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A Journey Begins

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

Lord Salisbury

The need for dependable outside sources of labour supply arose soon after Fiji became a British colony in 1874. Five years later, Sir Arthur Gordon, the first substantive governor (1875-80), introduced Indian indentured labourers into Fiji. But even before annexation others had considered India as a source of labour. In 1861, Commodore Seymour, sent to Fiji to assist British Consul W.T. Pritchard to establish peace between warring Tongans and Fijians, had mentioned the possibility of using Indian labour,¹ while in 1867 the Henning brothers made further enquiries, followed three years later by the planter Nathaniel Chalmers who approached India directly.²

These proposals were ignored by the Indian government, which did not sanction the emigration of its subjects to countries with governments unrecognized by Great Britain.

A few years later, John Bates Thurston was prompted by the acute shortage of plantation labour to write directly to the Government of India on behalf of the Cakobau Government of which he was an official. He argued that in 1872 Fiji had a 'fully constituted government of European residents and native chiefs', which had been recognised by Britain and other European powers. The indigenous Fijians, he went on, 'had lately emerged from barbarism' and were showing a 'remarkably cordial' attitude to foreigners, hinting thereby at the preclusion of any ill-feeling or hostility by the Fijian people to Indian immigration. Thurston also assured the Indian government of fair and vigilant regulation of the proposed traffic.³

The Indian government turned down the proposal. A.O. Hume, the secretary to government, firmly declined the proposal at 'the present time', while J. Geoghegan, an experienced and respected official on Indian emigration, was equally unenthusiastic.⁴ The South Seas labour traffic had recently been the subject of widespread sensational publicity.

It was a well known though unwritten principle of the Indian government that the establishment of a Western type of government in the archipelago, preferably by Britain herself, would be the precondition for Indian emigration to Fiji. Moves had been afoot in Fiji since the late 1850s to have the country annexed to the British Empire, but these had proved unsuccessful on the grounds of economy and political expediency. However, the changing circumstances of the 1860s, such as European imperial rivalry, the arrival of increasing numbers of European, especially British, settlers in the Pacific and their involvement in the disreputable labour traffic, left Britain with little alternative but to accept the unconditional offer of cession made by Fijian high chiefs on 10 October 1874.⁵

Cession brought in its wake a host of difficulties. Apart from the fundamental problem of law and order which must confront any new government, the most immediate issue was economic solvency, made more acute by an unforeseen drop in revenues from native customs and taxes in 1875, and by the reduction in the initial repayable Imperial grant from £150,000 to £100,000. Gordon thus assumed power in a far from happy situation. He did not despair, though, and in a typically vigorous manner charted out the main areas of development. In an early address to the planters, he stated:

We want capital invested in the Colony; we want a cheap, abundant, and certain supply of labour; we want means of communication; we want justice to be readily and speedily administered; we want facilities for education; and lastly (though, perhaps, that interests me more nearly and especially than you), we want revenue.⁶

In the circumstances, neither labour nor capital was easily available. To attract capital, Gordon soon saw the need to look beyond the local planters, who were themselves caught in the grips of recession following the collapse of the cotton boom of the 1860s. As it happened, he invited the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR), an Australian enterprise, to extend its operations to Fiji, which it did in 1882, remaining there till 1973.⁷

The problem of labour supply proved less tractable. The two previous sources, Fijian and Pacific Island labour, were both placed in precarious circumstances, and neither could be expected to meet the needs of the rapid pace of projected economic development. The indigenous Fijian population was in a state of extreme distress. Some 40,000 of the estimated total population of 150,000 had already been killed by an epidemic of measles accidentally introduced by a visiting man-of-war from Sydney,⁸ and if the depredations of the labour-hungry planters went unchecked, Gordon thought, the Fijian people would face extinction. He wrote to Lord Carnarvon: 'If the Fijian population is ever permitted to sink from its present condition into that of a collection of migratory bands of hired labourers, all hope, not only of the improvement but the preservation of the race, must inevitably be abandoned'.⁹

Gordon was, perhaps more than most colonial governors of the 19th century, deeply sensitive about the plight of native peoples abruptly exposed to the challenge of Western civilisation, and suffering the consequences of the predatory habits of Europeans in pursuit of profit or glory. He wanted Britain to be able to point proudly to at least one colony where the subjects were treated justly. He therefore moved to create a system of 'indirect rule' which would shelter the Fijians from the competitive pressures of the modern world, and allow them to proceed at their own pace in their own surroundings under the paternalistic hand of the government. The basic features of that system are well known: prohibition of the sale of Fijian land, a practice rampant in the decade before; the preservation of traditional Fijian social structure in a rigidly codified and institutionalised form; and the introduction of a native taxation scheme designed to generate additional state revenue, while allowing the Fijians to meet the tax burden without recourse to plantation employment. This policy was vehemently opposed at the time by the

planters, who viewed the Fijians as being 'specially intended by Providence'¹⁰ to work for them. But Gordon held his ground, with the approval of the Colonial Office.

It might also be noted, however, that Fijian way of life was not suited to plantation employment, which offered little except 'paltry pay, indifferent fare, and frequently anything but mild treatment'.¹¹ In a long letter to the governor, the chiefs explained their opposition:

Regarding our people who engage their services to others, we do not dislike work for we know that idleness is not right. Employment is good to all men because by it their daily wants are satisfied. But what we most desire is that men should work for themselves in their several homes—that they should plant plenty; that they should build themselves good homes; that they be in a position to furnish themselves with household necessities; that their villages be kept clean and their houses in good repair; this is what we consider living in peace and prosperity. Our people are in many ways enticed and induced to go to work far away from their homes leaving their wives, their children, their relations and everything in their homes in a most bitter and pitiable condition—and it is the cause of the people being in a state of poverty and desolation—this compensation for services rendered by those engaged as labourers—the payment received whether it be in money or merchandise is quickly dissipated. If they remain at or near their homes and worked there, the benefits they would receive would be comparatively greater than those they receive by hiring themselves out to distant places as labourers.¹²

The other sources of labour for the Fiji plantations were the neighbouring Pacific islands of the New Hebrides, the Solomons and the Gilberts. The first labourers from these countries were introduced into Fiji in 1864, and by the end of the decade there were over a thousand of them in the group. This labour traffic was ostensibly well supervised and the rights of the labourers protected. The reality, however, was starkly different, at least in the early years. Abuse of the system abounded, and atrocities were perpetrated in the recruitment and transportation of the labourers. The curtailment of these had in fact been a strong motive for the annexation of Fiji by Great Britain. In addition, the Pacific Island labour supply was becoming 'eminently precarious' to use Gordon's words, because of the decline of native populations in the islands of recruitment, and increasingly intense competition from Queensland, Samoa and New Caledonia for labourers.¹³ Despite these difficulties, the colonial government persevered with procuring Pacific Islander labour, though with declining success. But, the nagging question of an assured and

sustained source of labour remained unresolved.

