



**WHY SHOULD WE BE  
CALLED 'COOLIES'?**

**THE END OF INDIAN INDENTURED LABOUR**

Radica Mahase



## WHY SHOULD WE BE CALLED ‘COOLIES’?

A wide ranging study of the Indian indenture system from its early beginnings to its end in the early twentieth century that shows the complex and contested nature of the Indian indenture experience in all its multifaceted details.

PROFESSOR BRIJ V. LAL  
The Australian National University

The text represents years of work in India, the United Kingdom, Oceania and the Caribbean, weaving a major chapter in plantation studies.

PROFESSOR BRINSLEY SAMAROO  
Professor Emeritus, University of the  
West Indies, St. Augustine

Dr. Radica Mahase's study offers a brilliant and comprehensive account of the abolition of Indentured labour system. Her effort is indeed commendable as she critically explores the whole subject of migration of indentured from India to British colonies in Caribbean and Indian Ocean, and also the final termination of this system in 1920.

PROFESSOR KUNDAN TUTEJA  
Professor Emeritus, Kurukshetra University

What are the dynamics of the abolition of the Indian indentureship system? Why was it ended? Who were the main players in the final end of the labour scheme? Were Indian labourers and/or the Indian middle classes actively involved in the processes leading towards complete abolition? This book examines the end of a labour system which lasted from 1838 until 1920 in various territories throughout the British Empire. It looks at methods of agitations which had their genesis in the territories of the Indian Ocean and compare/contrast these with those of other territories such as the British West Indies.

The volume provides a comparative study of the abolition of the Indian indentureship system and shows the global interconnectedness of abolition, with a strong subaltern focus.

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# Why Should We Be Called 'Coolies'?

*The End of Indian Indentured Labour*

RADICA MAHASE

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MANOHAR

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MANOHAR

To my Parents

BOYSIE and SATBHAM MAHASE

For teaching me to cherish, respect and understand my  
Indo-Trinbagonian heritage. For teaching me everything.

For the younger generation

VANDANI, RAHUL, MAYA, VAANI, VALINI,  
VARUNE, CRYSTAL and LISA

May you appreciate, understand and cherish your History.  
You're my hope for the future



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## Preface

We came to Dem'ra,  
With the name 'coolie',  
Why should we be called coolies,  
We who were born in the clans and families of seers and saints.

(Protests Songs of East Indians in British Guiana)

The bulk of the research for this book was completed for my doctoral thesis. I am eternally grateful to my supervisors Prof. Kundan Tuteja and Prof. Brinsley Samaroo who helped me to conceptualize my research and guided me throughout the years. They both believed in my academic capabilities and after all these years they have continued to act as my gurus, always encouraging and inspiring me.

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A special thank you to those friends who constantly encouraged and motivated me to complete this manuscript – Dr. Jerome Teelucksingh, Dr. Laura Carballido-Coria, Dr. Sharon Pillai, Sofia Papoutsis, Kevin Baldeosingh, Karishma Nanhu and Rishi Ramcharan.

My family as usual, especially my sister Devika, has supported me throughout every endeavour – they alone know what sacrifices had to be made and words cannot express my appreciation for them.

RADICA MAHASE

## Introduction

I was standing on the bridge when the clock in the marketplace struck seven. From nowhere, two Muslim men, with feminine faces, approached me. I guessed they were money-minded and wicked men. Yet they were well dressed and looked like gentlemen, so I wished them '*Salam-ala-chum*'....' Are you interested in doing a job? One of them asked. 'What kind of job?' I inquired. 'A government job', one said and then asked me if I had any education. I told them that I had passed middle school. They responded happily and said that I could be a *Sardar*.... Such sugary talk swept me off my feet and I forgot everything: my family, my country and myself.<sup>1</sup>

