

Documenting our Journeys – As Guyana Commemorates 180th Anniversary of Indian Arrival Day

By Ashook Ramsaran

Perspective

“The **Indian indenture system** was an ongoing system of indenture, a form of debt bondage, by which 3.5 million Indians were transported to various colonies of European powers to provide labour for the (mainly sugar) plantations. It started from the end of slavery in 1833 (Slavery Abolition Act) and continued until 1920. This resulted in the development of large Indian diaspora, which spread from the Indian Ocean (i.e. South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar, Zambia, Zanzibar, Uganda, Malawi, Seychelles, Réunion and Mauritius) to Pacific Ocean (i.e. Fiji), to the Atlantic Ocean (i.e. the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, Belize, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Grenada, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Jamaica) as well as the growth of Indo-Caribbean, Indo-Fijian, Indo-Mauritian, and Indo-African population.” *Wikipedia*

Indian Indentureship was an intense and harrowing period for Indian labourers from several Indian states to far away lands of then British, Dutch and French colonies to replenish desperately needed labour after the British emancipation of slavery in 1834. The majority of those labourers were taken from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkand, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry.

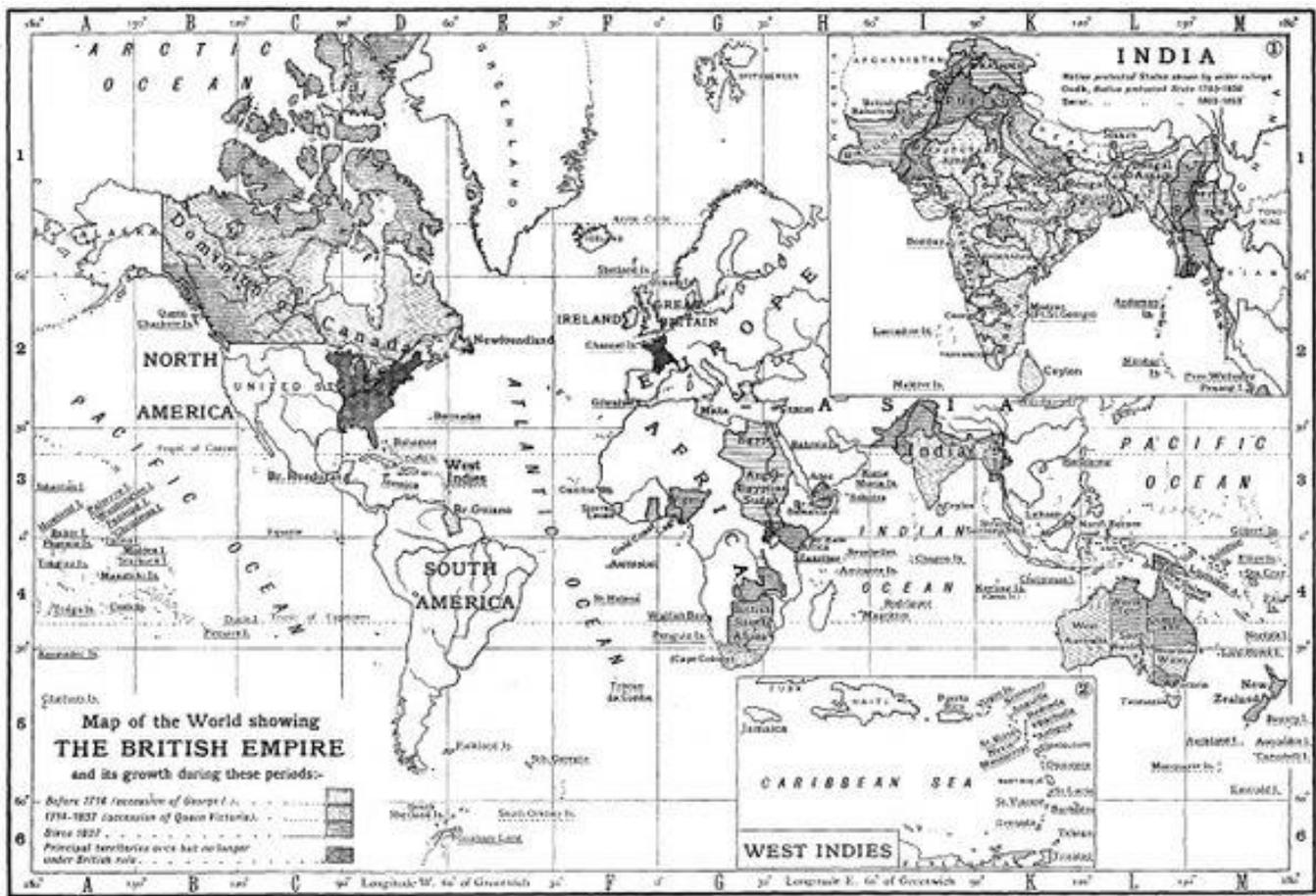
March 20, 2017 marked the centennial of official abolition of Indian Indentureship, an era spanning the years 1834-1917. The history and consequences of Indian Indentureship are deeply embedded with tremendous significance, importance, meaningful history and reflections to millions of descendants living in many countries which were the recipients of Indian Indentured labourers seeking better livelihoods. These countries included: Mauritius, Fiji, Malaysia, South Africa, East Africa, Guyana, Trinidad, Suriname, Jamaica, Belize, St. Vincent, Grenada and other countries of the Caribbean, as well as former French colonies of Reunion Island, Seychelles, Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana.

