. 114/208, Minutes of the Executive Council, 10 May 1926. See also C.O. 111/631, Collet to Milner, no. 468, 30 September 1920, encl.
44. Matbarally seemed to have earned much respect in the West Coast Berbice district. He had dug a well on his estate; and during the devastating drought of 1925-1926, a correspondent noted the assistance he gave to neighbouring villagers: 'People from various villages two or three miles away travel on foot with buckets and other receptacles before daybreak to get to his estate even before the gate is opened. It is a very touching spectacle to witness the crowd rush for the water he has done much to save the situation. About two or three weeks ago, Mr Matbarally bored another well at the back of Washington, West Coast Berbice to supply cattle with water, as the creek water has become salt' — *The New Daily Chronicle*, 4 February 1926.
45. In May 1926, it was reported that Chundun, for many years the chief sugar boiler at Plantation Albion, was retiring to manage his estate. - *The New Daily Chronicle*, 20 May 1926.
46. Several versions of Indian names appear frequently in the records.
47. Pillai and Tivary, *op. cit.*, [1924], p. 50.
48. Keatinge, *op. cit.*, [1924], p.164.

49. *The Daily Chronicle*, 14 September 1916.
50. *Leader, The Daily Chronicle*, 13 January 1917.
51. See note 47. In 1919, Jugdeo imported a 'Holt' 45 h.p. tractor, capable of ploughing 20 acres per day. — *The Daily Chronicle*, 8 November 1919.
52. C.O. 111/622, Collet to Milner, no. 147, 25 April 1919.
53. C.O. 111/661, Rodwell to Amery, no. 326, 17 July 1926, encl.
54. Douglas, *op. cit.*, [1930], pp. 37-38.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
56. Jugdeo's success in adapting agricultural machinery to the heavy clay lands up the Mahaicony Creek was achieved primarily because the subsoil on his empoldered plots remained firm for some time after the heavy rains. This contradicted H.C. Sampson's argument that 'The harvesting of swamp-grown rice on these heavy soils must of necessity be a laborious business the crops have to be cut by hand, since no machine could cope with this sticky clay soil'. Yet he conceded: 'In a few cases machine threshers are used'. [See his *Report on Development of Agriculture in British Guiana* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1927), p.18]. In 1950, American agronomists, H.M. Beachell and O.B. Brown underlined the centrality of good drainage to the success of mechanised rice cultivation on the larger fields of the Mahaicony-Abary area. They argued: '... the steel-wheel tractor has been successfully used under a wide range of soil conditions When heavy clay soils are continuously flooded the subsoil gradually becomes soft and boggy to increasingly greater depths. When thoroughly drained, the subsoil becomes firm and will remain firm for some considerable length of time following flooding thus allowing underwater cultivation with tractors as applied at Mahaicony-Abary'. — See their *Report on Mechanization and Organization of Rice Production in British Guiana*, mimeo., 1950, p.23.
57. Keatinge, *op. cit.*, [1924], p.165.
58. In April 1922, Jugdeo told Keatinge that he had 400 head of cattle, but he was not engaged in the milk trade, 'owing to transport difficulties': there was no road between his estate, Mora Point, and the coastal road, 12 miles down the Mahaicony Creek; no reference was apparently made to the possible use of his motor launch. — *The Daily Argosy*, 6 April 1922.
59. *Ibid.* The following exchange between Keatinge and Sookdeo Persaud, the secretary of the Rice Growers' Association, underlined the Government's neglect of these enterprising people:
- Keatinge: Your people do not seem healthy.
 Persaud: They are suffering mostly through insanitary surroundings and have enlarged spleens.
 Keatinge: What is your population?
 Persaud: Approximately 2,000.
 Keatinge: Any schools?
 Persaud: No.
 Keatinge: Any medical facilities?
 Persaud: the doctor visits once a week Other than that the sick have to be conveyed, irrespective of tide, to his residence. Very often, they become worse by exhaustion to and back.
60. See note 52.
61. C.O. 111/616, Collet to Long, no. 91, 15 March 1918, encl.
62. C.O. 111/617, Collet to Long, no. 141, 14 May 1918.
63. J.A. Van Sertima, 'The Colony's Greatest Asset: More about the East Indian', *The Daily Argosy*, 15 May 1920.
64. See note 38; *The Daily Argosy*, 4 April 1924; Pillai and Tivary, *op. cit.*, [1924], p. 50.
65. *The Daily Argosy*, 1 April 1924.
66. *The Daily Argosy*, 29 July 1924.
67. *The Daily Argosy*, 4 April 1924.
68. The case received detailed coverage in the press, over an extended period. It was apparently a rich source of amusement to the public.
69. *The Daily Argosy*, 1 October 1921.
70. *The Daily Chronicle*, 18 January 1921.
71. See note 38.
72. Harold Rabindranauth Persaud (born 1922), a grandson of Hanoman, has provided valuable information on many aspects of his family's achievements. He is a keen student of Guyanese history; between 1958 and 1962, he was the archivist of British Guiana. In 1962-1964, he was the secretary to the Premier of the colony, Dr Cheddi Jagan, and secretary to the cabinet. (This author has benefited immensely from numerous hours of enlightenment from Harold Persaud).
73. C.O. 115/147, *The Official Gazette*, 4 August 1928.
74. See note 72.

75. For biographical sketches of Cecil, Harry, and George [Hanomansingh], see *Who is Who in British Guiana, 1945-1948* (Georgetown: The Daily Chronicle Ltd., 1948), pp.230-231.
76. *Leader, The Daily Argosy*, 18 July 1929.
77. Peter Ruhomon, *Centenary History of the East Indians in British Guiana, 1838-1938* (Georgetown: The East Indians 150th Anniversary Committee, 1988 [1947]), p.169.
78. *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1948], pp.348-349.
79. Ruhomon, *op. cit.*, [1988], pp.169-170.
80. 'Indian Intelligence by the Pandit' [Peter Ruhomon, pseud.], *The Daily Chronicle*, 24 August 1930.
81. *Ibid.*; Ruhomon, *op. cit.*, [1988], pp.170-171.
82. See note 78; *The Daily Argosy*, 26 February 1929.
83. *The Daily Argosy*, 27 March 1927.
84. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 10 September 1927.
85. *Who is Who in British Guiana, 1935-1937* (Georgetown: The Daily Chronicle Ltd., 1937), p.186.
86. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 5 November 1927.
87. Ruhomon, *op. cit.*, [1988], p.169.
88. See note 85.
89. C.O. 114/200, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1926; C.O. 114/204, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1927.
90. As late as the early-1960s, Leo Despres, an anthropologist, noted the persistence of a patrilineally extended kinship structure among many Indians in British Guiana. This, he argued, was the basis for the organising of family labour. It was effective: land fragmentation was minimised; the cost of labour was very low; capital accumulation for further land acquisition was accelerated. Despres added that 'the economic potential of this structure is sufficiently recognised that nucleated families moving into the villages from the sugar estates tend to reconstitute it'. The kinship structure of the Blacks, however, militated against the organisation of such corporate economic units. - *Cultural Pluralism and Nationalist Politics in British Guiana* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1967), p.92.
91. Interviews with Ramdularic, May 1982; Joe Dhanna, May 1988.
92. Pillai and Tivary, *op. cit.*, [1924], p.50.
93. C.O. 114/192, C.O. 114/200, C.O. 114/204, Reports of the Immigration Agent General, 1924, 1926, 1927.
94. This has been determined by the relatively high incidence of Muslim names among successful Indians.
95. See note 91.
96. For a discussion of disputes over prestige among Indians on Plantations Blaimont and Port Mourant, in the late-1950s, see Chandra Jayawardena, *Conflict and Solidarity on a Guianese Plantation* (London: The Athlone Press, 1963), Chapter 5.
97. Despres, *op. cit.*, [1967], p.98.
98. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 13 February 1927: A staff writer on this paper captured, somewhat picturesquely, the vision of possibilities, supported by consistent effort, which was apparently evident in many Indian villages. He was struck by the contrasting approaches to farming at La Penitance, to the south of Georgetown, where Indians and Blacks had settled:
- I regretfully write that the East Indians are making more of the opportunity than the Negroes. On every holding of an East Indian there is either some cultivation or the rearing of caule..... such holdings as are held by the Negroes are bare of anything save bahama grass, and his livestock — a mangy-looking cur.....
- The holding of an Indian farmer evoked a poetic response from the reporter:
- I saw nearly everything a proper kitchen garden should have. Legumes abound. The egg plants showed up in fine colour against the slanting rays of the setting sun, the capsicum trees were groaning with their offerings..... a lordly melon was freighted with its fruit in all stages of development..... These people are deserving of whatever they have. They are hard toilers.....
99. *Leader, The Daily Chronicle*, 14 September 1916.
100. C.O. 114/195, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1925.
101. Pillai and Tivary, *op. cit.*, [1924], Appendix IX, p.113.
102. This was probably a consequence of the apprehension which Indians had of government institutions: the Post Office Savings Bank must have been perceived as a means by which the Government could screen their financial transactions, thus increasing taxation. Besides, the commercial banks were a better source of long-term loans for commercial purposes.
103. Keatinge, *op. cit.*, [1924], p.177. See also C.O. 111/628, Collet to Milner, confidential, 10 January 1920.

104. See note 91.
105. As early as the 1880s, Rev. H.V.P. Bronkhurst remarked on this practice, noting that 'they have an endless variety of chains, bracelets, anklets, necklaces, and rings.... rings in the nose, and bangles, or heavy gold or silver circlets round the ankles, rings called *Minji* on the toes, one of which emits a tinkling sound when the wearer is walking. It is also quite common to see men and women wear gold and silver coins around the forehead, suspended from the neck, and covering a system of network, attached to the back of the head-dress..... In addition to all these, married females wear about the neck the *Tali*, which is either a band of gold richly chased, or a silk network entwined with silver cord'. He observed that the display of jewellery on women and children was considered an antidote to the 'evil eye'. — *British Guyana and its Labouring Population* (London: T. Woolmer, 1883), pp.210-212. See also Henry Kirke, *Twenty-Five Years in British Guiana* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co., 1898), p.208.
106. Ramnarine, *op. cit.*, [1977], p.107.
107. *Census Report of British Guiana, 1921*.
108. Raymond T. Smith, *British Guiana* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp.108-111.
109. *Census Reports of British Guiana, 1911, 1921, 1931*.
110. Ramnarine, *op. cit.*, [1977], p.268.
111. *Ibid.*, pp.256-257.
112. *The Daily Argosy*, 29 December 1920, 23 January 1921.
113. *The Daily Argosy*, 29 December 1920.
114. *The Daily Chronicle*, 29 December 1920.
115. *The Daily Chronicle*, 15 January 1921.
116. *The Daily Argosy*, 23 January 1921.
117. *The Daily Argosy*, 1 February 1921.
118. Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in Guyana* (London: The Author, 1970), p.200; *The Daily Argosy*, 16 July 1929.
119. C.O. 114/162, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1917.
120. Pillai and Tivary, *op. cit.*, [1924], p.50.
121. *Commercial Directory of Georgetown and New Amsterdam, British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1925], p.48.
122. *The Daily Argosy*, 16 July 1929.
123. *The Daily Argosy*, 18 August 1929.
124. C.O. 111/643, Collet to Churchill, no.161, 27 April 1922, encl.
125. *Census Report of British Guiana, 1931*.
126. *The Daily Argosy*, 19 December 1922.
127. *The Daily Argosy*, 21 December 1926.
128. *Who is Who in British Guiana, 1945-1948, op. cit.*, [1948], pp.126, 451, 742.
129. *The Daily Argosy*, 18 October 1927.
130. *The Daily Argosy*, 5, 14 October 1927. In January 1928, Jaypeedas was also the agent for 'Royal Enfield' cycles. — *The Daily Argosy*, 4 January 1928.
131. *The Daily Chronicle*, 5 December 1916.
132. See *The Daily Chronicle*, 10 March, 5 May, 28 June 1921 for Permaul's role in this issue, and his call for the enfranchisement of Indians who were literate in an Indian language, but illiterate in English.
133. *The Daily Argosy*, 16 March 1924.
134. *The Daily Argosy*, 1 April 1924. In early-1922, Permaul gave evidence to the Pillai-Tivary-Keatinge Commission. Keatinge assessed his contribution thus: 'He was a keen partisan of Indian rights and aspirations, but he gave his evidence carefully, in a way which impressed me that he wished to be fair'. Among the suggestions made by Permaul was that a number of positions in the civil service should be reserved for Indians, 'so that when the country became prosperous, no legislation could be introduced to oust them'. His links with India were very strong: he had been there 'about sixteen times during ten years', as a compounder on an immigrant vessel. — Keatinge, *op. cit.*, [1924], pp.200-201.
135. *The Daily Argosy*, 14 September 1920.
136. Mrs Mahadeo's eldest daughter, Flora, was married to the distinguished lawyer, J.A. Luckhoo, on 24 August 1916. — *The Daily Chronicle*, 26 August 1916.
137. See note 91.
138. Keatinge, *op. cit.*, [1924], pp.177-178.
139. C.O. 111/720/35120 [1934], Denham to Cunliffe-Lister, confidential, 6 January 1934.

140. In June 1921, J.W. Permaul observed that the literacy (in English) prerequisite disenfranchised many Indians, with substantial financial resources, who took a deep interest in public affairs: 'There is a large number of East Indians, all over the colony, who have the necessary property qualification, but who unfortunately are not acquainted with the English language; many of them shrewd and practical businessmen, with well-trained intellects, and who entertain a great deal of interest in the welfare of the colony, and particularly that of their own people, who..... cannot enjoy the franchise....' — *The Daily Chronicle*, 28 June 1921.
141. C.O. 114/192, Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1924; C.O. 114/207, Report of the Director of Education, 1929; *Census Report of British Guiana, 1931*; Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], p.239.
142. Ramnarine, *op. cit.*, [1977], p.268.
143. *The Daily Chronicle*, 14 September 1916.
144. *Leader, The Daily Argosy*, 23 July 1920.
145. *The Daily Argosy*, 12 September 1920.
146. C.O. 111/693/85037 [1931], Denham to Passfield, confidential, encl.: W. Bain Gray, Memorandum on Education of East Indians in British Guiana, 23 November 1930.
147. *Ibid.*
148. See note 91.
149. C.O. 111/658, O.A.G. to Amery, no.444, 11 September 1925, encl.: Report of the Education Commission, 1924-1925 (Combined Court Paper, no.24 of 1925).
150. *Ibid.*, Appendix D: E. Wynn-Williams, Report on Education in British Guiana, [dated 7 January 1925]. See also *The Daily Argosy*, 7 October 1925.
151. *Ibid.*
152. P.D. Fraser, 'Education and Social Values in British Guiana, 1870-1914', D. Phil. Thesis, University of Sussex, 1976, p.167.
153. *Ibid.*, pp.169-170: Fraser notes that an agricultural school was opened in the East Canje district, Berbice, in January 1892. It had about 40 to 50 pupils; but it collapsed, after two terms, because parents objected to their children 'working cutlass and shovel'.
154. *British Guiana, Report of the British Guiana Commission*, Cmd.2841 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1927), p.60. They added: 'We need not discuss the causes of this regrettable delay as we now learn that the report has at length been accepted and that the Government was about to proceed.....[with] these vital, urgent and overdue reforms. No delay need arise from the financial situation..... we understand that it would be perfectly possible, with a system of Government schools and an adequate staff of inspection, to maintain the present standard of efficiency at very much less than the present cost; while, on the present scale of expenditure, a much higher standard of efficiency should be speedily obtained. But..... nothing can be done to restore (sic) orderliness and efficiency until the present administrative machinery is relegated to the scrap heap and replaced by a real Education Department....' (pp.60-61).
155. *Ibid.*, p.59.
156. *Ibid.*, pp.58-59.
157. C.O. 114/187, Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1923.
158. M.K. Bacchus, 'The Education of East Indians in Guyana', in *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience*, Frank Birbalsingh, (ed.), (Toronto: Tsar, 1989), p.161.
159. DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS RECEIVING FULL GRANTS-IN-AID, 1922, 1927

DENOMINATION	1922	1927
Church of England	91	88
Church of Scotland	34	33
Roman Catholic	28	28
Wesleyan (Methodist)	28	29
Congregational	29	29
Canadian Mission	10	11
Moravian	3	3
Lutheran	2	0
TOTAL	225	221

SOURCES: C.O. 114/184, Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1922; C.O. 114/204, Report of the Director of Education, 1927.