Other avenues would have to be explored. Gordon, with experience of Indian indentured labour in Trinidad and in Mauritius, where he had been governor before coming to Fiji, realised that he would have to turn to the 'super abundant population of India'. He had, perhaps, considered the introduction of Indians even before arriving in the colony; realities of the new situation may have merely reinforced his convictions. In his first address to the planters, Gordon outlined his scheme in considerable detail, discussing the advantages and disadvantages of introducing Indian indentured labour in the context of other topics.¹⁴ He asked the planters for their opinion and they, in response, expressed opposition. But Gordon's proposals were supported by the Colonial Office which was optimistic about the success of the proposed scheme in Fiji.¹⁵ With that support, Gordon authorised his Agent General of Immigration, Charles Mitchell, to arrange the details of immigration with the Government of India. The latter was normally inclined to leave emigration matters to the 'ordinary laws of supply and demand',¹⁶ though for the sake of formality it requested information on such subjects as the geographical and economic character of the colony, the conditions of employment and the structure and regulation of agencies responsible for matters relating to indentured emigration.

The requisite details were furnished in due course, and Mitchell explained the basic features of the intended immigration.¹⁷ The salary of the officers of the Immigration Department would be paid by the colonial government, and the cost of keeping the emigration depot in India, the recruiting of the *girimitiyas*, their transportation to Fiji and the return passage, would be borne by the employers and the colonial government. The employers would pay two-thirds of the total cost in the form of indenture fees, with the remaining third coming from government contribution. The indenture fee was to be fixed at a rate to provide for a 'fund in aid of return passages'. The fund would be used exclusively to meet the cost of repatriation of the labourers.

The indenture legislation provided that a term could only be extended for absence and desertion on the production of a magistrate's order. An employer wanting to recover lost work time due to a worker's absence was required to take the labourer to the Stipendiary Magistrate of his district who could extend the contract by the number of days the labourer had been absent. The labourers could re-indenture with the same or another employer, for which they were entitled to a sum of bounty money. Passes or Tickets-of-Absence were required if labourers wanted to leave the

plantation for a period of time. Without these, they could be arrested by their employers, overseers or the headman without warrant, while anyone else would require a warrant to make an arrest. In this respect, Fiji was different from Mauritius, British Guiana and Trinidad, where a policeman could, without a warrant, apprehend any indentured labourer without a ticket of leave.

Actual conditions of employment were stated on a form of agreement in English, Hindi (Devanagiri script), Urdu (Arabic script) and in Tamil and Telugu in the South, which the prospective girmitiyas were given by the recruiters in the districts of recruitment.¹⁸ These varied in some minor details over the years and between the different colonies. But all specified the type of work to be done, the number of hours of work required per day and remuneration for it, availability of accommodation and other facilities and, above all, the provision for an optional return passage back to India. Typical conditions offered to Fiji girmitiyas stated that their indenture of five years would begin on the day of their arrival in the colony. The girmitiyas would be required to do work related to cultivation or manufacture of the produce on any plantation in the colony. They would work nine hours on each week day and five on Saturdays; Sundays and public holidays were free. Monthly or daily wages and task-work rates were specified. For time-work, each adult male was to be paid 'not less than one shilling' and every adult female 'not less than nine pence', while children were to be paid proportionately to the amount of work done. The same rates applied to task-work, a male's task being defined as six hours of steady work and a female's four-and-a-half.

The regulations stipulated that an employer could allot only one task per day but if, by mutual agreement, the labourers performed extra work, they were to be paid an additional amount. The girmitiyas were to receive rations from their employers during their first six months on the plantation according to the scale prescribed by the government at a daily cost of four pence. Children between five and 12 years of age were eligible for half the rations free of cost, and those under five for nine *chittacks* of free milk daily during their first year on the plantations. Suitable housing was to be provided free of rent to those under indenture and the ill were to receive free hospital accommodation, medical attendance, medicine and food. A girmitiya could return to India at his or her own expense at the end of five years' indenture. At the end of a further five years of 'industrial residence', he was entitled to a free return passage provided he claimed this right before the end of 12 years of residence in the colony. Children who had come with their indentured parents could claim the right of free passage

before they reached the age of 24 years, whilst those born in Fiji were entitled to free repatriation until the age of 12 provided they were accompanied by their parents or guardians.

The Fiji Emigration Agent in Calcutta began recruiting in late 1878.¹⁹ He licensed 37 recruiters to procure the 400 adults requested by Fiji. Two of the recruiters' licences were subsequently cancelled for fraud. Altogether 650 recruits were collected 'up country'. After registration at the sub-depots, they were dispatched to Calcutta, but by the time the contingent was admitted to the main depot at Garden Reach, the number of recruits had been reduced to 597. Some had changed their minds and opted out or withdrawn because their families had been rejected, but the majority were rejected because they were declared unfit for manual labour. In the depot itself during the waiting period before embarkation, further reductions took place: some died from cholera and smallpox and quite a few were transferred to other depots. When the *Leonidas*, the first immigrant ship, cleared port on 4 March 1879, there were 498 people on board: 273 men, 146 women, 47 boys and 32 girls.

In the beginning the Fiji planters showed little enthusiasm for the Indian indentured labourers. Possibly their negative reaction was due to the extra cost of Indian labour,²⁰ but perhaps they were also protesting against Gordon's policy of prohibiting the commercial employment of Fijian labour. Only one planter, J. Hill of Rabi, offered to take 52 men, 25 women and 29 children from the first batch which had arrived in the *Leonidas*; the rest were reluctantly employed by the government on public works and other miscellaneous jobs.²¹ But the planters could not hold out for long. When they saw the Indians performing impressively on coffee plantations in Rewa in November 1879 they applied for an immediate allotment. Later, as the supply of Polynesian labour became increasingly less certain, the planters expressed greater appreciation of Indian labour. One planter, writing in the *Fiji Times* in 1885, noted:

It is upon the Indian labour that the future of Fiji depends; for the Fijians have become so utterly demoralised by the mistaken policy of the Government that many of the larger planters have no Fijian labour, and others are only waiting for existing agreements to expire and will have no more. The supply from Polynesia is gradually ceasing, and therefore, we have nothing but the Indian labour to depend upon, and it is undoubtedly the best in Fiji. Seeing that it is our only source of labour we must take it with the conditions imposed.²²

They did. And in time, Indian indentured labour not only helped create

the modern cash economy which the colonial government so desperately needed, but also shielded the indigenous Fijians from some of the harsher aspects of the process of modernisation, enabling them to adapt to the new world at their own pace.

Fiji was the last major sugar colony to import Indian indentured labour, and in 1879 the indenture system had been in existence for some 45 years. It is to the origins of that indentured journey that we should now turn. Indian indentured emigration was begun in direct response to the shortage of labour in the 'King Sugar' colonies caused by the abolition of slavery in 1834, and by the termination of the system of apprenticeship for six years under which, until 1838, the planters had been able to obtain 'free' labour. Once liberated, the former slaves shunned plantation work, even on much better terms. The memory of the relentless pace of work under harsh discipline, usually for a pittance, killed any desire for re-employment.²³ The apprenticeship system, which had been hastily devised to cope with the problem of the sudden emancipation of the slaves, failed largely because of its inherent contradictions and paradoxes.²⁴

Rapidly declining production of sugar caused by the precarious nature of the labour supply prompted the planters to look elsewhere. A number of smaller West Indian colonies looked to Europe, Africa and China,²⁵ but eventually, following Mauritius, they turned to India. Mauritius had been enjoying moderate success with Indian labourers imported on a simple contract since 1834. The tentative venture proved highly successful, and indentured emigration was put on a firmer footing. By the end of 1839, over 25,000 Indians had entered Mauritius.²⁶ Other colonies followed suit, as is indicated in Table 1.²⁷ By the time indentured emigration was finally abolished in 1917, over one million indentured labourers from India had been transported across the seas.