Also of significance is the continuing migratory second journeys and/or duality of Girmitiyas from their respective countries of birth to Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, South Asia and South East Asia, as well as other dialogue among Girmitiya countries. This trend has certainly added to the dynamics of Girmitiya journeys to be added to the continuing dialogue among Girmitiyas and others impacted by this 20th century migratory trend.

Definition

While it is generally known that a **Girmitiya** is a descendant of Indian Indentured labourers who were taken to Fiji during the period of Indian indentureship by the British, for this encyclopaedia and onwards, Girmitiya would be defined as Indian Indentured labourers and their descendants encompassing of **all** Indian Indentured labourers who were taken from India to several British, Dutch and French colonies during the periods 1826-1920 under the system of indenture labour.

Girmitiya today total almost 15 million descendants of Indian indentured labourers residing in the countries to which Indian indentured labourers were taken as well as those countries to which descendants of Indian indentured labourers made their second journeys.



Map of the British Empire at the time of Indian Indentureship

INDIAN INDENTURED MIGRATION ARRIVAL HISTORY

Country	Date of First Arrival & Ship Names	Number of Indenture Arrivals
Mauritius	November 2, 1834 - <i>Atlas</i>	451,796
Guyana (formerly British Guiana)	May 5, 1838 - <i>Hesperus</i>	238,909
Trinidad & Tobago	May 31, 1845 - <i>Fatal Razak</i>	143,939
Guadeloupe	December 24, 1854	42,326
Jamaica	May 7, 1845 - <i>Maidstone</i>	36,412
Suriname (formerly Dutch Guiana)	June 5, 1873 - <i>Lalla Rookh</i>	34,000
Martinique	May 6, 1853 - <i>Aurelie</i>	25,509
French Guiana(South America)	1854	19,276
St. Lucia	May 6, 1859 - <i>Palmyra</i>	4,354
Grenada	January 27, 1857 - <i>Maidstone</i>	3,200
St. Vincent	June 1, 1861 - <i>Travancore</i>	2,472
Belize (formerly British Honduras) located in Central America	1858 – Sepoy Indians 1882	1,000 from 1857 revolt 3,000 from Jamaica
St. Kitts	June 3, 1861 - <i>Dartmouth</i>	361
Nevis	1874	315
St. Croix	1863	321
Reunion Island	April 13, 1828 - <i>Yangon</i>	120 000
Seychelles	1898	6,315
South Africa	November 16, 1860 - <i>Truro</i>	150,000
Fiji	May 15, 1879 - <i>Leonidas</i>	60,965
East Africa - Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar, Zambia, Zanzibar, Uganda, Malawi	On-going research – indenture & contract labour for railroads and sugar plantations	On-going research

Note: The information above is compiled from various sources and its accuracy is based on information reviewed.

Credit to the many historians, researchers and authors whose information have been used to compile the listing above.

Compiled from various sources by Ashook Ramsaran (President, Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC))

\Reason for Indian Indentureship

The indentured labor trade was initiated to replace freed slaves on sugar plantations in French colonies and later British colonies in the 1830s, but expanded to many other locations around the world. This trend of global flow of indentured migrants developed after the end of the slave trade from Africa and continued until shortly after World War I. It involved the migratory experiences of the two million Asians, Africans, and South Pacific islanders who signed long-term labor contracts in return for free passage overseas, modest wages, and other benefits. The experiences of these indentured migrants of different origins and destinations is compared in terms of their motives, conditions of travel, struggles and inhuman conditions, as well as subsequent creation of permanent overseas settlements. The system of Indian indentureship takes into account the different motives of Indian indenture labourers, recruiters and employers, as well as the colonial powers and profit motivation.