In 1898, the year that the above scene took place, when Munshi Rahman Khan was approached by the arkatias, 1,390 labourers emigrated to Natal and 567 went to Fiji, while 618 crossed the Kala Pani bound for the Dutch colony of Suriname, 1,268 went to Trinidad and 2,380 left for British Guiana. Munshi Rahman Khan was just one out of 6,223 labourers who emigrated from India to territories in other parts of the world in 1898.<sup>2</sup> In fact, in 1907, almost ten years after Munshiji had settled in the colony, the Indian population in British Guiana was 127,000; in Trinidad it was 103,000; in Mauritius it was 264,000, in Natal it was 115,000 while there were 13,000 Indians in Jamaica and 31,000 in Fiji.<sup>3</sup>

By 1901, when Munshiji became a *Sardar* on the Skerpi plantation in Suriname, the roots of an anti-indenture agitation movement had already been planted in India. Activists in India were attempting to discourage individuals from registering for the system in the districts of recruitment, while Indians from the

middle class were protesting against racial discrimination in South Africa. Fifteen years later, when Munshiji had established himself as a landowner and was able to help his sons to purchase land so that they could settle down as independent cultivators, the 'abolish indenture' movement had been firmly established by Indian nationalists in India. In fact, only two years later, in 1917, Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy of India, announced that

No native of India shall depart by sea out of British India for the purpose of or with the intention of labouring for hire in any country beyond the limits of India, provided that the prohibition imposed by this rule shall not extend to any person or class of persons permitted so to depart by general or special license granted by such authority as the Governor General may appoint on this behalf.<sup>4</sup>

Lord Hardinge's announcement was the culmination of the concerted effort of different individuals and groups which transcended caste and class; which questioned a labour scheme that was developed to facilitate the benefit of British sugar planters in various parts of the world. It encompassed those who had been indentured and completed/survived the system, those who were against the system in principle and those who engaged in power struggles with the colonizers. Though the key players had separate and distinct agendas, their reactions against the labour scheme came together, probably unintentionally, to lead to the final and complete abolition of the indentureship system.

Abolition did not occur because British planters in sugar-producing colonies were inundated with labourers. This was far from the truth, as planters in colonies such as Fiji, Trinidad and British Guiana as well as the Dutch colony of Suriname continued to requisition labourers straight until 1917, the year when the last 'coolie' ships left the port of Calcutta. Planters from some of the British West Indian colonies even petitioned the Government of India after the system was ended, asking for another scheme to be implemented in the absence of indentureship.

The termination of the labour system was not an overnight occurrence, neither was it an easy feat. It was a process which occurred over a period of time and was due to a variety of factors.

It was the culmination of an intense agitation movement which grew out of Natal and later spread to Mauritius, Fiji and India. This anti-indenture campaign which emerged and steadily increased began as a humanitarian one and rapidly changed to become anti-colonial and anti-imperial in nature. In its later stages, organized agitation was mainly geared towards highlighting the ineffectiveness of British colonial rule and justifying the call for *swaraj*. The concerns for the labourers, that is, the humanitarian aspects, were visible in the early days of the campaign but later on, there was a focus on the inhuman aspects of the system so as to facilitate middle-class agenda in India.

To some extent, the Indian nationalist campaign was aided by the resistance against the system which occurred from within the Indian population in the colonies where indentureship existed. In some cases, the Indian middle classes in these territories used the issues of the labourers as well as their protests (when these occurred) to draw attention to their situation and the conditions under which they were indentured. The labourers themselves also agitated against everyday conditions but they hardly ever called for a complete end to indentureship, and when they did their voices were often subsumed. Those labourers whose contracts had terminated and those Indians who emigrated as freed persons – as both labourers and professionals – added a voice to the anti-indenture campaign but they did not expressively call for the end of the indentureship system *per se*. They agitated for improvements in their daily conditions and protested against their low status in the respective colonies, especially in Natal, Mauritius and Fiji. In addition to this, individuals and groups emerged in the districts of India where labourers were recruited. There, they made a concerted effort to prevent labourers from registering for, and leaving under the indentureship scheme. Thus, abolition came about due to the combined efforts of the labourers, individuals and organizations in the districts and the rigid campaign against the system which was waged by the Indian middle classes in the various territories.