For the better part of the first decade of indentured emigration, the laws of supply and demand governed recruitment. The planters obtained their labourers through European firms based in Calcutta and nearby areas, and also through their own agents. However, it was not long before the more vigilant officials in India began to suspect irregularities in emigration procedures. Their doubts were increased by well-publicised reports of neglect and ill-treatment of labourers on four successive ships to Mauritius, all of which were ill-equipped and poorly supervised. In response to these criticisms, as well as to provide a semblance of legal supervision of indentured emigration, the Government of India directed the Indian Law Commissioners to draw up proposals regulating indenture. These were incorporated in Act V of 1837,²⁸ which provided, among other things, for

greater control of recruitment at all levels in India, the specification of wages, and stipulation of the nature of employment and the period of service in the contract. Recruiters obtaining labourers through 'fraudulent means' stood to be fined up to 200 rupees or face 30 months imprisonment.

Table 1
Major Indian Indentured Labour Importing Colonies

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

As these measures were being enacted, reports of further abuses reached the more enlightened public in India and Great Britain, which, ever vigilant, denounced indenture as merely an extension of slavery, pressing government to take sterner measures to curtail the abuses. The Government of India temporarily halted all emigration, while planning for more comprehensive and effective legislation. It asked the colonies to conduct their own enquiries into the condition of the indentured labourers, and itself appointed a committee of six on 22 August 1838 to investigate all aspects of indentured emigration. The six men were T. Dickens, Rev. James Charles, W. F. Dowson, Russomroy Dutt, J. P. Grant and Major E. Archer.²⁹ The committee examined witnesses from August 1838 to mid-January 1839, and submitted its final report in October 1840. Because of the massive and frequently contradictory nature of the evidence that had been gathered, the members differed in their interpretations as well as recommendations to the

government. Consequently two reports were submitted. The majority report of Dickens, Charles and Dutt presented a scathing critique of the indenture system. Their report concluded:

it to be distinctly proved beyond dispute that the Coolies and other natives exported to Mauritius and elsewhere were (generally speaking) induced to come to Calcutta by gross misrepresentation and deceit practised upon them by native crimps, styled duffadars and arkottis employed by European and Anglo-Indian undertakers and shippers who were mostly cognisant of these frauds, and who received a very considerable sum per head for each Coolie exported.³⁰

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

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

In the correspondence that followed between the colonies and the Government of India it became clear that the prohibition of emigration could not be long maintained. Reports from the colonies appeared to show that the hardships and problems of the labourers had been exaggerated.³¹ In January 1842, the Colonial Office passed an Order, re-opening

indentured emigration to Mauritius. Most of its principles were later incorporated into the Government of India's Act XV of 1842, which was the first comprehensive measure to provide a semblance of government control and supervision.³² The Act provided for the appointment, on fixed salary, of an Emigration Agent at the ports of embarkation in India, and a Protector of Emigrants in Mauritius. The Emigration Agent was required to examine each emigrant and to ascertain that he fully understood the nature of the transaction. He was also to report the proceedings to the provincial government. All the ships were henceforth to be licensed by the government, and required to observe certain conditions; dietary and medical supplies for the emigrants were prescribed, as were accommodation facilities and indeed the length of the voyage itself. The Act was a step forward, but it still had many defects: for a start it dealt perfunctorily with the system of recruitment, but perhaps most important of all there were no devices in it for the enforcement of the regulations. Unsurprisingly, subsequent investigations continued to unearth problems.

Mauritius opened the way, and it was not long after that the West Indian colonies renewed their request for Indian labour. In the past, officials in India had been apprehensive of allowing emigration to those distant colonies, partly on account of the great distance and consequent problems of communication, and partly because of the fear of the effects of competition among the recruiters for the different colonies. But reports from British Guiana were encouraging³³ and the Government of India gave the colonies the benefit of the doubt. Consequently, indentured emigration to British Guiana, Trinidad and Jamaica was recommended under the same conditions as those that applied to Mauritius.

In the 1850s indentured emigration began to the smaller West Indian colonies. Some modifications were made in the existing regulations, but perhaps the most significant development was the move afoot in the colonies to restrict, or even abolish, provisions regarding return passage of the migrants after the completion of their contract. Mauritius raised the question in 1851 and was followed two years later by British Guiana and Trinidad.³⁴ In the case of the former, the Government of India agreed to waive the provision of repatriation of the Indians after five years, provided Mauritius agreed to pay the return passages of those unable from sickness or destitution to purchase their own tickets. The Government of Trinidad proposed to give free return tickets only to those who claimed the right within 18 months of it becoming available; others, even after 10 years' residence, it suggested, should be required to contribute a certain sum to meet the cost of repatriation. Initially, the Government of India proceeded

cautiously, but once it realised the full implications of the proposals, it retracted its earlier position. It observed in 1857:

We should view with great jealousy any proposals for depriving the natives of India of the absolute right to a return passage to their own country, unless such provisions could be framed as would perfectly secure them from the risk of undue influence when it was sought to obtain their consent to an arrangement for keeping them in the colony.³⁵

Despite persistent and genuine efforts to curtail abuses in the indenture system, careful investigation by independent-minded officials in the 1850s and early 1860s uncovered many irregularities and evasions. H.N.D. Beyts, for instance, criticised the continuing prevalence of unscrupulous tactics used by recruiters.³⁶ In many instances, he noted, recruits unwilling to go to one colony were taken to the depot of another. Often such activity was carried out 'in open defiance of the authority of the local laws', while the Protector of Emigrants was 'utterly powerless to prevent the abuses if not in all at least in nine-tenths of the cases in which offences were committed'. The problem was compounded by the 'peculiarly credulous and tractable disposition' of the recruits who, away from their villages and afraid of the unknown, succumbed to threats of reprisal from the recruiter. F. J. Mout, appointed by the Government of Bengal to investigate the problem of transporting migrants, had found distressingly high mortality rates on the voyages. The average mortality on the 12 ships which left for the West Indies during 1856-7 was 17.3 per cent, reaching as high as 31.2 per cent on the *Merchantman*.³⁷ Mout attributed the high mortality rates to the poor health of the labourers, especially those from Madras, defective selection procedures, inadequate facilities provided on the ships and changes in the diet of the emigrants on the voyage.

Further measures were passed, and these were incorporated in the Emigration Act XIII of 1864.³⁸ For the first time, the duty of the Protector of Emigrants was precisely defined. Previously the recruits had been transferred directly to the port of embarkation; they now had to be interviewed by local magistrates who had to be satisfied that the emigrants were leaving voluntarily and fully understood the terms of the contract. At the ports of embarkation the Protector was required as far as possible to personally interview each emigrant. The recruiters were given licences on a yearly basis, and had to wear badges to make their identity visible to all.