160. As late as 1939, J.D. Tyson, the officer deputed by the Government of India to advise the Indians before the Moyne Commission, observe that 'it is beyond controversy that very nearly the whole expense of the primary education of the colony is borne by general revenues'. He added: 'While gratefully recognising the work which the Christian Missions have done for education in British Guiana, the Government of India cannot regard as satisfactory a system under which a population of nearly 100,000 Hindus and 20,000 Muslims are compelled to send their children to

- schools managed by Christian Missions but paid for almost entirely out of the general revenues'. — *Report on the Condition of Indians in Jamaica, British Guiana and Trinidad* (Simla: Government of India Press, 1939), p.52.
161. *Ibid.* Tyson noted that of 102 Indian teachers in the colony in 1938, only 35 were non-Christians; while the Director of Education could not trace any Hindu or Muslim head teacher. The Canadian Mission informed him that they had 'at least one'.
 162. Bacchus, *op. cit.*, [1989], p.163.
 163. Rev. Dr. Galton, 'Elementary Education in British Guiana', *Timehri*, Vol.II, (third series), (1912), p.108.
 164. See note 149.
 165. C.O. 114/207, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1929.
 166. In 1939, C.R. Jacob, the president of the British Guiana East Indian Association told Lord Moyne that the Government allocated \$1,912 to 48 schools, for the teaching of Hindi. It was always a token effort, done primarily to placate the critics. — *The Royal Commission in British Guiana, 1939* (Georgetown: The Daily Chronicle Ltd., 1939), p.203.
 167. *Report by Kunwar Maharaj Singh on His Deputation to British Guiana in 1925*, p.9.
 168. C.F. Andrews, *An Interim Statement concerning East Indian Conditions in British Guiana* (Georgetown: The Daily Chronicle Ltd., 1929), p.12.
 169. See note 91; James McNeill and Chimman Lal, *Report to the Government of India on the Conditions of Indian Immigrants in Four British Colonies and Surinam, Part 1 — Trinidad and British Guiana* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1915), p.79.
 170. Andrews, *op. cit.*, [1929], p.18; see note 165.
 171. Bacchus, *op. cit.*, [1989], p.161.
 172. Fraser, *op. cit.*, [1976], pp.122,124.
 173. *Ibid.*, p.157.
 174. Reproduced in C.O. 114/187, Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1923.
 175. Ramnarine is emphatic that the measure was concocted to help the plantocracy, following the depression of the late-1890s. He argues: 'There is no doubt that the Swettenham Circular benefited the sugar planters by attempting to restore some of their slipping command of labour. East Indians had moved away from the estates in large numbers to cultivate rice on cheap Crown lands. Simultaneously, the number of indentured Indians had been lowered as a consequence of the depression. Child labour therefore allowed the planters to conduct some essential services on the estates cheaply'. — *op. cit.*, [1977], p.213.
 176. C.O. 111/613, Collet to Long, confidential, 15 November 1917, encl.: Extract from a Minute by R. Duff, Immigration Agent General, to the Sanderson Commission, 30 August 1910.
 177. Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1912-1913, quoted in Ruhomon, *op. cit.*, [1988], p.190.
 178. C.O. 111/613, Collet to Long, confidential, 15 November 1917, encl.: Memorandum by R.P. Stewart, 5 October 1917.
 179. C.O. 111/613, Collet to Long, confidential, 15 November 1917.
 180. This article from *Indian Opinion* was the subject of a leader — *The Daily Chronicle*, 9 May 1919.
 181. C.O. 111/658, O.A.G. to Wiseman, s.o., 13 November 1925, encl: Memorandum by W. Bain Gray, Director of Education.
 182. See note 157.
 183. See note 181.
 184. C.O. 114/187, Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1923, Chapter 7 — Report by H.V. Tait, Compulsory Attendance Officer, Corentyne District.
 185. *The Daily Argosy*, 30 July 1920.
 186. C.O. 111/632, Collet to Milner, confidential, 8 October 1920.
 187. C.O. 111/632, Collet to Milner, confidential, 30 November 1920.
 188. *Ibid.*
 189. See note 185.
 190. *The Daily Argosy* (Leader, 24 August 1920) rejected Collet's spurious arguments against the education of Indian girls: 'We can understand an objection of this kind being advanced by an uneducated person, but we fail to appreciate the propriety of the Governor's position..... A very large number of East Indians of British Guiana were born here, and have grown up in our freer atmosphere, and have become accustomed to another point of view altogether. The fact that so many of them are exceedingly eager to give their girls equal educational privileges with the boys is one proof of this.... The East Indian citizens fear a generation of illiterate women who, intellectually speaking, would never be fit companions for their brothers..... Once again, the Governor has shown his lack of understanding of an influential section of the community he has been sent to rule. His attitude here is reminiscent of his conduct in so many cases'. *The Daily Chronicle* deemed religious objections to the education of Indian girls a ruse: these girls often worked in 'creole' gangs on the estates, where they were exposed to 'far greater sexual dangers'. — Leader, 3 November 1920.

191. See note 179.
192. C.O. 111/638, Collet to Churchill, no.271, 17 May 1921, encl.
193. C.O. 111/638, Collet to Churchill, no.271, 17 May 1921.
194. C.O. 111/645, Collet to Churchill, no.382, 14 September 1922.
195. See note 157.
196. See note 181.
197. Pillai and Tivary, *op. cit.*, [1924], p.63
198. Maharaj Singh, *op. cit.*, [1925], p.8.
199. *Ibid.*
200. See note 149.
201. See note 150.
202. C.O. 114/195, Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1925.
203. C.O. 111/659, Individuals (E. Wynn-Williams), 7 January 1925.
204. *Ibid.*
205. Major W. Bain Gray (born 1887) was a Scotsman. He received his M.A. in 1908, and his Ph.D. in 1922. He studied history. In 1914, he was an examiner in Scottish history; in 1923, he was a Carnegie Research Fellow. His letter to the Colonial Office, accepting the post of Commissioner of Education in British Guiana (this was soon changed to Director of Education), was dated 27 May 1924. See C.O. 111/655, Miscellaneous Offices (Colonial Office), 6 November 1924. Bain Gray was a member of the Education Commission of 1924-1925.
206. C.O. 111/659, Individuals (E. Wynn-Williams), 6 March 1925.
207. Leader, *The New Daily Chronicle*, 10 September 1927.
208. C.O. 114/207, Report of the Director of Education, 1929.
209. *Report of the West Indian Sugar Commission* (Lord Olivier, chairman), (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1930), Appendix 7, Vol.II, Evidence, etc. Relating to British Guiana: Memorandum by the Immigration Agent General, p.130.
210. C.O.111/658, O.A.G. to Amery, no.411, 20 August 1925, Minute, E.R. Damley, 25 September 1925.
211. The officials at the Colonial Office tended to respond to even thoroughly-researched, imaginative reports with remorseless flippancy; but they were prodigious scribblers of minutes. These invariably recommended inaction. One such minute, in 1913, on Indian education in British Guiana, read: '..... seeing that if they had remained in India the East Indian children would have had no chance of attending a school of any kind, the colony had not done badly by them in the matter of education'. (See Ramnarine, *op. cit.*, [1977], p.213). Their approach was essentially the same in the 1920s.
212. *The Daily Chronicle*, 5 May 1938 (Indian Centenary Number). See Ruhomon, *op. cit.*, [1988], pp.194-195 for Rev. Hudson's contribution to the withdrawal of the Circular.
213. C.O. 114/216, Report of the Director of Education, 1933.
214. C.O. 111/720/35120 [1934], Denham to Cunliffe-Lister, confidential, 6 January 1934, encl.: 'Attendance of East Indian Children at Primary School' by W. Bain Gray, 15 July 1933.
215. C.O. 111/693/85037 [1931], Denham to Passfield, confidential, 16 March 1931.
216. *Census Report of British Guiana, 1931.*
217. See note 213.
218. Joseph Ruhoman, 'The Creole East Indian', *Timehri*, Vol.VII, (third series), (1921), p.103.
219. Nath (*op. cit.*, [1970], p.187) asserts that 'as recent as 1921 Indians had not achieved anything worth mentioning'; yet he proceeds to document what he considers their 'rapid progress' after the second World War. Nath's bleak assessment of the 1920s stems from a tendency to look for the episodic. The historical tradition demands that the tedious, often unobtrusive, less spectacular, efforts which contribute to the enlarging of perceptions of possibilities, and the building of a tradition of achievement, be unearthed and assessed. Writing of the same period as Nath, Peter Ruhomon (*op. cit.*, [1988], p.191) notes that the Canadian Mission 'had done so much in the cause of Indian education'; while 'The Indians themselves..... were not to be caught napping as the increase desire for, and appreciation of, the value of education for their children, were beginning to find expression in various channels'. He is nearer to the historical truth. Nowhere in Nath's work is reference made to the Canadian Mission; Ruhomon acknowledges and praises their contribution.
220. A new self-confidence was taking shape; it permeated the speech of J.A. Luckhoo at the inaugural meeting in Georgetown, on 24 April 1919, of the refurbished British Guiana East Indian Association: 'As a community we feel we have reached the turn of the tide not only in our life in the colony but in the history of our race and country [India].... We in British Guiana feel it incumbent on us to rise to the occasion and make ourselves worthy of the great race to which we belong'. — 'The East Indians in British Guiana', *Timehri*, Vol.VI, (third series), (1919), pp.64-65. (This article is the text of his speech).

221. E.A. Luckhoo, 'East Indians in British Guiana', *Timehri*, Vol.II, (third series), (1912), p.313.
222. Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], p.241.
223. C.O. 114/192, Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1924; *Census Report of British Guiana, 1931*.
224. *The Daily Chronicle*, 5 May 1938. J.R. Lachmansingh was the second Indian teacher to be trained at Mico College, in 1923-1925. J.S. Mahabir and Mongul Beramsingh also, were trained there, in 1924-1926. - C.O. 114/187, Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1923.
225. C.O. 114/184, Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1922.
226. It has not been possible to consult the records of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, kept at Knox College, Toronto. Three other valuable sources, which could not be procured through inter-library loan, are: Zander Dunn, 'The Canadian Mission in British Guiana: The Pioneer Years, 1885-1927', M.A. Thesis, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, 1971; the same author's 'The Canadian Mission in British Guiana: from Mission to Church, 1927-1967', M.Th. Thesis, Knox College, Toronto, Ontario, 1975; D.A. Bisnauth, 'The East Indian Immigrant Society in British Guiana, 1891-1930', Ph. D. Thesis, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, 1977.
227. D.A. Bisnauth, *A Short History of the Guyana Presbyterian Church* (Georgetown: The Author, 1979), pp.17-18.
228. Rudolph W. Grant, 'The Contribution of the Presbyterian Church in Canada to the Education of East Indians in Guyana, 1894-1964', M.A. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1967, p.56.
229. Bisnauth, *op. cit.*, [1979], p.18.
230. *Ibid.*, p.19.
231. Zander Dunn, 'The Canadian Mission to the Guyana Presbyterian Church', in *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience*, Frank Birbalsingh, (ed.), (Toronto: Tsar, 1989), p.220.
232. *Ibid.*
233. Grant, *op. cit.*, [1967], p.69.
234. Bisnauth, *op. cit.*, [1979], p.42.
235. Grant, *op. cit.*, [1967], p.58.
236. *Ibid.*, p.59.
237. Bisnauth, *op. cit.*, [1979], p.44.
238. At the conclusion of a seven-day *yajna* at Cane Grove, Mahaica, in May 1925, it is interesting that the two principal speakers were Edwin Bacchus, a prominent Muslim, and Sookdeo Persaud, secretary of the Rice Growers' Association. Persaud, who spoke in Hindi, Sanskrit, and English, noted that 'the great feature of the ceremony was the unity between Muslims and Hindus'. He also referred to the contribution of Indian women in politics and religion, when 'India was the cradle of the human race', while exhorting Indians to educate their daughters. This, he believed, would secure a place 'for India among the advanced nations of the world'. — *The Daily Argosy*, 31 May 1925.
239. In January 1927, the Young Men's Muslim Literary Association delegated Shaik Mohammad Osman, its vice-president, to give lectures and 'to propagate the tenets of the religion' in Berbice. But the Association did not restrict itself to religious issues: in an address to its members, the Imam of Ruimveldt, Moulvi Mohammed Alli, advocated the study of literature 'so that the time should not be far distant when the Muslim community would be able to claim a place among the intellectuals of the colony'. — *The Daily Argosy*, 12 February 1927. Meanwhile, on 28 February 1927, A.K. Amin, a lawyer from India who was practising in the colony, gave a lecture on the Hindu classic, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, under the auspices of the B.G.E.I.A. — *The Daily Argosy*, 24 February 1927.
240. Bisnauth, *op. cit.*, [1979], pp.43-44.
241. *Ibid.*, p.22.
242. *Census Report of British Guiana, 1931*.
243. Bisnauth, *op. cit.*, [1979], p.41.
244. *Ibid.*, p.22; Dunn, *op. cit.*, [1989], p.221.
245. *Ibid.*
246. *Ibid.* Bisnauth notes Scrimgeour's vision of the Berbice High School: '.... [his] hope was that the school would be pervaded with the spirit of Christ; but he wanted the school to produce a better boy for Guiana, even if he remained a Muslim or Hindu' (emphasis added).
247. *The Daily Argosy*, 11 July 1922.
248. Bisnauth, *op. cit.*, [1979], p.24.
249. See note 247.
250. Ruhomon, *op. cit.*, [1988], p.229.
251. *Ibid.*, pp.226-227.

252. Grant, *op. cit.*, [1967], p.72. He adds: 'We have no reason to believe that the Canadian Mission was as concerned... with points of dogma which might have been inculcated in a nearby Methodist or Congregational school. Their concern was not with a particular religious tenet; it was with a particular ethnic group, which had been so far neglected and among whom their sister church in Trinidad was reporting success.....' (p.73).
253. Ruhomon, *op. cit.*, [1988], p.228.
254. Dunn, *op. cit.*, [1989], p.219.
255. Grant, *op. cit.*, [1967], p.84.
256. See note 17.
257. J.B. Cropper to the Editor, *The Daily Argosy*, 24 February 1922.
258. C.O. 111/689/75141 [1930], encl: C.F. Andrews, 'Impressions of British Guiana', mimeo., pp.4-5.
259. This had led the Wesleyan East Indian Mission, in their Annual Report of 1918-1919, to remark in despair: 'We met with entrenched superstition, vain philosophy, racial pride, and everywhere sinful human nature.....' — *The Daily Chronicle*, 4 September 1919.
260. Grant, *op. cit.*, [1967], pp.144-145.
261. These regulation 80 schools were only partially funded by Government; they cost the Mission a considerable sum to run. The Government did not assume full financial responsibility for them until January 1936 (*ibid.*, p.117).
262. C.O. 114/192, 195, 200, 204, Reports of the Commissioner/Director of Education, 1924-1927.
263. C.O. 114/204, Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1927.
264. Bacchus, *op. cit.*, [1989], p.165.
265. *Ibid.*, p.166.
266. Edgar Mittelholzer notes how this corrupting phenomenon operated in British Guiana in the late-1920s: 'In those days of stiff competition in every department of endeavour, you needed more than scholastic qualifications to gain a foothold in any office, government or commercial. The ruling factor was a Godfather behind the scenes. My Uncle John was high in the Civil Service — he was by this time already at the top; Comptroller of Customs — and he moved in a wide circle of highly influential friends. It had been easy for him to get his sons into suitable middle-class jobs. Three he got into the Civil Service, and three into big commercial offices in Georgetown. Two daughters also went into the offices of well-established firms. *And all this without the benefit of certificates won in school!*' — *A Swarthy Boy* (London: Putnam, 1963), pp.143-144 (emphasis added).
267. Cheddi Jagan's progress in British Guiana, in the mid-1930s, was blocked by what Mittelholzer calls 'a paucity of godfathers'. Jagan recalls: 'Armed with an Oxford and Cambridge School Certificate, at the end of the school year at Queen's College in 1935, I tried to get a job. Then trying became hunting. My father and I knocked at many doors. The civil service was closed. A teaching job was proposed, but the salary offered was only \$20 a month. Besides, there were suggestions that if I wanted to become a teacher, I would have to become a Christian, and my parents would have none of this'. — *The West on Trial: My Fight for Guyana's Freedom* (London: Michael Joseph, 1966), p.46.
268. Bacchus, *op. cit.*, [1989], p.166.
269. *Who is Who in British Guiana, 1935-1937*, *op. cit.*, pp.551-552; *The Daily Chronicle*, 20 June 1919; C.O. 115/138, *The Official Gazette*, 23 February 1924.
270. 'Indian Intelligence by the Pandit' [Peter Ruhomon], *The Daily Chronicle* (Magazine Section), 13 July 1930; Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], p.202.
271. Dr. Ramdeholl worked for 37 years as a Government Medical Officer in British Guiana. In 1910-1912, he worked at the Public Hospital, Georgetown; in 1914-1915, he was the G.M.O. at the Mental Hospital, Berbice, and the Public Hospital, Suddie. Between 1916 and 1921, he was stationed on the island of Wakenaam. For most of the 1920s, he was the G.M.O. of the Mahaica District; in 1921 and 1923, he also acted as Medical Superintendent of the Leper Asylum in the district. Dr. Ramdeholl visited India in 1927 and 1936, when he was appointed Surgeon Superintendent of the return immigrant ship, 'Ganges'. He retired in 1947. (*Who is Who in British Guiana*, *op. cit.*, [1948], pp.430-431). His father, Ramdeal (Ramdeholl), a merchant from Cumberland, East Canje, Berbice, became the first Indian village councillor in 1892 (Ramnarine, *op. cit.*, [1977], p.255); his father-in-law was the popular businessman, Thomas Flood. In 1925, he reportedly paid \$12,000 for his brother-in-law's rice, cattle, and coconut estate, Plantation Blankenburg (*The Daily Argosy*, 10 June 1925). For many years, his estate was managed efficiently by his brother, Walter Ramdeholl. (See note 72; *Who is Who in British Guiana*, *op. cit.*, [1948], p.431).
272. *The Daily Argosy*, 31 January 1929.
273. *The Daily Argosy*, 15 September 1922.
274. *The Daily Argosy*, 7 October 1923.
275. C.O. 111/161, Collet to Churchill, no.161, 27 April 1922, encl.: Memorandum by J.A. Veerasawmy.
276. *The Daily Chronicle*, 19 September, 11 October 1916; C.O.114/184, Report of the Principal, Queen's College, 1922.
277. *The Daily Chronicle*, 7 September 1916.
278. Grant, *op. cit.*, [1967], p.131; Bisnauth, *op. cit.*, [1979], p.22.