The abolition of the Indian indentureship system was trans-continental in nature. The modern indentured labour system

took shape and form in the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean was the epicentre of migration of indentured labourers and more indentured labourers went to the territories of the Indian Ocean; probably the reason why the seeds of abolition ultimately forms in the Indian Ocean. However, events which developed in the Indian Ocean impacted indentured labourers in the British West Indies and elsewhere. Spates of resistance and contestations in the British West Indies were in turn used by agitators in India to consolidate their position regarding the emigration of Indian labourers to foreign territories. Additionally, there was a regular flow of information from the Indian Ocean territories to India and vice versa. As such, abolition was global in nature; it was not geographically-controlled. In fact, a strong pan-regional, pan-continental perspective is visible, with clear linkages between the various labour-importing territories.

There was also a distinct 'subaltern' component in the abolition process. The labourers in the various Indian Ocean and British West Indian territories impacted on the final abolition process in different ways. In the British West Indies their experiences of indentureship led to their contestation to daily conditions as visible in individual and group protests, petitions etc. In the territories of the Indian Ocean they voiced their grievances at mass meetings, petitioned to the colonial governments and protested against their everyday conditions like their counterparts in the British West Indies. In Mauritius, for example, the 'old immigrants', i.e. those who had completed their contracts, played a strong role in questioning the system. In some instances, labourers who completed their contracts and fulfilled all obligations, returned to India and exposed the adverse conditions of the indentureship system. Issues such as impoverishment, cruel treatment, sexual abuse of female indentured labourers, lack of payment of wages and so on, were openly discussed, letters were written to the Protector of Emigrants in Calcutta and petitions were sent to the Government of India.

In 1914, the recruitment of labourers in India for the Indian indentureship system in various territories had been suspended for the period of First World War. This was due partly to the fact

that the ships belonging to James Nourse Ltd. were contracted to transport labourers from Calcutta to the British West Indian colonies and the territories of the Indian Ocean were requisitioned by the British Admiralty. Additionally, the seas were simply unsafe for the 'coolie' ships, given the constant bombings of sea vessels during the war. Consequently, it was simply too risky to transport this human cargo. Once the shipping of labourers stopped during the war, individuals and groups who were agitating against the labour system were hopeful that the scheme would discontinue after the war ended. Thus, Viceroy Hardinge's announcement was received with much celebration by the agitators.

Interestingly, the Viceroy's announcement prohibited the recruitment and transportation of Indian labourers under the indentureship scheme but at the same time the system itself was not completely abolished. The announcement simply meant that no more labourers would be taken to the various colonies to work as contract labourers. The complete termination of the system happened only on 1 January 1920 when all contractual obligations of all labourers were terminated. It was only then that the Indian indentureship system ceased to exist completely in Jamaica, Trinidad, British Guiana, Fiji, and the Dutch colony of Suriname. The system which led to Munshiji's transportation and relocation from a territory more than 10,000 miles away from his home had now completely ended.

This book examines the historical process leading to the final abolition of Indian indentured labour. It is placed within the wider context of imperialism, anti-colonialism and nationalism. As such, it starts with the genesis and growth of the system under a British imperialist structure. This is followed by an investigation of the character of resistance which occurred – against British imperialism and colonialism in general, and specifically against the Indian indentureship system. It examines the nature of interaction which occurred between Britain and her colonies and discusses the role of the indentured labourers and the Indian middle class in bringing about an end to the system. It focuses on internal contradictions which came to the fore during the indentureship period and shows that some forms of protests, such as those of the

indentured labourers were actually visible throughout the entire indentureship period. However, other more organized movements were visible from the 1870s onwards and increased in importance with the emergence of the twentieth century.