These efforts reflect the difference between the situation as it existed in the very early years of indentured emigration and that which prevailed after the mid-19th century. Much progress had been made, but the reforms

failed to satisfy both the critics and the advocates of indentured emigration. The opponents pointed to sensational cases of kidnapping, and assumed that these were typical. J.C. Robertson, the Divisional Magistrate at Allahabad in 1871, condemned the irregularities in colonial recruitment by pointing to the great discrepancy between the number of recruits obtained by colonial recruiters, and that obtained by their inland counterparts: whereas the former collected 47 emigrants in the period of seven to eight months, the latter could only manage 14 or so during the course of the whole year.³⁹ His views were widely publicised. But what was not realised at the time was the crucial difference in the two types of recruitment: colonial recruitment was a highly organised and professionally co-ordinated venture, whereas inland recruitment, for the most part, was more amorphous and depended largely on the initiative and enterprise of the contractor or the middleman (*sardar*). Hence the discrepancy. But these facts were lost sight of in the heat of the argument.

Recruiters, on the other hand, complained of constant harassment and intimidation from magistrates and the police. W.M. Anderson, Emigration Agent for Jamaica, wrote that many officials deliberately delayed correspondence, and in some instances even refused to countersign recruiters' licences 'unless a respectable *zamindar* becomes a security for them'. He referred to the practice of daily police visits to emigration depots as 'in truth sending wolves and vultures to look after and take care of lambs'—a reference to widespread corruption in the police force. And he complained that there was a widely held impression that the government was opposed to emigration, and that subordinate officials were allowed to impede the process of recruitment at will.⁴⁰

Persistent complaints from the Emigration Agents precipitated the intervention of Lord Salisbury, the Secretary of State for India. He enquired whether the Government of India 'might not more directly encourage emigration and superintend the system under which it is conducted'.⁴¹ In Lord Salisbury's view, indentured emigration, properly regulated, would be to the benefit of India, Britain, the colonies and the emigrants themselves:

While then, from an Indian point of view, emigration, properly regulated, and accompanied by sufficient assurance of profitable employment and fair treatment, seems a thing to be encouraged on grounds of humanity, with a view to promote the well-being of the poorer classes; we may also consider, from an imperial point of view, the great advantage which must result from peopling the warmer British possessions which are rich in natural resources and only want population, by an intelligent and industrious race to whom

the climate of these countries is well suited, and to whom the culture of the staples suited to the soil, and the modes of labour and settlement, are adapted. In this view also it seems proper to encourage emigration from India to the colonies well fitted for an Indian population.

He then went on to suggest how the Government of India might intervene directly to encourage and facilitate indentured emigration and curtail bureaucratic impediments. He urged it to exercise direct control over the type of emigrants recruited by allowing the authorities in India to 'help and counsel' the colonial agents and, in times of difficulty, to even recruit labourers themselves. Salisbury further suggested that the Government of India should appoint its own officials in the colonies to enforce the observance of labour regulations and the indenture contract. The last paragraph of his despatch, which clearly shows that Salisbury intended permanent settlement and colonisation, read:

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

These words have acquired a particular significance in Fiji and are perhaps the most misunderstood in its political history. Fiji Indian politicians have long regarded it as the charter of equal rights for the Indian population of Fiji, equal in spirit and intent, they point out, to the Deed of Cession which promised the paramountcy of Fijian interests when Fiji was ceded to Great Britain in 1874.⁴² Their critics and political opponents deny that the despatch had the same legal or moral force as the Deed of Cession. The general consensus is that whatever the form of words, a general sentiment of equality informed Lord Salisbury's document, which was subsequently repeated by the governors of Fiji.

Throughout much of the period of indentured emigration, the Government of India let its citizens depart without hindrance. But this is not to say that India 'was following the policy on emigration matters formulated in the colonial office', and that in doing so, it was neglecting the 'true interests of common people'.⁴³ On the contrary, as seen in the notable example of Lord Salisbury's despatch, the Government of India, after consulting with the provincial governments, followed its own course. Of course, its efforts were not as successful as the critics would have liked, but the fact remains that colonial interests, at least in emigration matters, were

not allowed to supersede the interests of India. For when gross transgressions of labourers' rights took place in the colonies emigration was stopped, and not resumed until adequate assurances for the protection of the labourers had been given.⁴⁴

Was indentured emigration detrimental to the 'true interests of the people' of India—as some people have contended and as Indian capitalists argued at the time? If by this is meant that indentured emigration took away labour needed in various industrial enterprises in India, then it was not detrimental. Numerically, indentured emigration was hardly ever big enough to constitute a serious drain on the labour force. The domestic colonisation or resettlement schemes were not (or could not have been) affected adversely, for the type of people required for their success—'cultivators with some small capital and accustomed to independent enterprise'⁴⁵—were not emigrating to the colonies. The colonial emigrants were mainly 'labourers, dependent for their support upon cultivating classes'.⁴⁶ Furthermore, as we shall see later, colonial and internal recruitments were, by and large, centred in different regions of the subcontinent, with little conflict of interest or purpose.

The Salisbury despatch once again opened up the whole question of indentured emigration in the 1880s. Two enquiries into the working of the system of recruitment were instituted: in the United Provinces under Major D. G. Pitcher,⁴⁷ and in Bihar under G. A. Grierson.⁴⁸ They uncovered a number of defects, necessitating further reforms which were incorporated in the Emigration Act XXII of 1882. This piece of legislation governed indentured emigration, with minor modifications in 1908, until the abolition of indentured emigration in 1916.

It is appropriate now to examine in some detail the way in which the indentured emigration was carried out in India. Embarkation of indentured emigrants was restricted by the Emigration Act to the ports of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, and was abolished altogether from the French ports. Each Indian labour importing colony was required to appoint an Emigration Agent at the port of embarkation. However, because of the different recruiting seasons for different colonies, one Emigration Agent usually represented a number of them. Thus for much of the late 19th century there were only two British emigration agencies in Calcutta. One recruited for British Guiana and Natal, while the other was used jointly by Trinidad, Mauritius, Fiji, Jamaica and, occasionally, Grenada, St Vincents and St Lucia. Surinam, being a Dutch colony, had its own agency.

The Emigration Agent rarely recruited personally, except when the recruit was found in the vicinity of the depot, or when he presented himself

for registration in Calcutta. Usually the agent forwarded the requisition from the colonies to the sub-agents up-country. Who the sub-agents were cannot accurately be ascertained. But Major Pitcher found that in the UP many were Jews, and in Bihar they were former recruiters who had 'shown aptitude for the work', and who were able 'to meet the swindling tendency of recruiters by a thorough knowledge of their practices'.⁴⁹ There were also some European sub-agents, among the most prominent being Messrs Bird and Company of Allahabad in the 1870s.