279. Mittelholzer, *op. cit.*, [1963], p.89.
280. *The Daily Chronicle*, 7 January 1917.
281. Grant, *op. cit.*, [1967], pp.136-137.
282. *Ibid.*, p.137.
283. Mittelholzer, *op. cit.*, [1963], p.89.
284. *Ibid.*, pp.89-90, 109.
285. *The Daily Argosy*, 14 January 1921.
286. See note 72.
287. *The Daily Chronicle*, 18 November 1919.
288. C.O. 115/138, *The Official Gazette*, 23 February 1924: List of Registered Medical Practitioners.
289. See note 287; *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1948], p.474.
290. *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*, pp.486-487.
291. *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1937], p.24.
292. *The Daily Argosy*, 22 August 1920.
293. Bisnauth, *op. cit.*, [1979], p.23.
294. Joseph Ruhoman, *op. cit.*, [1921], p.105.
295. See note 285.
296. *The Daily Argosy*, 29 March, 11 July 1922.
297. *The Daily Chronicle*, 8 June 1921.
298. *The Daily Argosy*, 8 July 1922.
299. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 23 December 1928; *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1948], pp.430-431.
300. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 30 June 1928. His father, Peter Ramsaran (1874-1920), was a prominent rice farmer, who, in April 1919, had imported a 'deluge pump' to irrigate his lands at Sheet Anchor. *The Daily Chronicle* noted: 'The pump is the first of its kind in Berbice to be used by an individual rice grower. Mr. Ramsaran deserves praise for his initiative in trying to overcome the disadvantages of flood and drought' (26 April 1919).
301. *The Daily Chronicle*, 12 June 1932, 5 May 1938.
302. *The Daily Argosy*, 13 November 1925.
303. *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1948], pp.230-231; see note 72.
304. *The Daily Argosy*, 9 June 1929; *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1948], p.486.
305. *Ibid.*
306. *The Daily Argosy*, 29 December 1926.
307. C.O. 114/187, Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1923.
308. Bisnauth, *op. cit.*, [1979], p.24.
309. *The Daily Chronicle*, 24 August 1930.
310. *The Daily Chronicle*, 19 July 1921; *The Daily Argosy*, 22 January 1928.
311. *The Daily Chronicle*, 1 January 1922.
312. See note 307.
313. See note 302.
314. *The Daily Chronicle*, 7 September 1930.
315. See note 72.
316. *The Daily Argosy*, 17 July 1929.
317. Mittelholzer, *op. cit.*, [1963], pp.115-116.
318. See note 72.
319. *The Daily Chronicle*, 17 June 1920.
320. *The Daily Argosy*, 18 June 1920.
321. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 3 April 1926; *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1948], p.507.
322. *The Daily Argosy*, 7 May 1922. W.C.A. Luckhoo was the nephew of J.A., E.A., and Dr. David Luckhoo.
323. *The Daily Argosy*, 3 June 1925.
324. *The Daily Chronicle*, 22 January 1921.

325. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 25 May 1926.
326. *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1948], p.488.
327. *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, [1937], p.339.
328. *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, [1948], p.551.
329. *Ibid.*, p.539. He was born at Port Mourant, Corentyne, on 10 January 1905; and was educated at Queen's College, Georgetown, and the University of Edinburgh.
330. For the phenomenal achievements of the Jaikaran family, see Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], pp.203-204.
331. Ruhomon, *op. cit.*, [1988], p.196.
332. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 3 October 1928. Debidin became a solicitor. In 1939, he represented the British Guiana East Indian Association before the Moyne Commission, and at the inquiry of the Leonora shootings. In 1943, he was president of the Association. Hardutt Singh, the son of Dr. J.B. Singh, studied medicine at Edinburgh; while Nehaul, the son of H.M. Nehaul, the proprietor of Chapman's Grove estate, studied bacteriology and pathology at London, Leeds, and Edinburgh. - *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1948], pp.141, 381, 485.
333. C.O. 114/207, Report of the Director of Education, 1929.
334. See note 331.
335. Mittelholzer, *op. cit.*, [1963], p.155.
337. *The Daily Argosy*, 2 November 1921.
338. *The Daily Argosy*, 5 August 1922.
339. *The Daily Chronicle*, 4 August 1922.
340. *The Daily Chronicle*, 28 September 1930.
341. *The Daily Chronicle*, 16 February 1919.
342. *The Daily Argosy*, 13 August 1925.
343. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 13 May 1926.
344. Bacchus, *op. cit.*, [1989], p.165.
345. Bacchus, *Education and Socio-Cultural Integration in a 'Plural' Society* (Montreal: McGill University, Centre for Developing Area Studies), Occasional Paper Series, No.6, p.24.
346. C.O. 114/200, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1926.
347. Edward Shils argues that the rise of a modern intellectual tradition in India is rooted in the reverence for the man of thought within the Brahmanic tradition of ancient India: 'In general, the Indian tradition renders a favourable opinion of the intellectual. The Indian intellectual is the heir of the Brahmins, he is the successor of the pandits. The tradition of the guru is always tacked on to the tail of the Indian intellectual..... The pandits were the scholars who annotated and embroidered the sacred texts which guided man's action towards the highest state of being, the gurus were sages who taught the young and counselled the aged to ascend to the experience of absorption into the sacred..... before Gandhi, educators, intellectual lawyers and journalists, mainly of Brahmin origin, were the backbone of the Independence movement..... There can be no doubt about the extraordinary intellectual gifts of the Brahmins'. — *The Intellectual between Tradition and Modernity: The Indian Situation* (The Hague: Mouton, 1961), pp.20-21.
348. Joseph Ruhoman believed that the Black people in British Guiana, in the 1890s, by educating themselves, were beating back 'intellectual and political serfdom'. The Indians, however, were in a slumber; and he exhorted them to educate their children — boys and girls — in order to erase the dark stigma of indentureship. In his 1894 lecture in Georgetown, he pleaded with his compatriots: '.... our Hindo-Guyanian people..... are making..... very slow progress.... They do not know what it is to cultivate the barren wilderness of their minds.... The poorer classes of our people are simply "nobodies". On our sugar estates they are no more thought of than the mules which draw along the cane punts.... Upon parents.... there hangs a great responsibility.... They should see that their sons and daughters..... get...[a] sound, broad and liberal education.... from which every gracious and beneficial influence shall flow.... I consider it a downright shame..... that as yet, our young people have no societies.... it is no wonder that we find so many who are devoid of that polish of mind and character....I should impress deeply..... the great necessity there is for the formation of societies..... devoted to the intellectual, moral, and social well-being of their members'. Ruhoman felt that young Indian women had a part to play in these societies: women, he argued, were 'one of the most powerful forces at work in this 19th century, not only for the emancipation of her sex, but in the common cause of humanity.... in association with them..... you will obtain far better results in seeking to advance..... the interests of our people than you can by working alone'. (His thoughts were well-advanced of his time). — *India: Progress of Her People at Home and Abroad* (Georgetown: C.K. Jardine, 1894), pp.23, 25-27, 29.
349. Shils, *op. cit.*, [1961], p.22.
350. Ruhoman, *op. cit.*, [1894], pp.8-21.
351. Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], p.201.
352. *Ibid.*
353. Joseph Ruhoman was not a narrow Indian nationalist. As several of his pamphlets suggest, he was immersed in religious and philosophical speculation on questions of universal interest. See, for example, *Good and Evil, Signs and*

- Portents, and Records of the Past*. See also A.J. McR. Cameron, 'Joseph Ruhoman and the Growth of East Indian Consciousness', *Stabroek News*, 16 April 1988.
354. Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p.177.
355. *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1937].
356. Rodney, *op. cit.*, [1981], p.172.
357. See note 351.
358. Ruhomon, *op. cit.*, [1988], p.234.
359. *Ibid.*, pp.217-218.
360. *Census Report of British Guiana, 1931*.
361. Ruhomon, *op. cit.*, [1988], p. 218
362. *The Daily Chronicle*, 4 September 1919.
363. See note 361.
364. What Edward Shils observes of the lure of English literature among intellectuals in India applies to Peter Ruhomon and his colleagues as well: 'In English literature, Indians with a yearning for sensitive personal relations, for personal liberty and responsibility, for a private sphere into which admission was a product of affection and voluntary decision, found a land of their heart's desire'. — 'The Culture of the Indian Intellectual', *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 67, (1959), p. 408.
365. J.W. Chinapen notes that Peter Ruhomon was 'actively associated' with the Hindu Society, which was founded by Pandit Ramsaroop in late-1921. He recalls his first meeting with Ruhomon in 1927, when the latter gave a talk to the Albion Improvement Association, in Berbice: 'Here was one who held attention not by imposing statute nor by show of eloquence: indeed, Mr Ruhoman was a small built man though somewhat stocky, and, while a fluent speaker, he suffered a slight impediment and his voice carried a nasal sound. He, however, possessed a winning personality, and his speech rang with a sincerity that touched the hearts and consciences of his listeners'. — 'Peter Ruhoman' (sic), *Kaie*, No. 2 (Independence Issue), (1966), pp. 59-60.
366. Edward Brathwaite, *op. cit.*, [1974], p.54.
367. Ramnarine, *op. cit.*, [1977], p.243.
368. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
369. See Joseph Ruhoman, *op. cit.*, [1894], p.20.
370. Professor Shils states that he was told 'on numerous occasions', in India, that among 'the greatest events' in the establishment of 'India's national self-esteem' were: Ranjitsinhji's achievements in international cricket and Tagore's winning of the Nobel Prize. In these cases, he adds, 'the West is forced to acknowledge the merits of India'. — *op. cit.*, [1961], p.78.
371. See, for example, the response of *The Daily Argosy* (Leader, 8 February 1924) to the release of Gandhi from jail: '..... all the evidence goes to prove that his health has been improved by his enforced rest and abstinence from political agitation he was treated with the greatest consideration, even though the responsible authorities considered that he was rightfully imprisoned as an enemy of peace and public order, whose preaching of sedition, if allowed to continue, might once again have plunged great areas of India into bloodshed'. It concluded that 'an ignorant and fanatical populace' had to be protected from this agitator. The next day, this same paper reported: 'The liberation of Mahatma Gandhi, leader of the Indian nationalists, from prison, has been received with rejoicings throughout India'. There was no editorial comment.
372. See note 91.
373. *The Daily Chronicle*, 12 October 1919. For a biographical sketch of Clementi, see 'Sir Cecil Clementi', *Malaya*, Vol. 8, (1959).
374. *The Daily Argosy*, 21 February 1924.
375. At the inaugural meeting of the Society in October 1919, Rev. E. Donald Jones, chairman of the Methodist Society in the colony, had stressed that its aim was 'the development of the intellectual, moral, and social side' of the Indians, irrespective of creed or caste. - Ruhomon, *op. cit.*, [1988], p. 249.
376. See note 374. As late as June 1932, Ruhomon was still countering allegations that the [Wesleyan] East Indian Young Men's Society was under 'Christian influence'. He responded that 'the utmost freedom of thought' was allowed; and that the term 'Wesleyan' merely indicated that the Society was conducted under the auspices of that body. He added that Hindus and Muslims were admitted; and that 'every effort is made to exclude political and religious subjects'. — 'Indian Intelligence by the Pandit' [Peter Ruhomon], *The Daily Chronicle* (Magazine Section), 26 June 1932.
377. *The Daily Argosy*, 22 January 1921.
378. *The Daily Argosy*, 19 June 1927.
379. C.R. Jacob was a member of the Legislative Council from 1935 to 1947; and a life member of the executive committee of the British Guiana East Indian Association. — *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1948], p. 270.
380. *The Daily Argosy*, 6 May 1938.

381. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 29 January 1928.
382. See *The Daily Argosy*, 14 January, 24 March, 1923, 21 February 1924.
383. *The Daily Argosy*, 14 January 1923.
384. In an address to the Society in February 1925, Sir A.P. Sherlock had stressed that 'it was not by brilliance but by stability of character that they would really make names for themselves and push the colony forward in life it was not only the brilliant who won. It was nearly always the average man who had the pluck to steer the course; and so long as he was honest, stuck to his work, and did his best, he was bound to succeed in the end. Life was not easy' (This was not lost on his young Indian audience). — *The Daily Argosy*, 6 February 1925.
385. Joseph Ruhoman, *op. cit.*, [1921], p. 105.
386. *The Daily Argosy*, 14 July 1922.
387. *The Daily Chronicle*, 8 May 1932.
388. *The Daily Argosy*, 14 August 1920.
389. Chinapen, *op. cit.*, [1966], p.59.
390. *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1948], p. 429.
391. Chinapen, *op. cit.*, [1966], pp. 59-60.
392. *The Daily Chronicle* (Magazine Section), 7 September 1930.
393. Chinapen, *op. cit.*, [1966], p. 60.
394. 'Indian Intelligence by the Pandit' [Peter Ruhomon], *The Daily Chronicle* (Magazine Section), 12 June 1932.
395. See note 393.
396. Letter from Ian McDonald, (a member of the Committee), 10 March 1989.
397. *Guyana Sports Annual, 1962-1963* (Georgetown: The Guiana Graphic Ltd., 1963), pp.45-47, Francis Drakes, *op. cit.*, [1989], p.150; Kirke, *op. cit.*, [1898], pp.64-65.
398. C.L.R. James observes that in spite of the limitations of the colonial education curriculum, and manifestations of racial prejudice in Trinidad, in the early years of this century, a basically positive perception of British principles and attitudes developed among high school boys, because the white schoolmasters practised these principles on the cricket field. He adds: 'On the playing field we did what ought to be done. Every individual did not observe every rule. But the majority of the boys did. The best and most-respected boys were precisely the ones who always kept them. When a boy broke them he knew what he had done and, with the cruelty and intolerance of youth, from all sides our denunciations poured in on him. Eton and Harrow had nothing on us as far back as I can trace my consciousness the original found itself and came to maturity within a system that was the result of centuries of development in another land Along with restraint, not so much externally as in internal inhibitions, we learnt loyalty'. - *Beyond a Boundary* (London: The Sportsman's Book Club, 1964 [1963]), pp. 34-35, 39, 50. See also Keith A.P. Sandiford and Brian Stoddart, 'The Elite Schools and Cricket in Barbados: A Study in Colonial Continuity', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol.4, No.3, (1987), pp.333-350.
399. The great Indo-Guyanese batsmen, Rohan Kanhai (born 1935) recalls: 'I learned my cricket in the narrow back-streets and open wasteland around our house using fronds, the dried leaves of coconut palms shaped into a bat, a piece of cork covered with rags and bound with twine as the ball and twigs snapped from trees for stumps'. — *Blasting for Runs* (London: Souvenir Press, 1966), p.12.
400. Ignatius Scoles, *Sketches of African and Indian Life in British Guiana* (Georgetown: The Argosy Press, 1885), pp.33-34. See also Kirke, *op. cit.*, [1898], p.65.
401. Kanhai, *op. cit.*, [1966], pp.12-13: 'Those were painful but happy days. None of us could afford the luxury of pads and gloves even when we reached the school team at the age of eight. Consequently our arms and legs were always a mass of cuts and bruises But, however hard and often we were hit, we never ran away from the ball'.
402. See Richard D.E. Burton, 'Cricket, Carnival and Street Culture in the Caribbean', *The British Journal of Sports History*, Vol.2, No.2, (1985), pp.179-197.
403. Kanhai writes: 'In the West Indies the kids play in organised games from a tender age, learning exactly what team spirit and responsibility are. As an eight-year-old I was in the primary school team fighting to win our local shield competition' (*op. cit.*, [1966], pp.17-18).
404. Interview with Joe Dhanna, London, May 1988.
405. D.W.D. Comins, *Note on Emigration from India to British Guiana* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1893), p.31.
406. See Frank Birbalsingh and Clem Shiwcharan, *Indo-Westindian Cricket* (London: Hansib, 1988); Ian McDonald, 'Five Great Berbician Cricketers', in *West Indies v India (Souvenir Programme)*, Susil Dharry, (ed.), (Hampshire, Berbice, Guyana: The Central Corentyne Lions Club, 1983).
407. See note 405.
408. In 1926, H.S. Altham, who had seen Ranji at his best, recalled: 'In method, [he] was a law unto himself. His extraordinary quickness of eye and mind allowed him to do things utterly impracticable for others. He would play back to the fastest bowlers on the fastest wicket, and never have to hurry his stroke; his cutting was marvellous; his leg-side play has never been approached, and he broke the heart of the best bowlers by the way he deflected his fastest