Chapter 1 is a background chapter, setting the context for the abolition of the labour system. It examines the nature of British imperialist policies in India and discusses notions of colonialism and economic exploitation. It shows that a cheap source of labour was valuable within the imperialist framework, especially if this labour could be transported from one part of the Empire to another. As British colonial rule in India led to the intensification of poverty, Indian labourers from the regions affected by British economic exploitation sought alternative methods of earning an income and some made the decision to emigrate within India and to foreign colonies as contract labourers.

Chapter 2 examines the logistics of the indentureship system within an imperialist context. It shows the ideal theoretical situation as one whereby a scheme was developed to facilitate the transfer of labour from India to the Indian Ocean and the British West Indies, from which Britain could benefit economically. Thus, a system of contract labour was established with polices and regulations implemented to ensure that the system functioned as efficiently as possible in order to guarantee a continuous supply of labour. The regulations imposed were also meant to ensure that everyone who was involved in the scheme would benefit from it. However, this was not always the case and this resulted in conflict amongst the parties involved in the scheme, eventually setting the stage for the final abolition of the system.

Chapter 3 investigates the ways in which domination was contested in the everyday life of the indentured labourers in various colonies. It looks at the extent to which various forms of agitation by the labourers led to immediate changes in the system. It positions the Indian indentured labourers as dynamic participants in the contestation of the system. Although the agitation of Indians labourers was not sufficient to compel the British imperial government to terminate the system, it contributed towards the general

inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the scheme and was therefore significant in manipulating the manner in which the imperialists came to look at the emigration issue. It compares the contestations to the labour scheme which occurred in territories of the Indian Ocean and the British West Indies and accounts for the differences in agitation by the labourers themselves in these various territories.

Chapter 4 discusses the protests by the Indian middle classes in the labour-importing colonies. Groups of Indian middle class in Natal, Mauritius and Fiji and the British West Indies were actively involved in open criticisms against the system. They protested at various levels against the inhumane conditions of the labourers and their protests were instrumental in drawing the attention of the British imperial government to the daily conditions of indentured labourers and free Indians. Their protests were also influential in the colonial policy-making process. The Indian middle class in the British West Indies, Fiji, Mauritius and Natal were certainly not homogeneous groups and as such, the middle-class experience differed according to the territory and the composition of the groups, as well as the ways in which they identified themselves and their relationships with India, the 'Mother Country'.

Chapter 5 analyses the strong wave of agitation that emerged in India, the 'Mother Country'. At one level, it looks at the attempts made at a district level to stop the emigration of Indians. At another level, criticism of Indian emigration to foreign territories in general and the indentureship system specifically came from Indian nationalists in India. The Indian nationalists emphasized the inferior status of Indians within the British Empire and their protests were part of the struggle against British rule and colonialism in India. This agitation created a framework whereby colonialism was challenged and the mass emigration of Indians, as part of this colonial framework was also contested. This chapter assesses the extent to which agitation in India presented a threat to the continuation of Indian emigration and evaluates the extent to which this agitation hindered the smooth operation of the scheme and forced the colonial authorities to implement structural changes in the system.

Chapter 6 shows the extent to which issues in the various colonies impacted on the policy-making process of the British Imperial Government and the Government of India. The questions raised by those who were questioning the system or agitating for the end of the scheme influenced the attitude of the colonial authorities. This chapter analyses the interaction that occurred amongst the Colonial Office, the Government of India and the colonies which imported indentured labourers. It also discusses the extent to which certain issues influenced changes in the logistics of the indenture-ship system and threatened the British imperialist framework. It raises the question of India's role in protecting Indian indentured labourers and India's interaction with the British Imperial Government in that progress towards the final termination of the labour scheme.

This book draws heavily on a wide variety of sources from various geographical areas such as the Caribbean, Mauritius, India and the United Kingdom. Given the gaps in the existing historiography, it relied almost extensively on primary sources. Sources include but are not limited to documents generated by the colonial authorities in various territories; newspapers and gazetteers in India, Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad and British Guiana; private papers of various individuals and organizations; interviews with indentured labourers as well as oral tradition.