Some sub-agents, such as those for Trinidad, were paid by a fixed salary,⁵⁰ supplemented by a commission to cover the expenses of collection, registration, accommodation, lodging and transportation of the recruits to the port of embarkation. The commission was paid only if the recruits actually embarked for the colonies, while the cost of repatriation to their districts of those who changed their mind or were rejected at the port of embarkation had to be borne by the sub-agent. The British Guiana agency did not pay its sub-agents a fixed salary but gave them a higher rate of commission, supplemented at the end of the season by a bonus per 100 emigrants embarked for the colonies. Thus while commercialism may have induced a temptation to corruption, it also enjoined vigilance on the part of the sub-agent who stood to lose the most if the emigrants did not embark. The commission varied from place to place, depending upon the proximity of the locality of recruitment to Calcutta (or other ports of embarkation), as well as over time. It also depended on the availability of recruits. In 1886, rates for men and children varied between Rs 17 and Rs 23, while for women they ranged from Rs 24-Rs 34. In Allahabad in 1882, the sub-agents were paid Rs 28 for women and Rs 18 for men; in 1905, the rates had increased to Rs 40 for men and Rs 55 for women, and these remained more or less constant till the end.⁵¹

The sub-agents appointed and employed recruiters although in theory the recruiters were to be directly responsible to the Emigration Agent. The recruiters, however, were licensed by the Protector of Emigrants upon the recommendation of the Emigration Agent. The licence was granted annually, and it needed the signature of the magistrate of the district where the recruiters intended to work. Their remuneration varied depending upon the colony they worked for. In the case of French colonies, *bona fide* recruiters were paid at a fixed salary, while those who worked for British Guiana were paid partly by salary and partly by commission. Thus Ghura Khan, British Guiana sub-agent at Buxar, paid his recruiters Rs 5-Rs 8 per month, besides Rs 5 for males and Rs 8 for females.⁵² In Allahabad in the 1880s, recruiters received only commissions, without salary, of Rs 6 for men

and Rs 8 for women, which by 1912 had increased to Rs 6-Rs 9 for men and Rs 18-Rs 20 for women. These amounts may seem meagre today, but at the time they compared favourably with the average wage of unskilled labourers of two to four annas per day.

The critics of the indenture system reserved their harshest words for the recruiter. He was generally regarded as the 'scum of the earth', 'low class, unscrupulous in his methods', 'by no means respectable and not likely to have much scruples where money is to be made'.⁵³ Indeed, sometimes the district magistrate cancelled the recruiter's licence or refused to renew it because the recruiter was 'not respectable looking' or he happened to be a Chamar.⁵⁴

Who were the recruiters? Again, little is known about them during the first half of indentured emigration, though scattered sources indicate the dominance of Muslims and higher caste Hindus.⁵⁵ For the second half, more information is available. Table 2, constructed on the basis of data in *Register of Recruiters for the Benares District for the Decade 1882-1892*,⁵⁶ shows that the recruiters came from all strata of Indian society, though there were not surprisingly few from the lower castes. As can be seen, the largest numbers were provided by Muslims who, if we include Pathans, Sheiks, Saiyids, Moghuls, and Hajams, accounted for 40.4 per cent. The preponderance of Muslim recruiters is a puzzle, though their higher numbers may have been a result of their urban residence, dating from Moghul times, as well as high literacy rates. Among Hindus, the largest number of recruiters came from Banias and Kayasths who together provided 19.7 per cent of the total, with 9 per cent originating from Brahmans, Thakurs and Chattris. Caste status by itself, of course, is not a reliable index about a person's character or his moral scruples, and it is quite possible that high caste recruiters were as unscrupulous and deceitful as others; but in any event the data throw some doubt on conventional assertions about the recruiters' social origins.

Most of the recruiters were males who conducted their own operations. Nevertheless in many cases they also hired unlicensed agents called *arkatis*. These were employed where there were few recruiters or where the prospects of obtaining enough recruits appeared slim. Again, little is known about these people. In the UP, Pitcher found the *arkatis* to be *chaukidars* (guards) and *patwaris* (record keepers) who took the opportunity of making a few rupees by turning in 'troublesome characters'. The *arkatis* came from all castes. Some of them had been recruiting for a long time, while others were shopkeepers, peons, domestic servants, cloth sellers and even labourers.

Table 2
Caste/Social Background of the Recruiters
in Benares Region, 1882-1892

Name	No.	Name	No.
Muslim	169	Bhur	3
Bania	67	Pahari	3
Kayasth	33	Barhari	3
Pathan	19	Bind	2
Halwai	18	Gowala	2
Brahman	17	Fakir	2
Thakur	16	Jew	2
Chattri	13	Patwa	2
Gadariya	13	Rajwar	2
Sheik	13	Saiyid	2
Lallla	12	Kurmi	1
Chamar	12	Kori	1
Kunbi	12	Moghul	1
Ahir	10	Sweeper	1
Bhuya	10	Hajam	1
Christian	10	Kalwar	1
Kahar	10	Bengali	1
Koeri	7	Not Known	11
Nonia	5		
		TOTAL	507

Many emigrants were registered outside their districts of origin, as we shall see later. They had already left their homes before they encountered the recruiters. But the recruiters were also afraid of making frequent incursions into the villages for fear of being beaten up by the servants of the local *zamindars* who saw them as a drain on cheap labour. The villagers themselves were not averse to wielding the *lathi* when they heard of their friends and relatives being recruited through deception. Then there was the constant interference of the police officials who were more influential in villages than in cities. One sub-agent in Bihar, Badri Sahu, said that 'when he recruits men of respectable castes, the police find their way into the depot and turn them out, saying that the Government is going to make Christians out of them, and that they would be eaten up by maggots and

leeches'.⁵⁷ And in the UP, a recruiter complained that the 'mofussil police give us great trouble and annoyance by entering our depots and trying to intimidate the coolies into confessions against us'.⁵⁸ Apart from prejudice against emigration, police harassed recruits because they resented having to conduct detailed, time consuming enquiries about the 'suspicious' cases. Speaking generally about the recruiters, Grierson, in an otherwise critical report, remarked:

I think that recruiters suffer from a good deal of false suspicion . . . I heard many criticisms on the recruiters in the course of my tour, and, with few exceptions, they were the reverse of favourable. Such strong terms, as 'scum of the earth' applied to the recruiters generally, made one pause and think; but I invariably found that this bad opinion arose from too hasty generalisation. The notice of a district officer is drawn to cases in which one or two black sheep were concerned, and he hastily concludes that all recruiters belong to the same flock.⁵⁹

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

that the recruiter, though occasionally guilty of mal-practices in the exercise of what is looked upon by a number of people as not a very reputable calling, has to contend with many unnecessary difficulties, that he is frequently impeded in most objectionable ways by the police and the underlings of the Court...⁶⁰

Clearly, one must treat with some scepticism the depressing picture of the recruiters painted by C. F. Andrews and other contemporary observers, as aggressive and adventurous people who invariably terrorised villagers into acquiescence and who had to be bribed to keep the peace.⁶¹ There was deception, as is bound to be present in any enterprise of this kind, but its magnitude has probably been overstated.

Colonial recruitment was a vast, well-organised operation and, as Table 3 shows,⁶² there were very few years indeed when there were not upwards of 500 recruiters at work. In at least four years, they numbered more than 1,000. A number of other features are clear from the Table. For instance, over the years there was a gradual increase in the number of licences granted to recruiters. Among other reasons, such as increased demand from the colonies, this may be attributed to the difficulty in obtaining the requisitioned number of recruits in certain years. The late 1890s and early

1900s was a period of relative economic prosperity in the United Provinces which provided the bulk of the emigrants, and in these times Indians were naturally reluctant to leave their homes. Hence greater efforts were required to fill the quota. The sharp increase in the percentage of licences cancelled after 1898 may indicate that the recruiters had to resort to questionable practices to fill their quota. This contrasts with the situation in the mid-1890s when fewer licences were cancelled. These were years of drought, scarcity and famine, when distressed peasants sought any alternative to alleviate their grim conditions.