- breakbacks to the boundary. It was not a glance, as we now understand the term: the ball was met with the full face of the bat, and at the psychological moment those wrists of steel pivoted and the ball sped away to leg'. - 'Ranji, Fry and Jessop — The Golden Age of Batting', in *The Penguin Cricketer's Companion*, Alan Ross, (ed.), (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981 [1960]), p.232.
409. Quoted in Alan Ross, 'The Presence of Ranji', in *The Faber Book of Cricket*, Michael Davie and Simon Davie, (eds.), (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p.345.
410. Shils, *op. cit.*, [1961], p.78. See also Richard Cashman, *Patrons, Players and the Crowd: The Phenomenon of Indian Cricket* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1980), p.35.
412. *The Daily Chronicle*, 29 October 1916.
413. C.O. 111/643, Collet to Churchill, no. 161, 27 April 1922, encl.: Memorandum by J.A. Veerasawmy; *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1948], pp.537-538.
414. Ruhomon, *op. cit.*, [1988], p.256. In 1936, Veerasawmy published a book on cricket: *How to Become a Great Batsman and a Great Bowler* — (*The Daily Chronicle*, 5 May 1938).
415. *The Daily Chronicle*, 15 December 1915.
416. *The Daily Chronicle*, 14 December 1915.
417. *Ibid.*
418. See note 415.
419. *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1948], p.291.
420. *Ibid.*, p. 825.
421. *The Daily Chronicle*, 12 December 1916, 24 January 1917.
422. *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1948], p.461.
423. *Ibid.*, p.289.
424. *The Daily Argosy*, 3 January 1920.
425. *The Daily Argosy*, 14 January 1928.
426. Ruhomon, *op. cit.*, [1988], p.256.
427. *The Daily Argosy*, 1 May 1928.
428. *The Daily Argosy*, 4 May 1929.
429. In 1915-1916, the first year of the Club, the members of the executive were: Thomas Flood (president), R.R. Kerry (vice-president), J.A. Veerasawmy (secretary-treasurer), J. Subryan, R., J., and A. Rohoman, Francis Kwall, J.S. Pariag, E. Bacchus, P. Sawh, R.B. Gajraj (committee members), and J.A. Luckhoo (captain). — *The Daily Chronicle*, 14 December 1915.
430. *The Daily Chronicle*, 3 September 1916.
431. See note 413.
432. *The Daily Argosy*, 2 October 1920. Hunter was in the West Indies team that toured England in 1923.
433. *The Daily Argosy*, 20 May 1922.
434. C.R. Browne was born in Barbados in 1891. Like Veerasawmy, he was a lawyer. They were both magistrates in British Guiana in the 1930s. — *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1937], p. 43.
435. See note 413.
436. C.O. 111/643, Collet to Churchill, no. 161, 27 April 1922: '.... Mr Veerasawmy is a young man of very pleasing manners. He is well-educated and appears to have the instincts of a gentleman. (There are persons to whose opinion I attach great value who say that he undoubtedly *has* the instincts of a gentleman), and, therefore, is more fully accepted as an associate with Europeans than would most Indians and some Europeans'. His father, Veerasawmy Mudaliar, was the chief interpreter of the Immigration Department; he was one of the founders, in 1892, of the short-lived East Indian Institute, the first Indian organisation in the colony (Nath, *op. cit.*, [1970], p.94; Ruhomon, *op. cit.*, [1988], p.234).
437. *The Daily Chronicle*, 25 January 1920.
438. *The Daily Chronicle*, 24 June 1919.
439. *The Daily Chronicle*, 5 July 1919.
440. See note 438.
441. *The Daily Chronicle*, 25 January 1920.
442. See note 413.
443. *The Daily Chronicle*, 25 January 1917.
444. *The Daily Argosy*, 4 February 1923.

445. *The Daily Argosy*, 1 May 1928.
446. *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1937], p.172.
447. *The Daily Argosy*, 9 April 1929.
448. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 3 June 1927.
449. *The Daily Chronicle*, (Indian Centenary Number), 5 May 1938 — Among the Indians identified as having 'distinguished themselves' in cricket were: J.A. Veerasawmy, C. Pooran, K. Rohoman, B. Saddick, Ranjit Singh, Alladat Khan, and Chatterpaul Persaud; the latter represented British Guiana in the Intercolonial tournament in 1937. Singh (born 1896) was the captain of the E.I.C.C. between 1930 and 1941. — *Who is Who in British Guiana, op. cit.*, [1948], p.490.
450. *The Daily Chronicle*, 25 January 1917.
451. *The Daily Argosy*, 13, 20 May 1920.
452. *The Daily Argosy*, 16 October 1920.
453. *The Daily Argosy*, 2 February, 4 August 1921.
454. See note 452.
455. *The Daily Argosy*, 18 May 1921.
456. See note 404.
457. *The Daily Argosy*, 10 September 1925.
458. *The Daily Argosy*, 25 January 1927.
459. Brian Stoddart, 'Sport, Cultural Imperialism, and Colonial Response in the British Empire', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.30, (1988), p.653.
460. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 24 May 1927.
461. *The Daily Argosy*, 30 July 1925.
462. See note 458.
463. *The Daily Argosy*, 25 March 1925.
464. *Leader, The Daily Argosy*, 1 October 1925.
465. *The Daily Argosy*, 1 May 1928.
466. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 6 May 1928.
467. *The Daily Argosy*, 25 June 1929. Among the prominent Indians present at Andrews's lecture were: Mr and Mrs H.B. Gajraj, Francis Kawall, Mr and Mrs Ramprashad, Dr and Mrs W. Hewley Wharton, Hon. and Mrs A.E. Seeram, Mr and Mrs A.S. Rohoman, Mr and Mrs Joseph Jaikaran, Mr and Mrs Peter Ruhomon, Mr and Mrs G. Lawrence, Mr and Mrs S.K. Singh, P.M. Benson, M. Rohoman, J.P. Das, Edwin Bacchus, C.R. Jacob, A. Rohoman, W. Dinally, and David Iloo. (Gajraj, Kawall, Ramprashad, and Iloo were president, senior vice-president, junior vice-president, and secretary respectively of the E.I.C.C., in 1929).
468. Joseph Ruhoman, 'Centenary Notes and Comments', *Indian Opinion*, (Centenary Number), (May 1938), p.404. For a summary of Indian achievement in sports up to 1938, see M.M. Beramsingh, 'Indians in Sport', *ibid.*, pp.421-424.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: INDIAN ACHIEVEMENT IN A BACKWARD COLONY, 1919-1929

..... considering the classes from which the Indians in British Guiana and their forefathers have come, the community has prospered To those who are familiar with rural life in the congested districts of the United Provinces and the difficulties in the material and social progress of the lower classes, the change is striking. Educational and medical facilities in British Guiana are superior to those in rural India. There are no caste restrictions or purdah, and the Colonial Indian, man and woman, has a somewhat higher standard of living and is certainly more independent than his confrere in India. There are no political or economic inequalities, such as exist, for instance, in South Africa, no segregation, and no restrictions against the acquisition of land.... when one see many Indian landowners, substantial cultivators, legal and medical practitioners, merchants, shopkeepers, and Government servants, it is impossible not to feel that the community has progressed.... the main credit for this progress is due to the eminently laudable qualities of industry and thrift which seem innate in the Indian, and enable him, wherever he goes, successfully to face hardship and competition.

Report by Kunwar Maharaj Singh on His Deputation to British Guiana in 1925, p.13.

The Negroes had been outclassed, while the East Indians on the other hand, who came here as indentured immigrants and worked for small wages, had raised themselves by thrift and industry and are today among the employers of labour. The Negroes should not be satisfied with existing conditions but should press forward more vigorously in the race of life.

F.A. Egerton of the Negro Progress Convention to Residents, Bush Lot Village, Essequibo Coast — *The New Daily Chronicle*, 22 July 1926.

The Address of Welcome which was read by Dr. Nichols [the vice-president of the Negro Progress Convention] seemed to me to be carefully worded to avoid any slightest sign of jealousy towards the East Indian community. Nevertheless, though it was a reception that lacked nothing in cordiality to me personally, I could feel in the atmosphere an undercurrent of apprehension and strong racial feeling. The new race consciousness here is obviously far stronger than that which I had experienced amongst the somewhat primitive and unsophisticated Negro races in South Africa..... I could feel also from one or two side remarks that were made, that there is a real fear present lest they should be outnumbered by East Indians.

Rev. C.F. Andrews, 'Impressions of British Guiana', (mimeo.), pp.48-49 — C.O. 111/689/75141 [1930].

Commitment to home and family is an important value. The problem is it is not as strongly shared among the Caribbean males as it is among Caribbean females The male tends to be marginal to the family and to the home. Nevertheless, it is often the male that is, if not the main breadwinner, then at least the one that occupies the more privileged jobs. The family, particularly among the majority Afro-Caribbean people, often does not function as a viable economic unit. This lack of viability of the family as an economic unit inhibits the emergence of an entrepreneurial spirit. Industry and an orientation to wealth and economic activity is often acquired and developed within the home.

The dominant Afro-Caribbean families in general are not enamoured of the value orientations and resources necessary for the emergence of an entrepreneurial culture. Afro-Caribbean families tend not to pass on wealth to succeeding generations and often do not have wealth to bequeath to their offsprings.

East Indians and the other minority ethnic groups in the region, in contrast, tend to have more stable family forms, with the main breadwinner being central rather than marginal to the home. It is this commitment to the family as an economic unit and the tendency to pass on wealth to succeeding generations that accounts for the relatively greater economic power of East Indians in contrast to Blacks.

George K. Danns, 'The Role of the Entrepreneur in the Development Strategy of the Caribbean', *Caribbean Affairs*, Vol.2, No.3, (1989), pp.156-157.

The 1920s was the most important decade for the Indian community in British Guiana since Indian indentureship began in May 1838: the rice and cattle industries were established; a middle class, based on agriculture and commerce, had emerged; several Indian doctors and lawyers were practising in the colony; a positive attitude to western education was taking shape; a small Indian intelligentsia, fired by the rising tide of nationalism in India, had initiated a spirit of inquiry among young, urban Indians; a few Indian representatives were elected to the legislature; Indian youths, whatever their class or religious background, had achieved a degree of excellence at cricket, a national obsession. A sense of a comprehensive Indian identity was evident.

But from a purely psychological angle also, the 1920s was a watershed: no indentured labourers went to the colony after 1917. The last batch of 437 (including 39 children) arrived on 18 April 1917 — 49 had previously been indentured to Natal (South Africa), 8 to Fiji, 4 to British Guiana, and 1 to Trinidad.¹ In 1915, of 1,165 Indians taken to the colony, 81 had previously worked under indentureship: 38 in British Guiana, and 43 in Natal.² All indentures were cancelled on 15 April 1920.

In 1911, Guiana-born or creole Indians constituted 52.7 per cent of the total Indian population; in 1921 these accounted for 68.1 per cent; by 1931, 81.5 per cent were born in the colony. In the latter year, there were 94 Indian women to every 100 Indian men.³ The chronic, though diminishing, sexual imbalance had been the principal motivation for many young Indians to return to India; many elderly people also sought repatriation, preferring to spend their last years in their homeland. By the 1920s, the main obstacle to the development of a stable Indian community — the shortage of women (Indians rarely intermarried) — had been virtually removed. Moreover, the fact that over 80 per cent of the Indians in British Guiana, in the late - 1920s, were born there, strengthened their identity with the colony; although many still saw them as immigrants, alien 'coolies'. Jock Campbell, the respected sugar entrepreneur, recalls the tendency for Guianese to casually dismiss his enquiries about the role of Indians in the future of the colony, when he first went there in 1934. He summarises the general response thus:

'Oh! the coolies. They're not really part of this society at all. The indenture system ended less than 20 years ago. The coolies have their own language, religion, culture and customs superimposed on the mud of British Guiana. You don't have to worry about them'.⁴

Indians have often been maligned for their exclusivism, an impenetrable clannishness. It was this stubborn disinclination to appreciate the efforts and achievements of the Indian people, which fed such manifestations of incomprehension. The perceived, remote exoticism of the Indians precluded many from seeing that they were, indeed, adapting their culture to the new environment, and in the process, developing this hazardous, colonial backwater.

Other erroneous notions, such as that they were pampered by the planters and the Government, or that they all lied and cheated in order to make money, also tended to diminish Indian achievement in the colony. In February 1919, for instance, W.S.A. Richards, a Black correspondent, argued that Blacks contributed to the introduction of Indian labourers, who were underselling them on the labour market, while Indian children 'are given preference to ours as distillers, book-keepers, dispensers, and even in the Government service'.⁵ In fact, in 1925, about 87 per cent of the junior civil servants, and over 90 per cent of the teachers were Black.⁶

In the early-1930s, a prominent Black leader, A.A. Thorne, wrote disparagingly of the Indians, embroidering on the theme that they undermined the material position of his people. He, apparently, saw Indian thrift and industry as a defect. After noting that the colonisation movement had 'ruthlessly shattered' Black hopes (in fact, no Indian labourers were recruited after 1917; small batches of West Indians were), Thorne concluded:

The East Indian has, from the abolition of slavery up to the present time, lowered the standard of wages and of living throughout the colony, and the meagre wages and returns from rice cultivation on which the East Indian exists would kill out the Negro labouring population very rapidly. The East Indian wears very scant clothing, lives on rice and dhol chiefly, and contributes very little per head to the customs revenues of the colony. The Negro and his descendants, on the other hand, live like the British people, feed themselves well, and too often over-dress.⁷

Thorne had refurbished the old argument that the 'coolie' was of no benefit to anyone but the planters.⁸ He would not recognise that Indians produced rice, vegetables, and meat, for all consumers, under abysmal conditions; they made a significant contribution to the reduction of the import bill.⁹ Neither would he acknowledge that Indian indentureship commenced only because Blacks were disinclined to work continuously on the estates: they, understandably, equated such work with slavery; moreover, their acquisition of land, initially provided some independence of

estate labour; but their higher wage demands, in the 1840s, could not be met by most planters¹⁰ - several abandoned their estates. Indian indentureship rescued the sugar industry; the ex-slaves would not accept such a poignant reminder of their oppression. As for the comparatively weaker economic position of the Blacks, a regular Black correspondent to *The Daily Chronicle*, F.H. Ridley, argued persuasively that it was related to attitudes: to an inertia, spawned by the absence of any reward for effort under slavery:

.....the African is of a race, not rooted, like the others, in any ancient systems of agricultural or industrial organisation; and it cannot be said that the tutelage which they have undergone in these latitudes, has been of a kind to inculcate in any set of novices any sense of the economic relation between continuous labour on their part and their own welfare. It certainly did not, during slavery, contain the elements whereby the slaves can be trained in the value of money, the knowledge of which is the strongest incentive to industrial enterprise. And this defect in their early training is still traditional with the Creole of today.¹¹

But the idea of the pampered 'coolie' was alluring: it explained away deficiencies; it prevailed in spite of the efforts of the Negro Progress Convention to reduce its currency. In November 1926, the British Guiana East Indian Association made representation to the Government to procure national holidays for the celebration of the main Indian festivals — *Diwali, Phagwah, and Eid*. A regular columnist on *The Daily Argosy* promptly opposed this. His argument unveiled his ignorance of Indians; it was congruent with the pervasive bigotry: 'Whatever religious connections the festivals... might have in India, they certainly do not have them in this part of the world'. He concluded that the Government must not succumb to the dictates of the Government of India, and 'pamper' the local Indians: 'They have had enough wet-nursing and it is no good for them that they should be continuously petted and spoilt.....'¹²

A few years earlier, in early-1921, when Indian milk-vendors opposed Governor Collet's control on the retail price of milk (this, like his rice policy, was an aspect of his cheap food strategy, which fell inordinately on Indian producers), another columnist on *The Daily Argosy* was equally scathing. He execrated Indian vendors ('Sammies', he called them — a derogatory term for Indians), alleging that they were becoming 'more reckless in.... [their] addition of water, fresh and foul, in order to make the business pay'.¹³ A couple weeks later, the same commentator renewed his calumny. He did not examine the argument by milk producers that since early -1915 the price of cattle feed had increased by 200 per cent, while the price of milk had risen only by 33 per cent;¹⁴ yet he castigated the 'itinerant Hindu.... a wily individual', who cheated in order to get rich. He then offered an explanation of 'how "Sammy" gets rich'. Quoting a supposed Indian informant, in the peculiar English of India-born residents, the columnist elaborated:

'Buy um one saucepan for 2/-, two measure fo' 15c and get um stamp [a licence on the measure]. Buy um one gallon milk market stelling [by the Stabrock Market, Georgetown], an' put um one gallon water inside. Nex' day me buy um 'nother gallon milk an' put um two gallons water. Me sell um an' go home. Me throw um bax ['box-hand'], nah, an da time me getam pisa [money], me buy um one cow wid calf. Te-day me gat um 10 miluk cow an' couple hundred dalla bank house'.¹⁵

Such potentially dangerous simplifications took root in this backward, racially-sensitive colony: the notion of the unscrupulous, miserly, 'coolie', contriving at getting rich at the expense of Blacks. And when these were combined with the wide-spread, but only partially correct, belief among Blacks that they paid for the 'coolies' to go to the colony, it is easy to see how a conception of the Indian as one who was 'taking bread out of their mouths' became entrenched. This has endured; and was expressed by some of Rodney's informants, as recently as the late-1970s.¹⁶

In this context, one can understand why a popular tendency persists among Indians, including intellectuals, to emphasise their oppression; why the persona of the 'coolie', a virtual slave, attracts; why tales of deception in India, the machinations of the *arkatis* (the recruiters), black out the dark past in India: a flawed vision of consuming darkness, clouding out the enviable record of effort and achievement in British Guiana.