## Historiography

There is a very rich, formidable compilation of writings on various aspects of the Indian indentureship system. Writings on the indentureship system started as early as the 1930s in the form of letter to editors in territorial newspapers emphasizing various aspects of the labour scheme. These became more formalized from the 1950s onwards with the proliferation of articles and books. The existing historiography has touched on various aspects of imperialism, Indian emigration, the structure of the system, settlement in the different colonies and other themes dealt with in this book. The available literature is quite rich and comprehensive for some themes while it is still evolving for others.

First, there is a body of writing which examines indentureship at a global level. These located indentureship as one labour scheme within the wider context of imperialism and have given a global perspective of indentured labour. This literature deals with British imperialism and the way in which it has influenced or instigated the movement of people from one area to another. Works of David Northrup, Hugh Tinker, Eric Hobsbawm and Sabyasachi Bhattacharya opened up discussions on this topic<sup>5</sup> with writings which focused on one aspect or another of various labour systems within the imperialist structure, or as a substratum of imperialism and/or colonialism. The focus has been on the system as one part of a wider framework.

Northrup's work, *Indentured Labour in the Age of Imperialism 1834-1922*, is one of the most comprehensive attempts to locate indentureship within the wider context of imperialism and global developments. It gives an overview/comparative study of indentured labour from Asia, Africa and the Pacific Islands.<sup>6</sup> Northrup looks at various levels of contract labour and links indentured labour to 'new imperialism.' He shows the way in which capital investment, new technologies and an interest in colonial acquisitions influenced the demand for indentured labour in various parts of the world.

On another level, Hugh Tinker's, *A New System of Slavery* looks partially at both the way in which the labour scheme operated within the global system of labour as well as the dynamics of the structure of the system itself. Tinker's work is probably the most comprehensive account of the structure of indentureship as a labour system. In his in-depth analysis, he has shown the limitations in the system and the similarities it exhibited in relation to African enslavement. Tinker emphasized the difference between the theoretical basis of the labour scheme and showed that the reality of the system far surpassed the way in which the imperial authorities deemed it worked.

In a seminal article entitled, 'Labour Forms and International Labour Flows in the Context of North-South Relationships: An Overview' Sabyasachi Bhattacharya has shown how British imperialist policies in India created the situation whereby Indian

labourers saw the indentureship system as a viable economic option. Indentured labour was located within the entire context of British imperial policies. Agency is placed on the hands of the British who created the indentureship system and who created the situations in the villages and districts of India that would act as a feeder for the system. Thus, British policies in India created a large impoverished population which sought an outlet from poverty and which provided the labourers necessary to fulfil the wants of British planters.

Second, there is a substantial body of literature on indentureship pertaining to specific labour-importing territories. These have shown a tendency towards the examination of the socio-economic aspects of the system, culture, legislation, economics and politics. Topics such as cultural transplantation, gender issues and economic and socio-political contributions of the labourers have been dealt with by various historians over the years. While there is a distinct body of historical research on various aspects of the labour scheme in the Caribbean, there is a discrepancy, as the bulk of the work exists on Trinidad and Guyana (British Guiana), while some of the smaller islands have been missing in the existing literature. Historians such as Brinsley Samaroo, K.O. Laurence, Verene Shepherd, Walton Look Lai, Rhoda Reddock, Maurits Hassankhan, Lomarsh Roonarine and Bridget Brereton have examined various aspects of the system<sup>7</sup> such as the structure of the indentureship system and the settlement of Indians in the colonies; comparisons of Indian indentureship and African enslavement; settlement and contribution of the Indians; the transportation of an Indian cultural heritage and the manner in which this has shaped the Caribbean countries. K.O. Laurence's *A Question of Labour: Indentured Immigration into Trinidad and British Guiana 1875-1917* is one of the most distinctive work on indentureship, coming out of the Caribbean. Laurence focused on the structure of the labour scheme from time of recruitment to settlement in the colonies. He gives a clinical discussion of the manner in which the system was structured and administered in the colony and the impact of indentureship on the colonies with

a focus on the negotiations amongst colonial authorities in British Guiana, Trinidad and England. He links indentured labour to sugar production and relies heavily on colonial record-keeping to give a statistical tabulation of the system.