Table 3
Colonial Recruiting Licences Granted and Cancelled

Year	No. Granted	No. Cancelled	% Cancellation	No. Recruited	Average No. per Recruiter
1880-1	559	11	2.0	15,430	27.6
1881-2	452	14	3.1	11,539	25.5
1887	345	3	0.9	6,882	19.9
1888	511	4	0.8	10,325	20.2
1889	171	15	2.1	16,813	23.4
1890	768	20	2.6	23,813	30.0
1891	1003	22	2.2	25,613	25.5
1892	857	2	0.2	17,225	20.1
1893	866	8	0.9	15,046	17.4
1894	1023	6	0.6	26,707	26.1
1895	838	13	1.6	17,315	20.7
1896	755	12	1.6	16,439	21.8
1897	539	3	0.6	12,315	22.8
1898	701	27	3.9	9,334	13.3
1899	801	43	5.4	14,051	17.5
1900	1088	27	2.5	18,489	17.0
1902	1415	37	2.6	13,807	9.8

One of the most remarkable features of the Table is the surprisingly low percentage of cancellations of the recruiters' licences. The critics would explain it as the result of the inefficient and corrupt administration of the indenture system in India.⁶³ They would argue that the cases of fraud and deceit which reached the officials were only the 'tip of the iceberg'. Perhaps.

But in the context of the general thrust of the argument developed here, and in view of the long history of indentured emigration, it could be suggested that the elaborate machinery set up to govern recruitment was in fact effective, and that cases of fraud were certainly far fewer than it would appear from impressionistic and oral evidence.

For what type of offences were licences cancelled? Each year the Protector of Emigrants gave the reasons—and those for 1902 were most comprehensive.⁶⁴

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

Abuses for which licences were cancelled seem to have been of a general nature, and likely to be present in any system of labour recruitment. In seven cases, for example, licences were cancelled because of suspicion (the nature of which is not specified) about the character of the recruiters or the way they conducted their business. Those in authority appear to have dealt with the recruiters with some arbitrariness.

Once a batch of recruits had been collected the recruiters took them to the sub-depot. This was normally a large *pucca* (brick) house, with special arrangements for the accommodation of emigrants.⁶⁵ Once the recruits had entered their domain, the sub-agents aimed to keep them *khush* (happy) and in good health. Food was free, and the sub-agents had to ensure that those taken for registration appeared physically fit for manual labour. To

avoid violating caste scruples, the recruits were allowed to cook their own food which was bought from the local *bania*. In cold weather, they were provided with blankets. Sometimes, strict control was exercised on their movement, lest the recruits come in contact with people outside, change their mind and leave. But total *bandish* (confinement) could not be imposed for a very obvious reason: sub-agents feared public reprisal, even a riot, if it was discovered that people were kept against their will. In Bankipur district in Bihar, a sub-agent for Mauritius was falsely implicated in such a charge, which led to a police raid on the sub-depot. A long court case ensued which effectively ruined the sub-agent.⁶⁶

But there were other more subtle ways of applying pressure on recalcitrant recruits. The sub-agents and the recruiters would often remind the recruit that he had eaten their salt and therefore was obliged to proceed. Others who expressed an unwillingness to emigrate were told to repay money spent on feeding them. An official recounted an imaginary conversation between the sub-agent and an unwilling recruit:

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

Sometimes, things happened differently. As a UP official noted: 'if on the one hand there is a great agency for oppression, there is on the other a temptation to consent, get money or food, and then refuse to go'.⁶⁷

In the waiting period in the depot, which could last a fortnight, the recruits were examined by the agency's travelling medical inspectors. The hopeless cases were rejected and presumably they returned to their villages at their own expense; the others remained in the sub-depot until a reasonable number had been collected. The district civil surgeon then examined them after which they were taken to the sub-divisional magistrate for registration. Here the sub-agents and recruits had their first encounter with the bureaucracy. Clerks had to be bribed to get early registration; failure to do so could result in disaster, for the contingent could be made to wait for days and even weeks. The recruits had to be shielded from petty Indian officials, especially of high castes, who frequently abused and taunted them. And finally, they had been schooled to give proper answers. Sometimes the interview began and ended with only one question: 'Are you going willingly?' Sometimes the recruits were rejected because of vague suspicion. Here is an example from the Benares *Register of Emigrants*, 1890: 'Inspected the sub-depot today—only one female

coolie admitted this morning. She has got a little jewel on her, hence her case seems suspicious. Rejected.'

By the time the recruits finished with the sub-depot and had been registered, an average 18 per cent of the original entrants were rejected for reasons listed in Table 4.⁶⁸ A number of features are clear in the Table. The largest percentage of reductions took place in the mid-1890s. These, as noted above, were years of scarcity and famine in many parts of the UP, and it is more than likely that a large number of those brought before the district civil surgeons and registration officials would have included emaciated unfortunates who were naturally rejected. On the other hand, 1899 and 1900 were years of relative prosperity when the percentage of unfit recruits brought for registration would have been lower. Rejection for unfitness accounted for the largest percentage of reduction, and this again was more marked in the scarcity years. Another striking feature is the number of those who deserted from the sub-depot. The deserters may have included those who were initially tricked into the sub-depot, and escaped at the earliest opportunity; it may also have included those who changed their minds and decided to return to their villages. This was not difficult as the recruits were still in familiar surroundings. Those who were passed then did their *chalan* (journey) to the port of embarkation. Depending on the distance between the sub-depot and the main depot, weather and transport arrangements, the journey could take from a week to a fortnight or more. The batch was accompanied by the recruiter, who was required to have a special certificate for the purpose. Sometimes, the recruiter delegated this task to his deputy or the *chaprasis* (assistants) of the sub-depot, and set out himself in search of more recruits. Part of the journey was completed on foot and part of it by rail. Throughout, the recruits were provided with food, blankets and other necessities by the recruiter (or his deputies). Further reductions took place on the journey, mainly because of desertions.

Table 4
Deductions at Sub-Depot Before Despatch to Calcutta

Causes	Years										Total	%
	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1899	1900	1900	1900	1900		
No. at depot from previous year	90	380	400	118	176	258	514	1,936				
New registrations	15,046	26,707	17,315	16,439	12,315	14,051	18,419	120,362				
Infants born in Sub-depot	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	3				
Total Recruits to be a/c	15,136	27,087	17,717	16,558	12,491	14,309	18,933	122,301				
Died	7	14	10	9	2	6	2	50	0.2			
Deserted	343	963	600	592	460	146	338	3,441	15.3			
Left behind/detained	54	221	194	-	-	3	-	472	2.1			
Rejected as unfit	1,464	3,181	2,176	2,611	1,442	892	724	12,490	55.7			
Unwilling	79	154	330	369	60	104	120	1,216	5.4			
Claimed by relatives	90	140	83	292	58	102	71	836	3.7			
Transferred to other depots	3	412	81	2	15	-	457	970	4.3			
Surplus	25	-	-	188	557	542	1,487	2,799	12.5			
Rejected because relation rejected, unwilling, etc.	33	41	-	-	83	-	-	157	0.7			
Total No. Rejected	2,098	5,123	3,474	4,063	2,677	1,794	3,199	22,431	18.3			
% of Total Rejected	13.9	18.9	19.6	24.5	21.4	12.5	16.9	-	-			