British System of Indian Indentureship

- Started: 1826
- Official abolition: 1917
- Last ships (to fulfill contracts & returns): 1920

Final Ban on Indenture System

The Indian indenture system was finally banned in 1917. According to *The Economist*, "When the Indian Legislative Council finally ended indenture...it did so because of pressure from Indian nationalists and declining profitability, rather than from humanitarian concerns."

Documenting Our Journeys

To document, publish, preserve and promote **Girmitiya** history, journeys, struggles and achievements in the form of a comprehensive history of Indian indentureship spanning the years 1826 through 1920 as a detailed, well structured, instructive research and reference Girmitiya encyclopaedia, which would comprise the entire history, demographics, statistics, struggles and achievements, second migration journeys and trends, of the Indian indenture labourers and their descendants living in several countries.

This long overdue planned encyclopaedia would document the history and trends of a vibrant global Girmitiya society representing the interests, issues and concerns of worldwide Girmitiya based on shared history, heritage, journeys, aspirations and common goals in comprehensive and meaningful ways deserving of Girmitiya as a unique population of over 15 million among the Indian Diaspora and among peoples of the world.

The planned encyclopaedia would also be a comprehensive update of the 2001 Report by the Government of India's High Level Commission headed by late Dr. L.M. Singhvi, and include substantially more current and useful information in a well-organized manner suitable for research, reference and policy making

Countries

The countries which would be profiled in this encyclopaedia are those countries which were Indian indentureship destination countries and second migration countries which are important for a comprehensive history of Indian indentureship and descendants of Indian indentureship.

- **Indentureship Countries**
 - Mauritius, Fiji, Malaysia, South Africa, Seychelles, Reunion Island, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar, Zambia, Zanzibar, Uganda, Malawi, The Caribbean - Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, Belize, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Grenada, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Jamaica.
- **Second Migration Countries**
 - UK, USA, Canada, Netherlands, France, Australia, New Zealand

Publication

All research, writings and publications in this encyclopaedia would be original work and be worldwide copyrighted property of the organization, unless otherwise excerpted from published information with appropriate credits where applicable.

- **Contents**

History, journeys, struggles and achievements in the form of a comprehensive history of Indian indentureship spanning the years 1826 through 1920 in the form of a detailed, well structured, instructive research and reference Girmitiya encyclopaedia, which would comprise the entire history, demographics, statistics, struggles and achievements, second migration journeys and trends, of the Indian indenture labourers and their descendants living in several countries.

- **Format**

As would be expected for an encyclopaedia, the format of the information would be uniform and consistent design layout per country with same (22+) key words. These would be defined by the planning and editorial team.

Reference & Research Value

Indian indentureship is a unique phenomenon in the history of migration and of tremendous value to researchers, historians and think tank centers which could influence policies in governments, international agencies, world migration and preservationist institutions: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the (British) Commonwealth, World Bank, major libraries and research centers, diaspora studies departments of universities, think tank groups and others.

Contributors & Editorial Team

All contributors, researchers and members of the editorial team would be suitably qualified with an abiding interest and commitment towards the encyclopaedia and its purpose. Each contributor, researcher and member of the editorial team would be carefully vetted so that the team would be committed to producing the highest quality of encyclopaedia to document the unique history and migration of Indian indentureship.

Contributors, researchers and members of the editorial team would be selected per country and may be more than 1 per country depending on the history and extent of the Indian indentureship for respective countries. For those countries with smaller population of descendants of Indian indenture labourers and in close proximity (such as St. Kitts and Nevis) may be combined to have a single contributor.

Global Support

The planned encyclopaedia has generated worldwide support as a long overdue comprehensive history of Indian indentureship, documenting the initial migration from India, life on the colonial plantations, the struggles and achievements as well as the progress of the descendants who now number almost 12 million in original destination countries and several second migration countries.

Undoubtedly, today's Girmitiya takes pride in this history and yearns for more connections among themselves, to their respective countries of birth and to India as well.

In addition, there is interest in the destination countries and several second migration countries for this encyclopaedia which would become part of the history of those countries. In terms of documentation and preservation of history and culture, this encyclopaedia would be of interest to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the (British) Commonwealth, World Bank, major libraries and research centers, diaspora studies departments of universities and think tank groups.

Schedule of Implementation

This encyclopaedia project requires careful and methodical planning at all levels and regularly monitored steps at each stage of the process. The most crucial of these steps are as follows. Completion is set for **March 2020** coincident with last ships from India to former British colonies.