It is an act of inexcusable historical injustice to perpetuate this unexamined vision of darkness. A principal aim of this study has been to document and reassess the record of the Indians in British Guiana, to rescue it from this vision of darkness, to people it with their daily struggles, sacrifices, sadness and joy, dreams and achievements. The decade after the end of indentureship, for reasons given earlier, seemed appropriate for this scrutiny. An effort to illuminate the social and economic conditions in the eastern districts of the United Provinces, the source of 70 per cent of the indentured labourers taken to British Guiana (another 15 per cent originated in the contiguous districts of western Bihar), was indispensable for the unravelling of the forces which shaped the Indians in the colony.

What emerges is that, contrary to popular perception, only about 31 per cent of the immigrants were from the lowest castes — Chamar, Dhobi, Bhangi, Dusad, Dom, etc. Brahman and other high castes comprised 13.6 per cent; middling agricultural and artisan castes were about 39 per cent; Muslims were about 16 per cent. (The caste composition of the Indians in British Guiana was almost identical to that of Fiji).

Although Chamars, agricultural labourers mainly, were the largest single caste (12.9 per cent), the other principal castes — Ahir, Kurmi, Koeri — were primarily agriculturalists, with a highly-developed tradition of wet-rice culture; they were also engaged in a variety of supplementary agricultural activities. They were the backbone of farming in the United Provinces. Land-hunger was chronic; the land-tenure system discriminated against the best farmers; it was virtually immutable. The Ahirs, Kurmis, and Kocris were invariably tenants, renting from the Brahmans, Rajputs, and Kayasths, the highest castes. This situation was exacerbated with the imposition of direct British rule, in the latter half of the 19th century, after the 1857 Mutiny. The traditional patron-client relationships, which tended to moderate the excesses of landlords, were undermined by the new system of taxation and the commercialisation of agriculture: rent replaced payment in kind and other forms of ancient, informal, less extortionate tributes. Thrift and hard work were, therefore, crucial to the peasant's survival.

Debt-burden increased with the commercialisation of agriculture. Pressure on this old land rose as many non-agricultural, artisan castes were thrown onto it, as foreign products penetrated the village economy, and ancient trades became superfluous. Landless labourers were everywhere. Many were, in fact, slaves of the landlords. The land in eastern U.P. and western Bihar was exhausted; population densities were astounding; poverty was endemic; famines were rife. Weakened bodies succumbed readily to frequent visitations of plague and cholera. (These districts are still the most depressed in India today).¹⁷

By the latter half of the 19th century, a tradition of internal migration was clearly established in these areas. Migrants from these depressed districts formed a significant proportion of the labourers on the tea plantations of Assam, and the jute factories of Bengal; in parts of Bihar and Bengal, they were the principal agricultural labourers. These men and women from eastern U.P. and western Bihar were crucial to the economies of these areas. Although these migrants were in a minority, the idea of migration as a way out of the general hopelessness, was quite wide-spread. The moribund, caste-ridden social structure was especially oppressive to women. The system of bound labour overseas — indentureship in the sugar colonies — also answered the dreams of a minority, with the courage to flee the consuming despair.

Opportunities for deceiving these indigent people must have been rife. Many probably found the

slick pictures painted by the recruiters alluring. But it would be wrong to assume that the indentured labourers were primarily dupes — vulnerable, ignorant people who were kidnapped, or lured away from their families. They were essentially people on the move; many must have heard tales of a better life in the *tapas*, ‘the islands’, from returning immigrants. Most ships brought back to the colonies people who had worked there before, as indentured labourers; they found life in India unbearable. These returnees were certainly not kidnapped; neither were they victims of the recruiters’ seductive tales. *Their* experiences and self-confidence would have mitigated whatever fears or reservations tormented the novices.

The Indian past of the indentured labourers, though comparatively recent, is virtually a mythical construct, haunted by the infamous recruiter; the tales of the *Ramayana* have a greater immediacy to their descendants. It is painful to make a complete break with one’s certainties, however sordid. Some probably envisaged returning to India in better circumstances; over two-thirds did not. It was a revolutionary step to cross the *kala pani*, the dark sea: it meant the loss of caste, one’s very essence in village India. Those who left were probably among the most enterprising: men and women who were determined to make a new beginning. Their efforts and achievements in British Guiana, already impressive by the 1920s, suggest that they were thrifty, industrious, and ambitious, whatever their caste. As early as 1853, fifteen years after the beginning of Indian indentureship, a planter remarked on their competence as agricultural labourers, and their frugality. He observed:

.... the ... Coolies... may be set down as a most valuable class of labourers. With less physical strength than the Negro, they far surpass them in intelligence and docility, and quickly become expert at all descriptions of work.... Frugal and simple in their habits, there are very few of them who in the course of a five years residence in Demerara, do not save sums of money, which they may vainly strive to acquire during a life time of toil and privation, in their native country.¹⁸

By the 1920s, with a record of resistance, assertions to their docility could not be sustained; but the literature is replete with references to their thrift and industry. An overwhelming majority were from agricultural castes, with little or no land, or landless labourers, with few possibilities of renting land. This fed a passion for the land; to own land.

India was a dead end for these people. C.F. Andrews, Gandhi’s confidant and principal adviser on Indians overseas, argued in 1922, that it was futile for them to return to India. He noted that thousands who had been repatriated from Fiji, at the end of the First World War, were stranded in Calcutta, and were crying to return. Andrews observed that they found the climate in India oppressive; the

cost of living had risen 'enormously'; they were swindled by luggage-coolies, booking-clerks, tradesmen, etc. in Calcutta: '... there were thieves, immoral men and women always on the prowl to steal away the hard-earned savings which they brought back'. Moreover, most were not received back into their caste by their brethren. These broken people soon gravitated to the towns, or tried to get back to Calcutta, in a desperate effort to return to the colonies. Andrews expanded on the pain of the ex-indentureds, after they reached their villages in the United Provinces and Bihar:

There was no one who would give in marriage a son or daughter to them for their children. They were not allowed.... even to touch the village well for fear of pollution, or to smoke in the evening the common huqqa.... A hundred times I have seen them act before me over again the picture of their treatment — the way they were received in the village, the way the villagers handled them roughly, the way they spoke harshly to them. One of the returned immigrants said to me, 'We were treated like dogs!'.... and I would become angry in turn and say to myself, '.... This wretched social system has no place in it for those who had crossed the sea.....'¹⁹

The record bulges with evidence of repatriated Indians from British Guiana also, languishing in Calcutta, dreaming forlornly of returning to the colony.²⁰ In March 1921, for instance, Azeez Rohoman, the Indian businessman from Georgetown, returned to British Guiana after several months in India and Fiji; he was convinced that the Indians in British Guiana lived 'under far happier conditions' than those in Fiji. He noted that 20 who had been repatriated, went back on the ship with him; they had paid their own passages. They landed 'practically penniless'. Rohoman said that many who had returned to India wished to go back to the colony, but could not afford the fare of 600 rupees. He felt that the caste system was a 'bar' to their reintegration into their villages.²¹ Francis Kawall of the British Guiana East Indian Association went to India in early-1921. He, too, observed that many who had been repatriated from British Guiana were stranded in Calcutta: they 'expressed their anxiety' to return to the colony. Kawall added: 'Wages were very low in India and work very hard to get'.²²

The failure of the proposed Colonisation Scheme made it impossible for all, but a handful of the repatriated, to return. The recorded testimonies of a few of these speak of hunger, death, and unconscionable relatives. Gayadin, a cow-minder and farmer from Kitty, near Georgetown, returned to British Guiana in March 1921. He had been repatriated to India in July 1920, after 27 years. He had built a cottage by the railway line; he owned several head of cattle, as well as a rice and provision farm; and had savings of a couple thousand dollars. He left the colony with \$500, with the hope of settling in India, if conditions were favourable.

Gayadin's experiences in India were dark and humiliating. He said that Calcutta was 'infested with robbers who spared no pains of relieving the returned men of their savings'. He was not a victim; but from Calcutta to Lucknow, for a thousand miles, he saw nothing but destroyed rice crops and great suffering. He spent four weeks in his village, Tamaria, in Lucknow district. It was painful. He recalled: 'Sahib, see am lot hardship. People suffer bad. All about people dead from plague and nah can get am food Food too much dear and no work'. The people had no money, he added; starvation and plague carried them off. Gayadin soon realised that his money was dwindling; if he had stayed there for another two weeks, he would have been stranded. There was no way for him to earn a living. Wisely, he took the train back to Calcutta, where he encountered several broken, dejected people, seeking frantically to return to British Guiana. They had gone to India with him. Their misery was acute; most were penniless; they did menial tasks, for long hours, in order to get food. He estimated that three ship-loads were marooned in Calcutta. They all yearned to get back to the colony. He concluded: '... this colony too much better than India this time Suppose people know tory [story] na want go at all'.²³

The tale of Phagu, who had been indentured to Peter's Hall, East Bank Demerara, before he became a clerk with Resaul Maraj, an Indian firm in Georgetown, is even darker. He returned to the colony in June 1922, along with 22 other Indians who had been repatriated. On 5 November 1919, he left for India with his father, Debi Saran, his mother Jogi, his step-mother Jugdei (they had all gone as indentured labourers to British Guiana in 1902; Phagu was born in India in 1899), his step-sisters, Hasidei and Loungi, and his step-brother, Ramlochan. His mother died at sea. On their arrival at Calcutta, Phagu and the others left for their village in Basti, in the eastern U.P.. He spent six months there; during this time, Loungi and Ramlochan died of fever and abscesses behind their ears. He could not stand the climate: '... so much hotter in hot weather, and so cold in the winter'. He decided to return to Calcutta because 'I found I was outcasted'.

Phagu found employment with a merchant in Calcutta. It was his employer, who advanced him 375 rupees, who enabled him to return to British Guiana. (He had received no wages, but was fed and clothed). Meanwhile, in late-1920, he learnt that the other members of his family — Debi Saran, Jugdei, and Hasidei — died of plague in Basti. He noted that there were many Indians from British Guiana, Trinidad, Fiji, Surinam, and Jamaica living in Calcutta: their wages were poor; their work arduous — 'They all want to return to their respective colonies A creole will not be happy in

India after learning the ways of Demerara', Phagu concluded.²⁴

It is interesting that Phagu had abandoned his wife in British Guiana. She was from La Grange, West Bank Demerara; they were married under 'bamboo', according to Hindu rites. He remarked: 'I will not take her back if she has lived with anyone during my absence. I did not expect to return, and beyond giving her a calf, did not leave her provided for'.²⁵ Phagu's wife was probably of a lower caste; he dreaded taking her to India. His unscrupulous behaviour did not save him: he had crossed the *kala pani*, the dark sea of village Hindu infamy; he was polluted.

In October 1923, the Collector of Ghazipur District, in the eastern U.P., the third most important source of North Indian immigrants to British Guiana, reported: 'On the whole it appears the immigrants who return to their native land, do not find conditions favourable, which is shown by the fact that in a considerable number of cases they come here only to go away to some other place'.²⁶

The evidence suggests that there was wide-spread misery among those repatriated. In the early-1920s, several of their relatives in British Guiana were offering to pay their return passages. In a few cases, successful Indians in the colony were prepared to pay the cost of introducing relatives who had never gone there. In June 1920, for instance, H.M. Nehaul (Nehall), the proprietor of Chapman's Grove and Bee Hive estates, who was indentured to Plantation Non Pareil in 1882, indicated his willingness to pay for the introduction of five of his sister's sons and their families, from Rai Bareli in the United Provinces.²⁷

British Guiana was no El Dorado. But it was infinitely freer than the impoverished, decaying, caste-ridden districts of eastern U.P. and western Bihar. Professor A.R. Desai argues that 'The caste-stratified social organisation was not conducive to any development of individual initiative [it] smothered mental initiative, the experimenting impulse, the investigating urge and the rebellious mood of the villager for ages'.²⁸

This could not have been lost on the perceptively individualistic Indians in British Guiana: only about 30 per cent returned to India, although they were all entitled to assisted return passages. Fewer might have done so if more women had been recruited as indentured labourers: many who went back hoped to procure a wife.

The central argument of this study is that in spite of the chronic malaria; the daunting environmental hazards, and the necessity for a complex drainage and irrigation system to pursue were basic farming; the poor public health and sanitation record; an undercurrent of Black envy; and the obsession of the plantocracy and the colonial rulers with sugar monoculture, the achievements of the Indians in British Guiana, by the 1920s, were impressive. The ex-slaves and their descendants had failed to establish themselves as peasant cultivators, faced with similar problems. Indians fared substantially better; they were not slaves, although, initially, before the 1870s, the plantations retained many slave-like features.²⁹ Indians were able to adapt their rich, ancient, cultural traditions to the coastal environment. This was central to their achievements: a modified, liberal form of the ancestral village evolved on the Guiana coast. At the hub of this culture was the family, an adapted joint-family.

This was a solid achievement. Most indentured labourers migrated as individuals, or with a relative or two at most. Yet by the 1920s, despite the shortage of women during indentureship, a modified form of the extended family had emerged in the colony. Great emphasis was placed on early marriage and unrestrained procreation: 10 children were common in many families. And, as in India, the authority of the paterfamilias was sustained.³⁰ He was able to maintain control over family labour, even when the joint-family was not co-residential. His authority was perpetuated because of his monopoly of resources: land, cattle, agricultural implements, etc. The moral and ethical principles inculcated by Hinduism and Islam also bolstered his authority: these conditioned the responses of members of the household — wife, sons, daughters-in-law — to the head, rendering them high, moral imperatives. In conjunction with its social and socialising functions, the joint-family, in the 1920s, was a unit of work.

Detailed attention has been given to some of the cardinal texts and principles drawn from the *Ramayana*, the main classic in Guianese Hinduism. Possibly the most enduring legacy is respect, indeed reverence, for the authority of elders, and devotion to the family, as epitomised by Lord Rama, the hero of this classic. The theme of exile and redemption, which permeates the *Ramayana*, had special resonances for the Indians in the colony. The anecdotal style of this great work, which is centred on Ayodhya, in the eastern U.P., and peopled by gods and goddesses, with human foibles and mundane problems, rendered it accessible: it instructed and entertained. Moreover, the absence of a centralised, ecclesiastical body within Hinduism, minimised exegetical preoccupations, thus facilitating flexibility in the adaptation of this religion to the new environment. The aggressive

challenge from Christian proselytisers quickened this process: the erosion of the arid, stultifyingly rigid notion of caste and its obsessions with pollution, already undermined by the mechanics of indentureship, was accelerated. Brahman priests embraced Indians from the lowest castes; Blacks became the 'Chamars', the outcasts.³¹

The implications for Hindu-Muslim relations were profound; they remain possibly the best of all overseas Indian communities.³² The shared experience of indentureship shaped this tolerance; but a common assumption of superiority over Blacks ensures its resilience. (A caste-like exclusion of them, rooted in notions of pollution, physical aversion, and sexual fear, continue to poison Indian-Black relations.) And because the Madras (Tamil) element was so small — about 6 per cent — a comprehensive Indian identity had been forged by the 1920s. The historian, Brian Moore, has commented on the peculiar character of Indian creolisation in British Guiana, underlining what Professor Edward Brathwaite calls 'inculturation'. Moore argues:

Creolisation for the Indian immigrants was more a process of adaptation of their traditional values, customs and behavioural patterns to prevailing customs in the alien social environment than the adoption of Creole culture patterns. Of course, there was some measure of interculturalisation but it is evident that this was confined to the peripheral aspects of cultural life and did not penetrate into the belief systems, religious observances, the family structures, etc. of either group.³³

The reconstruction of the Indian family was a primary feature of Indian adaptation. It was the bed-rock of Indian achievement in this difficult environment. Meanwhile, the eradication of notions of caste released a tremendous amount of hitherto emasculated, pent-up energy into the community. The shortage of women and their experience as workers under indentureship, untethered the substantial, creative energy of the Indian woman, reshaping a new, more independent, assertive person, although this was canalised within the joint-family. As Tyrann Ramnarine argues: 'Indian immigration transformed the submissive role of women and enhanced their position. This process began on the sugar estates where she gained some economic independence. The manager paid "her wages in her hands and she altogether feels she is a rational being". Aware of (her) new-found rights in the colony, the Indian woman did not hesitate to exercise them fully The enhanced position often gave [them] financial control of family matters and an opportunity to bedeck themselves in gold and silver jewellery'.³⁴ The latter was not a meretricious display; it was a form of saving.