Table 5
History of Emigrants Between Arrival at Depot and Departure for Colonies

Causes	Years										Total %	
	1881-2	1888	1889	1891	1894	1895	1896	1897	1899	1900		
Total no. accom. in dept	11,162	9,412	14,814	21,101	21,181	14,584	12,796	9,809	12,213	15,465	142,537	-
Died	64	59	108	141	109	41	33	26	39	131	751	2.7
Deserted	484	249	426	348	559	201	133	69	343	412	3,224	11.8
Rejected as unfit	590	703	1,236	2,057	1,602	1,516	1,145	742	728	932	11,251	41.2
Unwilling	125	144	62	91	226	149	83	56	215	397	1,548	5.7
Claimed by relatives	62	49	79	52	105	36	26	11	63	139	622	2.3
Not emig. on acc. of relation	54	264	580	1,013	554	522	337	145	155	218	3,842	14.1
Trans to other agencies, reject, unwill., etc.	155	175	178	707	306	280	204	261	390	197	2,853	10.4
Surplus	38	51	265	277	238	264	319	124	438	469	2,483	9.1
Released from engagement	-	4	17	17	47	17	2	2	62	135	303	1.1
Procd to colonies as passengers	-	5	43	17	2	2	8	1	2	-	90	0.3
Sent to hospitals outside	-	-	-	-	86	44	54	116	10	59	369	1.3
Total reduction	1,572	1,713	2,994	4,720	3,834	3,072	2,344	1,553	2,445	3,089	27,336	
% Reduction	14.1	18.2	20.2	22.0	18.1	21.1	18.3	15.8	20.0	20.0	-	-19.2

Upon landing in Calcutta the recruits encountered further harassment: more palms had to be greased and more *baksheesh* was needed. Eventually, they were taken to the Emigration Depot at Garden Reach. The facilities here were usually shared between different colonies at different times, to ensure that ships avoided bad weather on the various routes. The buildings varied in size and structural layout, though each depot was required to have a number of facilities stipulated in the Emigration Act.⁶⁹ First of all there was a reception shed set apart from the other for the examination of freshly arrived recruits. Those recruits who were passed there by the medical officers were then taken to the accommodation depot. Single males and females were housed separately, and efforts were made to keep together married couples and others with families. Each person was given a platform space of 12 'superficial feet' wide and six feet long in the accommodation depot. Cooking sheds with brick or mud plastered walls and tiled floors were situated at a distance, as were separate latrines for men and women. Each Agency had separate hospital sheds for treatment of ordinary diseases, observation sheds for suspected cases, and segregation sheds for the treatment of contagious diseases. Then there was the inspection shed for mustering the emigrants for various purposes including, wherever necessary, their feeding.

Soon after their arrival at Garden Reach, the Emigration Agent arranged for the recruits to be examined by the medical inspector whose main duty was to determine whether they were physically fit for five years of hard manual labour in the colonies. If satisfied, he gave a certificate for embarkation to the Emigration Agent, and if not, he notified the Protector of Emigrants. The Protector and his deputies interviewed all the recruits and if they discovered irregularities, or found that the recruits for some valid reason did not want to emigrate, they ordered the agent to pay them reasonable compensation as well as arrange their repatriation to the place of registration.

During the waiting period in the depot, a further reduction in the number of recruits took place, as shown in Table 5.⁷⁰ It is clear from the figures that, on the average, a little more than three-quarters of the recruits who were admitted to the depot finally embarked for the colonies. This proportion is much lower when compared to the number of recruits who were brought to the sub-depot up-country: in 1894 only 58.8 per cent of the original recruits finally boarded the ship, in 1895 60.3 per cent, in 1897 60.8 per cent, in 1899 65.5 per cent and in 1900 61.4 per cent. That is, on the average, 40 per cent of those originally recruited did not embark. The causes of the rejections are clearly indicated in Table 5, and much of what

has been said about the reductions at the sub-depot applies here as well. However, some features call for comment. The figure of 41 per cent for rejection for unfitness seems inordinately high. The reasons for this are difficult to ascertain as our sources do not go beyond giving statistical aggregates. Recruits may have contracted disease or otherwise been disabled between the time they left the sub-depots and the time they were brought before the medical inspectors at the Emigration Depot. Perhaps also the authorities at the sub-depot exercised less vigilance than did those at Calcutta. The highest number of rejections for unfitness took place in the early to mid-1890s, years of economic hardship when there was little difficulty in filling the requisition from the colonies. Those who did not emigrate because their relations were rejected or remained behind for other reasons constituted the second largest non-emigrating category. However, over the years, there was a progressive decline in the importance of this factor. In 1891, for instance, this accounted for 21.5 per cent of the total reduction, in 1895 17.0 per cent and in 1900, 6.4 per cent. In the case of Fiji, this trend is related to the discouragement by the colonial government of family migration after 1890 because planters persistently complained of having to feed and clothe 'uneconomic' families (see below). Desertion was the third most important cause of the reductions. The desertion figures for the main depot in Calcutta were lower for all the years except 1899 and 1900 than the figures for the sub-depots. Thus in 1894, the sub-depot desertion figure was 19 per cent, compared to 14.6 per cent at the main depot, in 1895 17 per cent and 6.5 per cent, in 1896 15 per cent and 5.6 per cent and in 1897 17 per cent and 4.4 per cent.

In the absence of anything other than statistical data, we can only speculate on the causes of desertion. Perhaps the deserters included those who were tricked by the recruiters and the sub-agents and decided to get away before they were taken to some place to which they did not wish to go. Perhaps also they may have been shrewd men and women who got enlisted as potential colonial migrants knowing from the very start that they would abscond in Calcutta. This view is not entirely implausible given that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries large numbers of people from the UP were increasingly finding employment in Calcutta and its industrial suburbs. A free trip would save them a few valuable rupees.

Those recruits who had been passed by the medical authorities and had obtained their necessary papers had to spend a compulsory period of seven days in the depot before they could embark the ships. The waiting period could, of course, be extended to several weeks if the ships did not arrive in time or if requisite quotas had not been filled. During this time, the recruits

were encouraged to do light work such as cleaning and gardening within the depot.

Games and amusements were encouraged to keep the recruits away from melancholy and depression. The new life fostered a sense of companionship and togetherness that cut across barriers of religion, caste, and place of origin. The old, hierarchically organised and seemingly divinely pre-ordained world of the villages, and the tenacity of social bonds forged through many years of communal existence, were proving fragile and indeed irrelevant. Social barriers were impossible to maintain. Commensal tabus gradually broke down as all had to eat food cooked by unknown *bhandaris* (cooks). This process of fragmentation—for it was not abrupt disintegration—of the old world was aided by the attitude of the authorities who viewed all the recruits simply as 'coolies'. But along with this a process of reconstitution was taking place in which new ideas, new values and new associations were being formed. The recruits soon saw that success, even survival, in the world ahead depended more on individual enterprise than on ascribed status. They would realise fully the validity of this truth on the plantations in Fiji.