For Fiji, the historiography of indentureship has been dominated by the writings of historians such as Brij Lal, John D. Kelly and K.L. Gillion. John D. Kelly's *A Politics of Virtue: Hinduism, Sexuality, and Countercolonial Discourse in Fiji* focuses on the political conflicts amongst Hindus in Fiji starting with the indentureship period and then the post-indentureship era. Kelly focused on sexuality and the role it played in the abolition of Indian indentured labour in 1919. He has emphasized cases of violence towards female indentured labourers in Fiji as one aspect of the control and subordination of Indian labourers. More importantly though, is his discussion of the manner in which issues of violence towards Fiji's female indentured labourers were projected in the discourse leading towards the end of the indentureship system. Also important to note is K.L. Gillion's *Fiji's Indian Migrants: A History to the End of Indenture in 1920* which discusses various aspects of Indian settlement in Fiji. Gillion analysed some of the main issues that were incorporated in the abolition campaigns and focuses on changes in Fiji.<sup>8</sup> Brij Lal's various works such as *Chalo Jahaji: On a Journey Through Indenture in Fiji* and *Bittersweet: The Indo-Fijian Experience*, as well as other books and numerous articles, provided a comprehensive investigation into different issues pertaining to indentureship in that territory on the whole. Writing on a variety of topics, Lal has clinically discussed indentureship and the Indian diaspora in Fiji through an analysis of the system as it existed, impact on the Fiji socio-economic structure as well as culture and politics.

The historiography for Mauritius was initially dominated by Marina Carter. Carter's main works include *Voices from Indenture: Experiences of Indian Migrants in the British Empire*; *Servants, Sirdars and Settlers: Indians in Mauritius* and *Lakshmi's Legacy: Testimonies of Indian Women in 19th Century Mauritius*.<sup>9</sup> Using a variety of sources Carter has been able to bring out the voices of

the subalterns in her works, providing details into the workings of a colonial labour scheme by often analysing indentureship from the labourers' perspective.

Regarding South Africa, there have been some general studies on Indian indentureship which analysed various aspects of the system such as structure, penal codes, repatriation and discrimination. In fact, a substantial part of the existing historiography for South Africa deals with discrimination against both free and indentured Indians. Another substantial part focuses on Gandhi and his attempts to end discriminations against Indians and Asiatics in general in that territory. Earlier seminal studies such as G.H. Calpin's *Indians in South Africa*, P.S. Joshi's *The Tyranny of Colour: A Study of the Indian Problem in South Africa* and Fatima Meer's *Portrait of Indian South Africans* provide the basis for further works on Indians and indentureship in South Africa.<sup>10</sup> More recent studies have attempted to focus on newer themes and to give Indian indentured labourers agency in the wider colonial discourse.

In the case of Suriname, there has been an upsurge in writings on Indian indentured labourers in recent times. The existing historiography has been deeply enriched by writings from Maurits Hassankhan, Mohan Gautam and other researchers writing on various aspects of indentureship and Indians in Suriname. These range from the only published autobiography of an Indian indentured labourer, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer (1874-1972)* written by Munshi Rahman Khan<sup>11</sup> to more recent edited volumes by Hassankhan containing essays on a variety of topics on the Indian Diaspora in Suriname.<sup>12</sup>