The competence, and accompanying self-confidence, of Indian women were an important factor in

the development of Indian agriculture in the villages. They and their daughters-in-law, with the agricultural skills acquired on the sugar estates, were crucial to the extraction of a margin of profit from rice cultivation. As recently as 1951-1952, Harold Hickerson, an American anthropologist, observed that the acreage under rice among Black farmers at Danielstown, Essequibo, was restricted, and their profits reduced, because their wives and children did not work in the rice fields. Indians comprised about 25 per cent of this predominantly Black village; they were also perceptibly more wealthy.

The reaction of the Blacks to Indian progress showed no change from their perceptions in the 1920s. Hickerson noted: 'Many Negroes feel that they have been victimised by the East Indians who have accepted lower living standards than they.... [They] stated bitterly that the wealthiest Indians send their wives into the drainage trenches to catch fish, and do not allow them pillows for their heads or shoes for their feet, and that by such stinting, they are able to save money and thereby set up business establishments and operate their estates'.³⁵

But Indian women were inclined to be decision-makers as well. They were consulted whenever important matters arose: whether in connection with marriages, Indians religious functions, or crucial financial and managerial issues relating to the running of the farm, or the shop. This did not diminish the robust, authoritarian role of the paterfamilias; it moderated and attenuated its excesses, rendering it less unpalatable to younger, mercurial members of the joint-family. The achievements of the Indian community would have been less impressive if individuals were not highly motivated. Family responsibilities, religious obligations, and a perceptible, incremental progress of their individual families, sustained Indian effort.

It is tempting to be disparaging of the authoritarian character of the Indian joint-family; this must be tempered: it is difficult to see how this ecologically-hazardous, malarial environment could have yielded a decent livelihood in the absence of a reliable, cohesive expenditure of family labour. The efforts of Black farmers were invariably abortive, primarily because this tight family structure, with its attendant command of labour, did not obtain. Indeed, as Raymond Smith, the anthropologist, observed in the early-1950s, in his study of a Black village on the West Coast Berbice: 'The mother-child relationship is the most important single relationship and it is around mothers that all forms of domestic organisation seem to crystallise..... Men have to be regarded more as providers

with relatively weak ties to the other members of their families of pro-creation rather than strongly authoritarian and respected heads of a co-operative unit'.³⁶ The Indian family was a co-operative unit. This ensured their progress in agricultural activities which would have been ruinous to Blacks. As Hickerson noted in the early-1950s: 'Many Negroes still look upon rice farming as "Coolie work"....'³⁷ He added that in the majority of Black households at Danielstown, men played 'a distant role... or no role at all';³⁸ older women deprecated this, while younger women and some men expressed reservation. The popular view was that 'although a woman can keep her household together and provide for its basic needs, only the presence of a man can guarantee a release from poverty'.³⁹

It is noteworthy that the centralised, though infinitely more repressive, plantation structure was crucial to the empoldering and maintenance of the elaborate and expensive hydraulic systems on the estates; as well as the implementation of the rigorous schedule for the planting, harvesting, and milling of sugar-cane. Without some such control of labour, large-scale agriculture is impossible; dependence on it is suicidal.

However, the tight, authoritarian family structure of the Indians did not lead to the repression of children. Rather, as in India, boys in particular, were prized; affection for them was shown openly; they were often pampered: they augmented the work unit. On the other hand, as A.R.F. Webber, the progressive editor, thinker, and legislator, remarked in August 1927, the apparently less generous treatment of children among the Black working class was inimical to Black progress. He believed that this was at the heart of their stagnation:

What a contrast is presented between the Negro and East Indians in these respects. The Negro child has a fearful time of it. The home is the torture chamber, whence come all the punishments of irate parents: but the children grow no better for it In their old homeland..... there were no such evidences of intolerance of child life..... there can be no great upliftment of the Negro community until there is upliftment in their home life; until, in fact, there IS home life.⁴⁰

The long shadow of slavery lingered.

The deep commitment to the family, among Indians, bred industry and thrift. Throughout the 1920s, many Black leaders, especially those in the Negro Progress Convention (N.P.C.), were preoccupied with encouraging rural Blacks to emulate the example of Indians: to take pride in, and cultivate, their lands; to plant economic crops, to save. At the inaugural meeting of the N.P.C., on 1 August

1922, Rev. D.E. Perry reportedly argued that Blacks could not advance through co-operatives; they should act individually; other races were not succeeding by co-operative enterprises. He believed that when they practised 'racial thrift, a brighter day would dawn for them'.⁴¹ In September 1926, J.D. Ainsworth of the N.P.C. reportedly told Black villagers at Noitgedacht, Wakenaam: 'They as Negroes should not speak about past matters: what the Negro did and what he did not do, but they were to look ahead and keep their eyes wide open. They were not to look at the Portuguese, East Indians, or any other race of people and envy them for their possessions; but they were to strive to emulate them and endeavour, by their own initiative, to get abreast of them'. He praised the Indians 'for what they had done. They were carrying on the tradition of their forefathers'.⁴²

Earlier, in July 1926, the president of the Negro Progress Convention, E.F. Fredericks, in an address to Blacks at Bush Lot, Essequibo, also exhorted them to cultivate their lands and practise thrift. He appealed especially to the men who laboured in the interior, in the gold, diamond, and balata fields: their earnings were substantially higher than the Indians on the sugar estates. *The New Daily Chronicle* reported Fredericks's speech thus:

....[he] made an impassioned and eloquent appeal to the men who worked in the interior to give up the silly habit of display, which they indulged in when success attends their effort. The direct cause of their poverty was the crass ignorance of wastefulness of their earnings which marks the conduct of the Negro. Many also bartered away their inherited lands to an alien race [a reference to the Indians] and have become tenants on those same lands.... Thrift in any people, he said, was a domestic conception carried out in a domestic manner..... They should begin at once to save some of what they earn and rectify the false mode of living.....⁴³

It has been argued in this study that aspects of the Indian great tradition, whether in its Hindu or Islamic variant, were adapted by Indians in British Guiana. The fact that much of this tradition was not oral — it was enshrined in the great classics — enhanced its appeal; it withstood comparisons with Christianity: it was ancient; it was resilient. This promoted a positive self-image; it strengthened their self-confidence; infused a sense of purpose; and sustained effort. But at the practical, work-a-day level of material culture also, the Indians in the colony adapted their agricultural tradition from the eastern U.P. and western Bihar to grow rice, fruits, and vegetables, and rear cattle. The wet-rice culture of India was adapted, initially, to marginal lands on the sugar estates. This was a major development: rice and cattle on the plantations were the basis of land purchases in the villages. By the 1920s, rice was well-adapted to the coastal environment; and their rudimentary system of water-control, though ineffectual during floods and droughts, was adequate to ensure a good crop

when the weather was favourable.⁴⁴

The returns from rice and cattle facilitated the building of temples and mosques, and a resurgence of Hinduism in the 1920s: seven-day *yajnas* — with readings from the classics, especially the *Ramayana*; expositions on moral and simple philosophical themes, such as duty to family, respect for elders, and racial unity; and communal feasts — were common. Similar expositions on the *Koran* and Islamic philosophy, were initiated by the Young Men's Muslim Literary Association in the late-1920s; several impressive mosques were also constructed; while learned members were delegated to lecture throughout the colony. Economic achievements fed this religious and cultural efflorescence; while the precepts and attitudes extolled by pandits, moulvis, and middle class Indians at these functions, impelled them to greater effort. But the celebration of Indian festivals, such as *Diwali*, brought^t social and environmental benefits as well, as Professor J.C. Jha observes:

There are many legends on the origin of diwali (sic). The most popular among the Hindus of the Caribbean is the home-coming of Rama, the hero of the *Ramayana* Since Ayodhya was cleansed and illumined to welcome Rama, his wife, Sita, his brother Lakshman, and their supporters after an exile of fourteen years, the Hindus consider it necessary to remove all the filth from their surroundings. All the litter and rubbish are thrown out and burnt and then the houses are illuminated. It also becomes an occasion of family get-togethers.⁴⁵

In British Guiana, the celebration of *Diwali* coincided with the harvest of the autumn rice-crop. It became a festival of thanksgiving as well, a sort of harvest festival. And the lighting of the *diyas*, the earthen pots, became a symbol of the conquest of light over darkness — a further stimulus to effort.

It has been demonstrated that Indians rarely depended on one source of income. Even on the sugar estates, where their options were more restricted, men, women, and children exploited every conceivable ecological niche to supplement their inadequate wages. Meanwhile, Indians who settled in the villages, ingeniously exploited both the village and the plantation environments. Rice and cattle were the bed-rock of the village economy; but vegetables, fruits, and coconuts were also grown around the homesteads; subsidiary stocks as well were kept — sheep, goats, chicken, ducks, etc. When they could not afford lamb or pork, home-produced chicken, eggs, vegetables, and fish were available. Ditches and ponds, flood-fallowed cane-fields, and canals on the sugar estates, were all reliable sources of fish and crabs; shrimp and fish were also caught in coastal waters. During droughts or prolonged dry spells, Indian villagers had access to other resources from the plantation

eco-system: grass for cattle, and wild vegetables. Thus, the dichotomy between village and plantation was never terminal, or totally antagonistic: many Indian villagers continued to work on the sugar estates; many friends and relatives still lived there. They moved freely between villages and estates, to attend weddings and Hindu and Muslim festivals.

These activities in the villages were the basis of rural entrepreneurship. By the 1920s, many Indian landlords, rice farmers and millers, shopkeepers, cattle-rearers, milk-vendors, and money-lenders were established. Often, several of these enterprises were combined in the same family: the joint-family made this possible. Already, by the First World War, a small, but influential, urban Indian commercial class had emerged in Georgetown and New Amsterdam. These had their origins in rural entrepreneurship; some maintained that link.

There is a tendency to see a conflict of interests between the Indian middle class and the rest of the Indian community. This assumption is somewhat flawed. In the rural areas in particular, where middle class Indians invariably remained Hindu or Muslim, men and women, irrespective of their material circumstances, interacted in the temples and mosques, at weddings, and at communal celebrations of *Eid*, *Diwali*, and *Phagwah*. In the village cricket teams, and the legendary drinking sessions in the rum-shops, Indian men, whatever their class or religion, socialised freely. In this colony, where a person's principal identity was his race, working class Indians tended to see the achievements of the Indian middle class as a manifestation of the progress of the race as a whole.⁴⁶ Moreover, the stubborn arrogance of creole society, which deemed all Indians 'coolies', helped to blur class divisions in the Indian community. As Raymond Smith argues, the Indian middle class were 'the prime movers in the process of resurgence of "Indian culture"..... In certain respects the decay of Indian culture was arrested because adherence to certain aspects of it became symbolic of the prestige of the more successful Indians..... The prejudice against Indians who were sufficiently educated also tended to reinforce their self-identification as Indians.....'⁴⁷

It is argued that whatever envy was spawned by the progress of some Indians, their achievements were claimed by all Indians. The Indian middle class set standards and broadened the horizons of the less privileged. A generalised conception of attainable goals, of expanding possibilities, was thrown up within the Indian community by their discernible mobility. An enduring vision of agriculture and commerce as avenues of potential upward mobility took shape, feeding Indian effort,

encouraging thrift and industry, and enhancing their self-image. Indian achievements were rooted in these seemingly mundane, frequently denigrated, attitudes.

However, their educational progress was less impressive. This was so because the earlier generations of Indians concentrated on establishing a sound economic base: the labour of children was an important dimension. Moreover, Indian parents were deeply apprehensive of the motives of Christian clergymen: the primary schools, though funded primarily from general revenue, were administered by them; non-Christians were rarely employed as teachers. Indians were generally wary that education in denominational schools would undermine their Hindu and Islamic values. These had sustained them in the colony; they were intrinsic to their achievements. Consequently, Indians lagged in the sphere of western education. The Swettenham Circular of 1904 encouraged this neglect of their children's education. The colonial state and the plantocracy connived in this delinquency: the labour of Indian children was widely used on the sugar estates. The Circular was not withdrawn until 1933.

It was the Canadian Presbyterians (Canadian Mission), working exclusively among Indians, who made the greatest contribution to the erosion of Indian resistance to western education. They manipulated several key symbols of the Hindu tradition, in their evangelical work. They won few converts; but their achievements in education were stupendous. The Canadian Mission schools were located in predominantly Indian villages, and on the plantations; their teachers were primarily Indians who had converted to Christianity, some nominally. This was a significant development: Indian parents dreaded having their daughters taught by Black teachers; a caste-like notion of pollution and sexual fear persisted; the appointment of Indian teachers spawned an increasingly progressive attitude to education.

In Berbice, in particular, where the Canadian Mission had founded the Berbice High School, in 1916, secondary education became available to Indian boys and girls in that progressive county; dormitories were built to accommodate rural Indian children. Moreover, the return of a few Indian doctors and lawyers to British Guiana, by the end of the First World War, lent prestige to these independent professions; fed visions of illimitable financial possibilities; while expanding perceptions of the potential benefits of education. A somewhat paradoxical situation developed: while Indian children were disproportionately under-represented in the primary schools, their

numbers at the Berbice High School, as well as the proportion of Indian doctors and lawyers in the colony, were quite impressive. Here again, the effort of the joint-family was mobilised to support a son who had demonstrated extraordinary academic ability: several studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh primarily; others did law in London. By the late-1920s and early-1930s, Indian attitudes to education were changing; a professional class had emerged; a tradition of educational achievement was taking shape.

Coincidental with these developments and enhancing them, was the rise of a few Indian thinkers. Possibly the first Indian in British Guiana to achieve such status was Joseph Ruhoman, a writer, lecturer, and tireless advocate of education for his people. His brother, Peter Ruhomon (sic), through the [Wesleyan] East Indian Young Men's Society, which was founded in 1919, worked assiduously to inculcate the habit of study and intellectual inquiry in some young Indian men in Georgetown. It is noteworthy that this was being pursued in the context of a universal upsurge in intellectual curiosity in the achievements of the ancient Indian great tradition, and the rise of Gandhi. Although the E.I.Y.M.S. was essentially western in its intellectual orientation, it was not a Christian organisation; its programme, as reflected in the lectures delivered to its members in the 1920s, was permeated by a discernible pride in the achievements of ancient India. Thus, while working class Indians fed on the mystical, idyllic India of the *Ramayana*, the sensibility of a section of the rising Indian middle class was refracted through notions of an ancient India of high culture: art, sculpture, architecture, poetry, philosophical scholarship, etc. This past of high achievement seemed to have been vindicated by European recognition of several Indians since the 1890s: Rabindranath Tagore, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913; Vivekananda, who had enchanted Western audiences with his philosophical expositions in the 1890s; and Prince Ranjitsinhji, the master batsman, whose artistry before the First World War, enthralled the cricketing world. These men deepened the pride of these young Indians in British Guiana in their ancestral homeland.⁴⁸ So also did the writings of the Oxford-based German scholar, Max Müller, on which the Ruhoman brothers thrived.⁴⁹ It was this legacy which they communicated to their young disciples.⁵⁰ Members of the E.I.Y.M.S. were also active in the British Guiana East Indian Association and the East Indian Cricket Club.

Meanwhile, the visits of several prominent men from India, in the 1920s, in connection with the aborted Colonisation Scheme — Pillai, Tivary, Kunwar Maharaj Singh — as well as Jaimini⁵¹ and C.F. Andrews in 1929, strengthened their identity with India, 'the motherland', while underlining the intellectual stature

of the new Indian man. The whole process of Indian creolisation in the colony was rooted in a robust identity with a new India, one which was challenging Imperial assumptions, an India which was seen to be in revolt. This percolated deeper: by the mid-1920s, Gandhi was already virtually enthroned in the Hindu pantheon.⁵² But these developments tended to reinforce the wall of incomprehension between Indians and Blacks in British Guiana. Even the most enlightened and discerning leaders in the 1920s invariably appealed to the racial sensibilities of their respective sections.