Endnotes

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5. For detailed discussion see, e.g. J.D. Legge, *Britain in Fiji, 1858-1880* (London, 1958), 15-35; Ethel Drus, 'The Colonial Office and the Annexation of Fiji', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, ser. 4:32 (1950), 87-110.
6. Sir Arthur Gordon, *Fiji: records of private and of public life, 1875-1880* (Edinburgh, 1897-1912), I: 194.
7. For a detailed study of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company in Fiji, see Michael Moynagh, *Brown or White? a history of the Fiji sugar industry* (Canberra, 1981).
8. J.K. Chapman, *The Career of Sir Arthur Hamilton Gordon: First Lord Stanmore, 1829-1912* (Toronto, 1964), 159. For a detailed discussion see Norma McArthur, *Island Populations of the Pacific* (Canberra, 1967), 3-26.
9. Gordon to Carnarvon, 9 October 1877, PP, LV, Cmd 2149 (1878).
10. See Colaco, 'Labour Emigration from India', 96.
11. Quoted in Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, 2.
12. Colaco, 'Labour Emigration from India', 96-97.
13. For further discussion see Legge, *Britain in Fiji*, 56; O.W. Parnaby, *Britain and the Labor Trade in the Southwest Pacific* (Durham, NC 1964).
14. Gordon, *Records of Public and Private Life*, I: 179.
15. Carnarvon to Gordon, 14 November 1877, in PP, LV, Cmd 2149 (1878).
16. Fiji Government, *Fiji Royal Gazette*, IV, 23 March 1878.
17. *Ibid.*, 9 February 1878.
18. The following paragraph is based on 'Conditions of Employment' offered to Fiji migrants. These are found in the PRs and Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, 210-12.
19. This paragraph is based on PR, 1879, and EP B Pros 90-93, April 1882.
20. Including wages, rations and the cost of introduction and repatriation, the annual costs to the planter was estimated to be £13 14s, as against the existing costs of £10 14 8d for an imported Pacific Island labourer.
21. PR (1879); EP B Pros 90-93, April 1882.
22. Colaco, 'Labour Emigration from India', 110.

23. See HL (Emigration), A Pros 14, 8 May 1847. See also PP, xxxvii (1840), 459; D.W.D. Comins, *Note on Emigration from the East Indies to British Guiana* (Calcutta, 1893), 5; W. Kloosterboer, *Involuntary Labour since the Abolition of Slavery* (Leiden, 1960); W.L. Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the West Indies* (London, 1937).
24. See Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in British Guiana* (London 1950), 6-7.
25. For more discussion see Panchanan Saha, *Emigration of Indian Labour, 1834-1900* (New Delhi, 1970); K.O. Laurence, *Immigration to the West Indies in the Nineteenth Century* (Kingston, 1971); I.M. Cumpston, *Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834-1854* (London, 1953); Fred H. Hitchins, *The Colonial Land and Emigration Commission* (Philadelphia, 1931).
26. General Department (Emigration), Consultation 6 (1837).
27. The main sources of this table are: G. W. Roberts and J. Byrne, 'Summary Statistics on Indenture and Associated Migration to the West Indies, 1834-1948', *Population Studies*, 20:1 (1966), 125-34; J. Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration from India* (Calcutta, 1874); PP, LVII (1900), 467-68; EP B Pros 1-3, October 1881; Hugh Tinker, 'Indians Abroad: emigration, restriction, rejection', in Michael Twaddle (ed.), *Expulsion of a Minority* (London, 1975). It must be noted that the two terminal dates refer to the peak period of emigration; there were some years when there was no emigration to some colonies. The figures generally refer to the actual numbers entering the colonies, but in some cases they may also refer to numbers embarking at different ports in India. This distinction is not always made in the sources.
28. Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration from India*, 433-44.
29. PP, XVI, See. 2 (1841), 287ff. See also HP (Emigration), A Pros 15-20, 4 November 1840.
30. PP, XVI, Sess. 2 (1841), 291.
31. Cumpston, *Indians Overseas in British Territories*, 38.
32. PP, XXXV (1844), 483-88.
33. Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration from India*, 444.
34. *Ibid.*, 447-47.
35. *Ibid.*
36. HP (Emigration), A Pros 36-38, 17 March 1862, and A Pros 6, 6 September 1861.
37. F.J. Mout, 'Report on the Mortality of Emigrant Coolies to the West Indies', HP Consultations, 1 October 1858. See also Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration from India*, 454.
38. Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration from India*, 467ff.
39. EP A Pros 16-43, July 1872.
40. P A Pros 16-43, July 1872.
41. EP A Pros 41-67, May 1881. See also House of Commons Cmd. Paper 5192 (1910), 7-10.

42. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, 26-27.
43. Saha, *Emigration of Indian Labour*, 155.
44. Cmd 5192 (1910), 4.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. EP A Pros 43-57, September 1881.
48. EP A Pros, 12-15, August 1883.
49. EP A Pros, 43-57, September 1881; EP A Pros 12-15 August 1883.
50. EP A Pros 43-57, September 1882.
51. *Ibid*; Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, 30-31.
52. EP A Pros, 12-15, August 1883; and 43-57 September 1882.
53. Miscellaneuos File (Emigration), 1/102 (1865), Regional Record Office, Varanasi, UP.
54. EP A Pros 41-67, May 1881.
55. In 1865 among the many recruiters working in Benares were: Mudar Bux, Jainarain, Thomas Wyburn, Bisheshwar, Rahman Ally, Rain Lal, Kisoonersaud Lalji, Hans Raj, Sheik Mudaree, Khuda Bux, Abdul Khan, Faiz Khan, Sadak Ali and Sheik Chandoo. In 1871 the following recruiters were working for Messrs Bird and Company: Bundoo, Ram Surun, Gouree Sunkar Choubey, Madho, Mommed Hossein, Oahed Khan, Shewpersaud, Goroo Churn Dutt, Sheik Sunoo and Gunga Bissan Mistry.
56. The *Register* was located in the Collector's Office, Benares. I am grateful to Dr S.P. Sinha of the Regional Record Office, Varanasi, UP, who helped me to locate it.
57. EP A Pros 12-15, August 1883.
58. EP A Pros 43-57, September 1882.
59. EP A Pros 12-15, August 1883.
60. EP A Pros 43-57, September 1882.
61. C.F. Andrews and W.W. Pearson, *Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji. An independent enquiry* (Perth, 1918).
62. Data obtained from the *PR* of the various years listed. Fiji cannot be isolated from other colonies, but the broad pattern applied to it.
63. E.g. see Andrews and Pearson, *Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji*; Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: the export of Indian labour overseas, 1830-1920* (London, 1974).
64. *PR*, 1902.
65. Based on EP A Pros 12-15, August 1883; EP A Pros 43-57, September 1882; A.H. Hill, 'Emigration from India', *Timheri*, 4 (September 1919), 43-52; and the testimony of some of Fiji's indentured labourers in Ahmed Ali (ed.), *Girmit: the indenture experience in Fiji* (Suva, 1979), 1-57.

66. EP A Pros 12-15, August 1883.
 67. EP A Pros 43-57, September 1882.
 68. Source: PR for the years listed.
 69. The following discussion is based on *The Indian Emigration ACT XXI for 1883, Rules and Notifications* (Calcutta, 1898); Hill, 'Emigration from India'; Ali, *Girmit*; Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*.
 70. Source: PR for the years listed.
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A typical early Indian market scene with men dressed in traditional garb—dhoti, kurta and pagri. Note the man standing with a full sack on his head, a common sight until the 1940s. This photograph was taken in the mid-1930s.