Dated: 1st April, 2018 By: Ashook Ramsaran

Ashook K. Ramsaran was born in Guyana (formerly British Guiana) third generation of Indian indentured laborers who came to in 1853 and 1860 respectively. He obtained advanced degrees in engineering at Polytechnic University in New York, USA. He is president of the Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC) and former president of the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO International) and very active in New York and US national deliberations on migration, assimilation, partnerships and inclusivity for good citizenship. He is founder and president of Ramex, an electronics manufacturing company based in New York where he resides with his family. Ramsaran is the recipient of India's Pravasi Saman Award for his contributions to the Indian Diaspora. Contact: AshookRamsaran@gmail.com

Attachments

Indian Indenture Labourer Contract

Indian Indenture Agreement of 1912

- ◆Period of Service-Five Years from the Date of Arrival in the Colony.
- ◆Nature of labour-Work in connection with the Cultivation of the soil or the manufacture of the produce on any plantation.
- ◆Number of days on which the Emigrant is required to labour in each Week-Everyday, excepting Sundays and authorized holidays.
- ◆Number of hours in every day during which he is required to labour without extra remuneration-Nine hours on each of five consecutive days in every week commencing with the Monday of each week, and five hours on the Saturday of each week.
- ◆Monthly or Daily Wages and Task-Work Rates-When employed at time-work every adult male Emigrant above the age of fifteen years will be paid not less than one shilling, which is at present equivalent to twelve annas and every adult female Emigrant above that age not less than nine pence, which is at present equivalent to nine annas, for every working day of nine hours; children below that age will receive wages proportionate to the amount of work done.
- ◆When employed at task or ticca-work every adult male Emigrant above the age of fifteen years will be paid not less than one shilling, and every adult female Emigrant above that age not less than nine pence for every task which shall be performed.
- ◆The law is that a man's task shall be as much as ordinary able-bodied adult male Emigrant can do in six hours' steady work, and that a woman's task shall be three-fourths of a man's task. An employer is not bound to allot, nor is an Emigrant bound to perform more than one task in each day, but by mutual agreement such extra work may be allotted, performed and paid for.
- ◆Wages are paid weekly on the Saturday of each week.
- ◆Conditions as to return passage-Emigrants may return to India at their own expense after completing five years' industrial residence in the Colony.
- ◆ After ten years' continuous residence every Emigrant who was above the age of twelve on introduction to the Colony and who during that period has completed an industrial residence of five years, shall be entitled to a free-return passage if he claims it within two years after the completion of the ten years' continuous residence. If the Emigrant was under twelve years of age when he was introduced into the colony, he will be entitled to a free return passage if he claims it before he reaches 24 years of age and fulfills the other conditions as to residence. A child of an Emigrant born within the colony will be entitled to a free return passage until he reaches the age of twelve, and must be accompanied on the voyage by his parents or guardian.
- ◆Other Conditions-Emigrants will receive rations from their employers during the first six months after their arrival on the plantation according to the scale prescribed by the government of Fiji at a daily cost of four pence, which is at present equivalent to four annas, for each person of twelve years of age and upwards.
- ◆Every child between five and twelve years of age will receive approximately half rations free of cost, and every child, five years of age and under, nine chattacks of milk daily free of cost, during the first year after their arrival. ◆Suitable dwelling will be assigned to Emigrants under indenture free of rent and will be kept in good repair by the employers. When Emigrants under indenture are ill they will be provided with Hospital accommodation, Medical attendance, Medicines, Medical comforts and Food free of charge.
- ◆An Emigrant who has a wife still living is not allowed to marry another wife in the Colony unless his marriage with his first wife shall have been legally dissolved; but if he is married to more than one wife in his country he can take them all with him to the Colony and they will then be legally registered and acknowledged as his wives.

Dep't No. ~~106~~ 106

COLONIAL EMIGRATION FORM NO. 5.
FORM OF AGREEMENT FOR INTENDING EMIGRANTS.

Particulars of Emigrant executing a contract for service in TRINIDAD.

REGISTRATION		EMIGRANT.		DEPENDENTS.				RESIDENCE.					SUCCESSOR TO ESTATE IN INDIA.					
Date.	Number.	Name.	Father's name.	Name.	Relation-ship to labourer.	Sex.	Age.	Caste.	Occupation.	District.	Thana.	Village or Town and Mahalla.	Name.	District.	Thana.	Village or Town and Mahalla.	Father's Name.	Relation-ship.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14			15	16	
2. 6. 11	6	Singha	Mahar										Lukha	Masdoi	Sonpalpur	Danbar Mahalla	Mahar	Brother

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

Executed in my presence.

[Signature]
 Registering Officer.
 Dated at _____ the 2 6 1914
 N.B.—This form is to be filled up in the Office of the Registering Officer in English in duplicate.

Mark of Emigrant

_____ fit to emigrate,
_____ Surgeon.
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