This was exacerbated by the much-publicised Colonisation Scheme — a programme to procure more Indian immigrants for the colony by offering land-grants after three years' service with a registered employer; essentially to get more labour for the sugar estates. Nothing came of it; but the declared aim of J.A. Luckhoo and Dr. W. Hewley Wharton, the Indian members of the deputation to India in 1919-1920, 'to induce more Indians from the motherland to join our ranks, increase our numbers and so help us to make British Guiana an Indian Colony',⁵³ led to a resurgence of Black opposition to Indian immigration, and expressions of fear of Indian domination. (This will be pursued in the second part of this study, now under preparation.) The Colonisation issue created deep rifts within the British Guiana East Indian Association (B.G.E.I.A.), resulting in the formation of rival organisations; more significantly, it led to the formation of the Negro Progress Convention (N.P.C.), on 1 August 1922. (One of the founder-members of the N.P.C. was H.N. Critchlow, the head of the British Guiana Labour Union (B.G.L.U.)⁵⁴ The N.P.C. made a profound contribution to the moulding of Black consciousness in the colony.

Both the N.P.C. and the B.G.L.U. opposed the Colonisations Scheme, although they sought, unsuccessfully, to get labourers from the West Indies and West Africa.⁵⁵ What they really wanted, was equality of treatment to counter any possibility of Indian domination. In 1923-1924, efforts were again being made to revive the Scheme, to bring in more Indians. The Black community was determined to stop this. In December 1923, the secretary of the N.P.C., E.P. Bruyning, reportedly told Governor Thomson that 'there was abroad among the Negro section in the colony an impression that the real aim of those who had so far moved in the matter was to secure an augmentation of the East Indian section of the community as would put the Negro section in a hopeless minority....'⁵⁶ In January 1924, the N.P.C. informed the Colonial Office that the Colonisation Scheme was 'a distinct act of discrimination' against Blacks, who were entitled to 'first consideration', being the 'pioneer settlers' of the colony. They concluded that an increase in the Indian population 'would be detrimental to good government and the preservation of the peace....'⁵⁷

The evidence suggests that the N.P.C. used its influence on Critchlow and the B.G.L.U.⁵⁸ to capitalise on the grievances of predominantly Indian sugar workers, on the East Bank Demerara, in April 1924. The B.G.L.U. ousted the weak leadership of the British Guiana East Indian Association: its emissaries insisted on marching to Georgetown, although the whole colony was under martial law; at Ruimveldt, 12 Indians and one Black were killed by the militia. Contrary to entrenched assumptions, by politicians and scholars, these events were hardly a manifestation of working class racial unity: there seemed to have been a deep undercurrent of Black manipulation of Indian workers' disaffection, to court confrontation, in order to cripple the Colonisation Scheme and stem potential Indian domination. The disaster at Ruimveldt strengthened Indian fears of the motives of Black leaders. Critchlow was conspicuously absent; but his reputation among Indian workers on the plantations was damaged irreparably. (He had enrolled many of them in his union in 1919-1920). The tendency for appeals to be made unabashedly on racial premises increased. Critchlow, for instance, at the Sixth Annual Conference of the Negro Progress Convention, in August 1927, exhorted Blacks to close ranks. He reportedly said:

People of their own race tried to do everything to pull the race down and not to give support to them. But when they pulled down one member of the race, they were pulling the race down.... They should sink their own differences, and get together, so that other races should not laugh at them. One failure of a Negro was failure for the race. The Convention should get up and do more useful work to protect the fallen race.⁵⁹

Among Indian leaders as well, the perceived self-interest of their own people took precedence over national concerns. Some observers sought to make a distinction between the promotion of racial consciousness, racial pride — a positive endeavour — and racism.⁶⁰ Many could not grasp the semantic difference. As noted earlier, Blacks tended to see 'Coolies' as the pampered wards of the sugar planters and the colonial rulers, at their expense. The record of Indian resistance and the frequently brutal response of the colonial police would suggest otherwise; although a few progressive managers, such as J.C. Gibson of Port Mourant, rendered valuable assistance to their Indian workers. A more accurate assessment of the condition of Indians on the estates was provided by Jock Campbell, the progressive sugar entrepreneur, who in 1954, stated frankly that because of the hazardous environment and the poor prices for sugar in the 1920s-1930s, the sugar industry was 'only able to exist at the expense of the wages of labour and of their amenities...'⁶¹ Later, in 1966, Campbell was even more forthright. This is how he recalled the treatment of Indian workers on the sugar estates in 1934:

Conditions of employment in the sugar industry were a disgrace. Wages were low; housing unspeakable; workers were treated with contempt — as chattels not as human beings — animals and machinery were in fact cared for better than the workers because they cost money to buy and replace. The plantocracy had great power in Government — did all they could to prevent other industries in order to maintain a surplus of labour.⁶²

The Government of British Guiana, throughout the 1920s, had no agricultural policy other than the perpetuation of sugar monoculture; this was deemed indispensable for the survival of the colony. With the end of Indian immigration in 1917, peasant agriculture was discouraged: the labour supply of the plantocracy could not be undermined. In 1939, the Director of Agriculture, Professor J. Sydney Dash, who had promised much, when he went to the colony in late-1927, virtually admitted that nothing had changed. The following exchange before the West India Royal Commission underlines the barrenness of official attitudes to agriculture in British Guiana:

ENGLEDOW: Can it be said... that the country has an accepted policy of agricultural development.....?

DASH: It has not been the policy to have any long-range agricultural policy and one of the reasons is finance....

ENGLEDOW: Government cannot be said to have a policy for the development and use of the land as a whole?

DASH: No.

ENGLEDOW: And it is prevented by financial consideration?

DASH: Yes. There is still a relatively small population for the area we have got and the biggest part of our policy would centre around drainage and irrigation and that would be a big item for the Government's programme.

ENGLEDOW: And what you call a big item is not so far a subject of continuous investigation by Government.

DASH: That is so.⁶³

Earlier, in 1926, the Colonial Office was manoeuvring to suspend the constitution of British Guiana — to foist in a crown colony government — under the pretext that greater financial control by the Governor and the Executive Council was imperative for the initiation of a comprehensive development programme. This was a ruse. The Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, W. Ormsby-Gore, wrote confidentially that they contemplated no such undertaking: British Guiana could not be developed in the short-run. He minuted:

I think it is quite possible that for this generation the development of Tropical South America — i.e. the whole belt between the Amazon and the Orinoco is beyond our present capacity. It is not as if we were failing where others are succeeding. This belt has beaten everyone so far.⁶⁴

However, he sanctioned the sending of a Commission to the colony, even if it achieved nothing. At least, he argued, it would show that the 'dream of development was an empty one', and the Colonial

Office would no longer be bombarded with arguments that 'Here is a wonderful colony awaiting development which has been forgotten and left derelict'.⁶⁵

Yet the Colonial Office would not countenance the opening up of this colonial backwater to foreign capital. In February 1924, Governor Thomson wrote to the Colonial Office requesting that he be apprised of their position on this subject, as 'it was frequently alleged that His Majesty's Government is hindering development in the colony by refusing to allow the introduction of foreign capital'. The question of oil exploration had risen again, along with the possibility of American involvement. Gilbert Grindle, Assistant Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, replied privately to Thomson in April 1924. He opposed American involvement in oil exploration for strategic and commercial reasons:

.... in the particular case of the West Indies we are rather nervous about any extension of American influence, already too prominent there, though neither you nor we could very well say so openly.... The right of pre-emption coupled with prohibition of supply to aliens in time of war, etc. would not cover all the requirements met by the policy of British control. It could not secure that friendly consultation and co-operation in time of emergency which is possible with a British subject but not with a foreign corporation..... And from a commercial point of view..... as we physically control only some 2 per cent of the world's supplies, it is important to keep what little we have got in our own hands.⁶⁷

Against this backdrop of stubborn inertia, the achievements of the Indians in British Guiana appear even more remarkable. As shown throughout this study, Indians progressed in spite of the ecologically-hazardous, malarial coastal environment, and the unremitting opposition of the Government and the plantocracy to their efforts at fashioning an independence of plantation labour. Governor Collet tried to destroy the rice industry, as he admitted confidentially, because he deemed it subversive of the interests of sugar monoculture. (In 1919-1920, with a phenomenal rise in sugar prices, he erroneously anticipated the dawn of a sugar millenium;⁶⁸ everything had to be sacrificed to Moloch). His prolonged embargo on the export of rice to the West Indies, his incessant demands for the flooding of that market with rice from the East, his implacable position on the drainage and irrigation of the Corentyne, the premier rice district, and his vulgar depreciation of the admirably indomitable efforts of Indian rice growers, were all designed to force Indian labour back to the sugar plantations. Yet he received the support of Black leaders because his policy was seen as a means of getting cheap rice. Most of the rice farmers were Indians.

Indian achievements by the 1920s, were earned; nothing came easily. They owe it to themselves:

their thrift, enterprise, deep sense of responsibility to their families, and the values by which they lived, fed by their Hindu and Islamic heritage.

However, these achievements were not taking place in isolation — in 1931, Blacks comprised 39.9 per cent of the population, Coloureds 10.8 per cent, and Indians 41.9 per cent.⁶⁹ By the 1920s, there was already an underlying, though inchoate, resentment among Blacks of Indian progress. And this had led the perceptive champion of Indians overseas, C.F. Andrews, to reflect forebodingly in 1929, on race relations in the future. He wrote:

Suppose, for instance, East Indians took up very vigorously education and insisted on having their full share of teachers and also of subordinate clerical posts in Georgetown, would not this bring inevitably a clash from the intellectual side owing to rivalry?..... I find, on one hand, very little daily contact between East Indians and Negroes, but on the other hand, a habit of friendly tolerance between them. This lack of contact, while each carries on his own business, is all very well so long as ordinary circumstances prevail. But the time may come when a sudden emergency arises, or some vital racial interest is stirred up. Then, I can imagine the Negro and the Coloured people becoming almost fiercely patriotic in Demerara and at last clashing with the East Indians.⁷⁰

Andrews was, indeed, portentous: the Guyanese futility was taking shape.

Notes

1. C.O. 114/162, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1917.
2. C.O. 114/154, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1915.
3. *Census Report of British Guiana, 1931*.
4. Jock Campbell, 'The Clash of Immigrant Coloured Races in British Guiana', Address to the Ministry of Education Commonwealth Course, 15 April, 1966, (mimeo.), p.6. (I am grateful to Ian McDonald for a copy of this excellent paper). John Middleton Campbell (1912-) was appointed Chairman of Bookers, the largest sugar company in British Guiana, in 1952. This author has written: 'Campbell was considered to be a man with Fabian socialist sympathies, a humane, civilised human being..... his appointment marked the beginning of a period of major social reform on the plantations. Housing improved immeasurably; most of the obnoxious "logies", a savage reminder of slavery, were demolished. Health facilities were expanded and modernised; pure water supply systems were installed. Community centres, with excellent cricket grounds, were built on all estates. Social welfare officers were appointed at each estate'. See Clem Shiwcharan, 'The Tiger of Port Mourant - R.B. Kanhai: Fact and Fantasy in the Making of an Indo-Guyanese Legend', in Frank Birbalsingh and Clem Shiwcharan, *Indo-Westindian Cricket* (London: Hansib, 1988). In a speech at the L.S.E. on 24 November 1959, Campbell said: 'I felt - perhaps as the sixth generation of my family connected with sugar in British Guiana - a heavy sense of debt unpaid; a compelling need to do something about the situation'. - M. Shahabuddeen, *From Plantocracy to Nationalisation: A Profile of Sugar in Guyana* (Georgetown: University of Guyana, 1983), p.410.
5. *The Daily Chronicle*, 16 February 1919.
6. *The Daily Argosy*, 13 August 1925.
7. A.A. Thome, 'The Negro and His Descendants in British Guiana', in *Negro Anthology*, Nancy Cunard, (ed.), (London: The Author), p.508.
8. In March 1903, Patrick Dargan, a Coloured legislator, told a Black audience that 'The coolie was of no use to anyone but the planters'. For a thorough study of how economic arguments by Blacks against Indian indentureship tended to assume an anti-Indian character, see Peter D. Fraser, 'The Immigration Issue in British Guiana, 1903-1913: The Economic and Constitutional Origins of Racist Politics in Guyana', *The Journal of Caribbean History*, Vol.14, (1981). (Dargan is quoted in this article, p.33).
9. This was also the case in Trinidad, where, as Bridget Brereton argues: 'The Indian peasants strengthened the island's economy by producing food crops and by helping to diversify agriculture. But, for the Indians themselves, the importance of the establishment of an Indian peasantry was that it provided solid economic foundations for the development of an Indian community with roots in the colony'. - *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad, 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.182.
10. See Brian L. Moore, *Race, Power and Social Segmentation in Colonial Society : Guyana after Slavery, 1838-1891* (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1987), Chapter 2.
11. *The Daily Chronicle*, 2 February 1919.
12. 'Village Notes' by "Rusticus", *The Daily Argosy*, 28 November 1926.
13. 'Sammy on a Milk Strike' by "Here and There", *The Daily Argosy*, 27 February 1921.
14. "Pure Milk" to the Editor, *The Daily Argosy*, 26 September 1920.
15. *The Daily Argosy*, 13 March 1921.
16. Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p.261.
17. A recent study of an administrative division in Jaunpur (eastern U.P.), the eight most important district of origin of North Indian indentured labourers in British Guiana, shows that power and privileges are still deeply rooted in a caste-based system of land-ownership. In 1978-1979, Thakurs (land-owners) constituted 16 per cent of all households, but owned 53 per cent of the land; Ahirs, the best cultivators, were 13 per cent and owned 11 per cent; while Chamars were 25.5 per cent of all households, but owned just 7 per cent of the land. Thakurs, Ahirs, and Chamars held 64.6, 14.6, and 2.3 per cent respectively, of the seats on the *panchayat*, the principal decision-making body in the villages. See H.N. Singh, 'Caste, Land and Power: A Study of Dobhi Block in Jaunpur District of Uttar Pradesh', in *Social Stratification in India*, K.L. Sharma, (ed.), (New Delhi: Manohar, 1986).
18. A Landowner [J. Brumell], *Demerara after Fifteen Years of Freedom* (London: T. Bosworth, 1853), p.54.
19. C.F. Andrews, 'The Returned Indian Emigrants: A Problem of Reconstruction', *The Indian Review*, (July 1922), p.437. See also 'Indians Anxious to Return to Fiji', *The Daily Argosy*, 7 March 1921.
20. See, for example, C.O. 114/172, Report of the Immigration Agent General, 1919, for excerpts from the letters of some repatriated immigrants, who were stranded in Calcutta. One who was born in the colony in 1900, and had gone to India in 1920 wrote: 'We are only praying when they can open the Colonisation Scheme that we may get back to Demerara. I don't mind even we are bound for 20 years on any sugar plantation. We prefer that than stay in Calcutta..... I wouldn't believe one of those d-d Indians anymore, and do, if they tell you anything about this country, how nice it is, kick them, don't forget.....'