Third, the literature pertaining to underlying themes which forms the basis of this research, such as resistance and abolition, is more limited as compared to literature on general aspects of the indentureship system or even territory-specific writings. In the first instance, resistance by Indian indentured labourers is one component of the indentureship system which has so far been neglected in the broad field of labour history. Unfortunately, the existing historiography has neglected the impact of resistance of indentured labourers on the policy-making process of the British

Imperial Government. The Government of India's reaction to this type of resistance has also been underdeveloped. Furthermore, there has been an inclination towards the categorization of methods of resistance into active and passive resistance.<sup>13</sup> Most of the writings have focused more in the manner in and extent to which the labourers were controlled within the plantation system. This is evident in the works of Lomarsh Roopnarine and Kusha Harak-singh, for example; both authors examined the ways in which labourers were controlled and also discussed cultural resistance by the labourers.<sup>14</sup> Other writers such as Frank Birbalsingh and Basdeo Mangru have discussed topics such as the marginalization of Indians in Trinidad and Guyana (British Guiana); the suppressed socio-economic positions of Indians in these territories, especially in the post-colonial period; strikes and disturbances by the labourers on the estates; the 'hardships' which the labourers suffered and the extent to which they existed in depressed conditions.<sup>15</sup> The impact of labourers' resistance on the actual labour system and in the process leading towards the final abolition of the scheme is missing from the historiography on resistance.

Sadly, the historiography on the abolition of the labour system is limited to a few studies or based on specific territories. Hugh Tinker in *A New System of Slavery*, analyses the manner in which the system was questioned but at the same time has overlooked the impact of the labourers themselves in questioning the system as well as the movement towards abolition in Fiji, Mauritius and the British West Indies.<sup>16</sup> Tinker looked at the high politics of abolition – by the Indian nationalists and British officials and interest groups. While this research provides a comprehensive study of agitation in India, it deals mainly with the manner in which the system was questioned by colonial officers in India and only briefly mentions the movements which developed at a district level. K.O. Laurence in *A Question of Labour*, briefly discusses the end of the system with emphasis on the role of the planter class as well as the British Imperial Government. Laurence noted that 'it was in India itself that a movement was to arise which would grow powerful enough to force the abolition of indentured immigration'.<sup>17</sup> Laurence dealt mainly with Gopal Krishna Gokhale and the 'high

politics' of the Indian National Congress as well as the responses to the reports on Indian emigration. John D. Kelly's *A Politics of Virtue: Hinduism, Sexuality, and Countercolonial Discourse in Fiji* examines the manner in which sexual abuse of Indian women in Fiji became an important part of the discourse on the abolition of the system. K.L. Gillion's *Fiji's Indian Migrants: A History to the End of Indenture in 1920*, discusses some of the main issues that were incorporated in the abolition campaign and focuses on changes in Fiji.<sup>18</sup> Karen Ray discussed the final stages of the abolition process and tried to determine who should take the credit for the end of the system in *The Abolition of Indentured Emigration 1916-17: The Race for the Spoils*.<sup>19</sup>

It is important to note however, that the historiography of Indian indentured labour/the indentureship system is neither static nor dwindling. Over the past decade there have been new trends in the historiography and a proliferation of publications on Indian indentureship/Indian diaspora. There has been both new research and new information with a focus on comparative studies; Indian women and more gender-oriented studies as well as research that attempt to give a voice to the subalterns and give agency to the labourers themselves. There is a tendency towards more emotional accounts of indentureship as researchers/historians move away from the colonial written sources to other sources such as oral history, interviews with survivors and descendants of indentured labourers. An even more positive step forward would be the focus on comparative studies and studies that seek to clinically examine the combined experiences of the labourers from various territories in its totality rather than as individualized studies. There is also a need to focus on the ones who have been overlooked in historical writings such as children and the poor and destitute labourers.

#### NOTES

1. Munshi Rahman Khan, *An Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer (1874-1972)*, Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2005, p. 73.
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3. CD. 5192, 'Report of the Committee on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates.' Great Britain, 1910. West Indian and Special Collections Division, UWI Main Library, St. Augustine.
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