21. *The Daily Argosy*, 25 March 1921.
22. *The Daily Argosy*, 7 June 1921.
23. *The Daily Argosy*, 30 March 1921.
24. C.O. 111/644, Collet to Churchill, no.288, 21 July 1922, encl.
25. *Ibid.*
26. C.O. 111/655, (India Office), 15 April 1924.
27. C.O. 111/631, Collet to Milner, no.468, 30 September 1920, encl.
28. A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (Bombay: Sangam Books, 1976 [1948]), p.19.
29. See Isaac Dookhan, 'The Gladstone Experiment: The Experiences of the First Indian Immigrants to Guyana, 1838-1843', *Revista/Review Interamericana*, Vol.6, No.4, (1976-1977); and his 'The Elusive Nirvana: Indian Immigrants in Guyana and the Des Voeux Commission, 1870-1871', (mimeo.), 1987. I am grateful to Professor Dookhan for providing me with copies of these papers.
30. With regard to the joint-family in India, Professor A.L. Basham writes: '.... in most families the authoritarian element was probably more in evidence than the democratic one.....[but].... The good head of the house governed in council, discussing all important questions with the senior members of the family before taking action..... With its strong sense of hierarchic grading..... Hinduism expected a junior member of a family to show great deference and obedience to an elder one.... The paterfamilias was always treated with much respect.... The large joint-family had many practical advantages, chief of which was that it provided security for its members.... it also encouraged fellowship and a sense of responsibility for others'. - 'Indian Society and the Legacy of the Past', *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol.12, No.2, (1966), p.139.
31. In her study of attitudes to race in Guyana in the late-1960s, Iris Sukdeo notes that Indians considered intermarriage with Blacks 'very disgraceful': 82 per cent of her Indian respondents opposed it; 90 per cent of her Black informants had no objections. She adds that Indians deprecated both Black physiological features - flat nose, kinky hair, etc. - as well as what they perceived as 'blackman behaviour' - a lack of thrift, a love of fetes and dances, a lack of organisational skills, reflected in their buying small quantities of food stuff as their needs arose, and their inability to manage businesses. - 'Racial Integration with Special Reference to Guyana', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sussex, 1969, pp.333-336.
32. Chandra Jayawardena notes: 'Guyanese Hindus and Muslims have closer relationships than their Fijian counterparts. In social interaction the distinctiveness of being a Muslim (*Fulaman*) appears mainly in ironic repartee..... In Guyana political antagonism between Hindus and Muslims is virtually non-existent at either national or local level.... Northern and Southern Indians are totally merged and marriage between Hindus and Muslims causes little distress provided it is not celebrated publicly by the rites of one or the other religion'. - 'Culture and Ethnicity in Guyana and Fiji', *Man*, Vol.15, (1980), pp.436-437. Jayawardena says that 'Hindu-Muslim differences are subordinate to communal interests....' - *Conflict and Solidarity in a Guianese Plantation* (London: The Athlone Press, 1963), p.102.
33. Moore, *op. cit.*, [1987], p.28.
34. Tyrann Ramnarine, 'Indian Women and the Struggle to Create Stable Marital Relations on the Sugar Estates of Guiana During the Period of Indenture, 1838-1917', Paper Presented to the Twelfth Conference of Caribbean Historians, U.W.I., Trinidad, April, 1980, pp.16-17.
35. Harold Hickerson, 'Social and Economic Organisation in a Guiana Village', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Indiana, 1954, p.120.
36. Raymond T. Smith, 'Aspects of Family Organisation in a Coastal Negro Community in British Guiana', *Timehri*, (5th series), No.32, (1953), pp.60-61.
37. Hickerson, *op. cit.*, [1954], p.106.
38. *Ibid.*, p.393.
39. *Ibid.*, pp.393-394.
40. Leader, *The New Daily Chronicle*, 9 August 1927.
41. *The Daily Argosy*, 2 August, 1922.
42. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 12 September 1926.
43. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 22 July 1926.
44. By the 1920s, the reputation of Indian farmers was unassailable, as Harold W.B. Moore, a naturalist, observed: '.... his fame in this direction rests almost entirely on the rice industry, which, without Government assistance, he built up, and for which feat..... he very richly merits the highest laudation. With cattle, too, he has done excellently. Note the thriving milk industry, which like that of rice, is almost exclusively in his hands..... As soon as one begins to think of the East Indian in relation to agriculture, one naturally and unconsciously links him in thought with rice and cattle, and wonders not that he has made good with both these industries.....' - *The Daily Argosy*, 1 January 1929.
45. J.C. Jha, 'The Hindu Festival of Divali in the Caribbean', *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol.22, No.1, (1976), p.55.
46. This was true of the Black community as well: their leaders constantly appealed to them to practise thrift and self-help in the interest of their race. In September 1928, for instance, the president of the Negro Progress Convention told residents at Hopetown, West Coast Berbice, that the object of the organisation was 'to get the souls of the race on fire

- so that they might be able to do things..... for their advancement..... the time had come when the race should make a forward move and excel as the other races had done'. - *The New Daily Chronicle*, 26 September 1928. T.A. Marryshow, a Grenadian legislator and editor, was the guest of the N.P.C. in August 1928. He told a Black congregation at Mission Chapel, New Amsterdam: '.... it is a fact that Negroes are careless about the value of money.... Get money in all wholesome ways and keep it within the race..... it was a weapon of offence and defence in the interest of racial security.... by being a trying people and not a crying people, we will be able to dictate terms to others consistent with our honour and dignity'. - *The New Daily Chronicle*, 8 August 1928.
47. Raymond T. Smith, *British Guiana* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp.108,110.
 48. In his lecture in Georgetown in 1894, young Joseph Ruhoman underlined his lineage with the ancient Indian great tradition, delineated aspects of its achievements, and expressed pride in its contemporary resurgence. He said: 'East Indians are an inherently great people, and I feel supremely proud of the fact as one who has the pure, genuine East Indian blood flowing in his veins. In their own literature, science, and art, East Indians have held their own'. Ruhoman elaborated: 'Not a very long time ago, I was utterly insensible to the real progress of my race in India.... But I accidentally had a plunge into East Indian Literature..... I saw that India could boast of great men and great women - great thinkers and great writers - as great as any that Europe or any other country has produced - poets, philosophers, scientists and so on.....' He then referred to the outstanding performance of Vivekananda in Chicago, the previous year: '.... my soul was thrilled through and through with genuine pleasure and admiration when I learnt that there are brilliant East Indian lights in the world of English oratory - a striking instance of which was afforded us, when at the great World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago a few months ago, some of our East Indian orators who stood up on the platform as champions of their own religions simply electrified the vast audience by their marvellous exhibitions of English oratory'. - *India: Progress of Her People at Home and Abroad* (Georgetown: C.K. Jardine, 1894), pp.13, 20.
 49. The profound impact of Müller on educated Indians in India, as well as those overseas, stemmed primarily from his argument that Sanskrit had European linguistic roots; and his concomitant deduction that Hindus and Europeans had a common ancestry. Nirad Chaudhuri recalls the source of his early fascination with Müller: 'My father was not a highly educated man in the formal sense, for he had received only a school education and that too in the backwaters of East Bengal and not in Calcutta, the centre of modern Bengali culture. None the less, it was he who explained to me how Max Müller had established that our languages and the European languages belonged to the same family..... and that we Hindus and Europeans were both people descended from the same original stock'. - *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1974), p.5. Dr. William Hewley Wharton, the son of Hindu indentured labourers, and the first Indian doctor in British Guiana, obviously felt the same pride in the supposed link between ancient India and Europe. In 1898-1899, he was president of the Edinburgh Indian Association; years later, he recalled the compliments paid to him by Professor Sir Thomas Grainger Stewart, Queen Victoria's physician, at the annual dinner of the Association on 7 January 1899: "'Here is a young gentleman who was born in British Guiana, possesses an English name, fills the chair at this banquet with much dignity and grace, and insists on calling himself Indian. I may as well call myself an Indian as we both belong to the same stock - the Aryan family'". - *Who is Who in British Guiana, 1935-1937* (Georgetown: The Daily Chronicle Ltd., 1937), p.551.
 50. In October 1925, the [Wesleyan] East Indian Young Men's Society underlined their identity with India, in their address to Kunwar Maharaj Singh, a 'distinguished visitor from the motherland': 'As Indians we feel a justifiable pride in our Motherland and the achievements of her sons, and watch with considerable interest her social, intellectual, and political development. The many ties of interest and affection that bind us to her can never be broken, and though separated from her by miles of ocean, we are one with her in thought, one in feeling, and one in aspirations.....' - *The Daily Argosy*, 30 October 1925.
 51. Mehta Jaimini, in a lecture on Indian philosophy in New Amsterdam, in May 1929, reportedly claimed that India was 'the cradle of civilisation, the basis of Western philosophy, and the fountain-head of religion..... India had her civilisation long before the present civilisation, long before the time of Moses and Abraham, long before the Sphinx and the Pyramids of Egypt'. - *The Daily Argosy*, 29 May 1929.
 52. In July 1923, *The Daily Argosy* deplored the circulation of propaganda material, designed to raise funds for 'the agitation in India against the British Raj'. It advised Indians in the colony to spurn such efforts, as they could have little sympathy with the schemes of the 'political extremists'. It concluded, somewhat despairingly: 'In all the publications, as also in articles published in local newspapers, great play is made with the name of Mr. Gandhi, and so far as we can judge, local Indians regard that ascetic and firebrand as a kind of minor deity....' - *Leader, The Daily Argosy*, 11 July 1923.
 53. C.O. 111/636 (Greenwood), 14 April 1920, encl.: 'British Guiana: A Colony for India', p.20. J.A. Luckhoo and Dr. Wharton attended the 34th Session of the Indian National Congress at Amritsar, in December 1919. They said that they were 'anxious that a branch of the Congress should be established in British Guiana so that it may form a connecting link with the mother country. The Indian Colony would thus not be left isolated or forgotten. British Guiana as an Indian Colony would indeed be a great asset to India.....' - *The Daily Chronicle*, 2 March 1920.
 54. *The Daily Argosy*, 2 August 1922. This paper considered the demands by the N.P.C. that one Black should be brought in for every Indian immigrant introduced, a case of 'political self-defence, especially as there had been injudicious talk about British Guiana becoming an Indian Colony'. - *Leader*, 15 March 1929.
 55. *The Daily Argosy*, 20 March, 7 June, 13 July 1925; C.O. 111/652, Thomson to Thomas, confidential, 9 April 1924, encl. no.1.
 56. *The Daily Argosy*, 25 January 1924.
 57. C.O. 111/652, Thomson to Thomas, confidential, 9 April 1924, encl.: Memorandum of 'Reasoned Statement' submitted by the Negro Progress Convention.

58. As early as 1920, E.F. Fredericks, a lawyer and the founder-president of the N.P.C., was a principal actor in reconciling factional disputes in the B.G.L.U. - *The Daily Chronicle*, 14, 15 February 1920.
59. *The New Daily Chronicle*, 2 August 1927. In his address to the Seventh Annual Conference of the Negro Progress Convention, T.A. Marryshow said: 'Back your leader and crush your enemies!.... Dignify your cause. Organise; and if you are an organised people..... you have won already. Because people do not take chances with those who are organised'. - *The New Daily Chronicle*, 3 August 1928. It is interesting that a few days later, Marryshow warned his Black audience that 'other races..... were grabbing up all the land'. - *The New Daily Chronicle*, 8 August 1928.
60. Leader, *The Daily Argosy*, 10 May 1929.
61. Quoted in Michael Swan, *British Guiana: The Land of Six Peoples* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1957), p.86.
62. Jock Campbell, *op. cit.*, [1966], p.3.
63. *The Royal Commission in British Guiana, 1939*, (Georgetown: The Daily Chronicle Ltd., 1939), p.84.
64. C.O. 111/664/14888 [1926], Minute by W. Ormsby-Gore, 30 June 1926.
65. *Ibid.* Some argued that British Guiana was not even known in Britain. The following exchange between Francis Dias, a Member of the Court of Policy, and Governor Collet, in November 1921, is most revealing:
- DIAS: You know that they don't know us, and they don't care about us.
 COLLET: Who don't?
 DIAS: The people of England.
 COLLET: The people in England know more about you than you imagine.
 Mr Dias replied that he travelled with a public officer who was coming out. The officer went to the Colonial Office, asked for some literature relative to British Guiana, and was given something about British New Guinea. His Excellency said that 'The Times' newspaper thought of British Guiana and New Guinea as the same place. - *The Daily Argosy*, 1 December 1921.
66. C.O. 111/652, Thomson to Masterton-Smith, private, 6 February 1924.
67. *Ibid.*, Grindle to Thomson, private, 8 April 1924.
68. *The West India Committee Circular*, 4 September 1919.
69. Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in Guyana* (London: The Author, 1970 [1950]), p.236.
70. C.O. 111/689/75141 [1930], C.F. Andrews, 'Impressions of British Guiana', (mimeo), pp.51,54.

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Re researching the history of the Indians in British Guiana is a difficult, often frustrating, undertaking. The historical tradition does not run very deep; the work of historians is still considered odd, a rather dubious profession for men in particular. It requires 'an aristocracy of will', to use Lamming's phrase, to carry on: appreciation of the historian's efforts does not come easily; if at all.

But there are other problems. The records of the sugar plantations could not be located in Guyana, or in Britain. Lord Campbell of Eskan (formerly Sir Jock Campbell, chairman of Booker Bros., McConnell and Co., the largest owner of sugar estates in British Guiana) has told this author that the files of the Company, as well as those of Curtis Campbell and Co., going back to the nineteenth century, were completely destroyed in the bombing of London, during the last War. The microfilms of those documents, which were kept in Liverpool, were destroyed when that city also was bombed. Meanwhile, a fire in Georgetown, on 23 February 1945, consumed the Company's records in British Guiana; the great collection of the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society, also, was destroyed.

Unfortunately, prominent Indians in the colony in the 1920s and beyond, did not collect their papers in a systematic manner; and the massive flight of middle class families from Guyana since the 1970s, as a result of the post-colonial decay, has resulted in the loss of even fortuitous documents which had survived the indifference, and the remorseless tropical humidity. The few issues of *Indian Opinion*, which appeared irregularly from around 1917 (edited by Joseph Ruhoman), could not be located in Georgetown, or at the British Library (Newspaper Archives, Colindale); inquiries of potential private sources were equally unfruitful. A typical example of the void, which the historian of Indian affairs encounters, is the case of J.A. Luckhoo, the first Indian legislator and president of the British Guiana East Indian Association: his daughter told this author that she burnt his papers, which cluttered the small house into which she moved, on her retirement. A diary which he kept on his visits to India in 1919-1920 and 1923-1924, in connection with the aborted Colonisation Scheme, survives. Painfully, one hears constantly that papers were burnt because they were a haven for rats or other predators — old, smelly things of use to no one; and no efforts were made by local archivists to rescue valuable documents. (A notable exception were the efforts of the late Joel Benjamin of the University of Guyana; these, sadly, came too late).

However, the Colonial Office files at the Public Record Office (Kew, London) yielded vital information; as did some documents at the India Office Library and Records (I.O.L.). (Most of the responses of the India Office to issues relating to Indians in British Guiana are included in the C.O. 111 series at the P.R.O., and are not cited in this study). But the *District Gazetteers of the United Provinces*, *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, and the *Census Reports of India* were consulted at the I.O.L., the only repository in London where these useful documents were located. Several rare pamphlets and many official or semi-official reports were utilised at the Caribbean Research Library (University of Guyana), The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Library (the former Colonial Office Library, London), and the Royal Commonwealth Society Library (London). The British Library (Bloomsbury), the National Library (Georgetown), and the C.R.L. (University of Guyana) are the main repositories of rare, 19th century books on British Guiana. The British Library yielded numerous texts on India which helped to shape this author's appreciation of the complex background of the Indians in British Guiana. *Timehri*, the journal of the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society of British Guiana, which appeared irregularly between 1882 and 1967, was studied very intensively at the British Library and the National Library (Georgetown). This is a journal of high pedigree, on virtually every aspect of Guianese history; it had no parallel in the Anglophone Caribbean before the Second World War; it is indispensable. *The Journal of the Board of Agriculture of British Guiana* (1907/1908-1927) and *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana* (1928-1939), published by the Department of Agriculture, are rich sources of technical articles on agriculture in the colony. Four seminal articles by Dr George Giglioli, on malaria, appeared in the latter in 1938-1939. (A complete set of these too quarterly journals is at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Library).

Local newspapers — *The Daily Argosy*, *The Daily Chronicle*, *The New Daily Chronicle* — as well as *The West India Committee Circular*, the weekly paper of the sugar companies in Britain, were utilised most rigorously at the British Library (Colindale). It was a monumental, frequently painful, project: every issue of these Guianese newspapers, available for the 1919-1929 period, was consulted, on microfilm. But it was most rewarding: colonial British Guiana had a free press; no authority, however mighty, was sacrosanct, as some of the quotes in this study reveal. Much work was also done at the University of the West Indies Library, St. Augustine, Trinidad, and the Library of the University of Warwick. Numerous articles in obscure, defunct journals were procured through Inter-library Loans at Warwick.

This author is deeply rooted in the folk tradition of the Indians in Guyana: this study has been profoundly influenced by this. The oral recollections of several older Indians were used primarily to capture the temper of the time; these were essentially corroborative of the findings sculpted by this researcher's reading of the printed sources. But a more systematic recording and utilisation of these rich, but rapidly disappearing, sources of oral history is highly recommended. No money is available for such a project.

Another potentially rewarding source in Indo-Caribbean historiography are the records of the Presbyterian Church of Canada, which are available at Knox College, University of Toronto. This researcher failed to get any funds to consult these documents.

The distinction between primary and secondary sources is sometimes a delicate matter, treated idiosyncratically, and somewhat arbitrarily. The scientific articles in the *Journal of the Board of Agriculture of British Guiana* and *The Agricultural Journal of British Guiana*, for example, constitute primary sources; so do several articles in *Timehri*. An effort has been made to simplify this bibliography: these are listed as secondary sources. The excellent pamphlet by Guyanese historian, Mary Noel Menezes, *A Guide to Historical Research* (Georgetown: University of Guyana, 1978), and the format of the bibliography in her *British Policy towards the Amerindians in British Guiana, 1803-1873* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), are thorough, professional achievements: they epitomise the discipline, sense of order, and intellectual honesty of this fine scholar. This researcher could only try to emulate Sister Menezes; her example has been an inspiration.

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