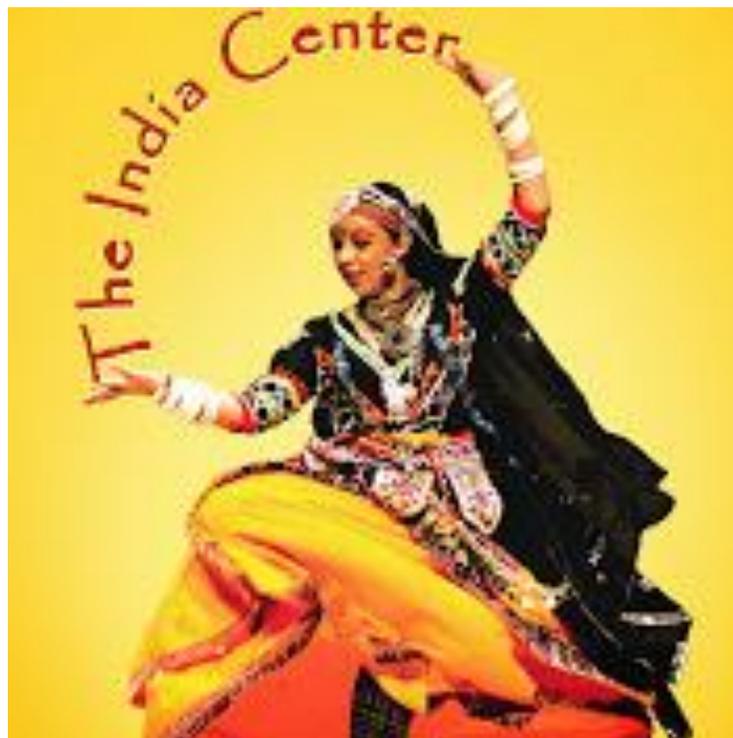


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FAR FROM HOME –
The story of Indian Indentured laborers in the Caribbean

Presentation by **Ashook K. Ramsaran**

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May 23, 2021

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Salutation

Good morning, Namaste, Salaam – one and all.

Before we begin:

I humbly request that we pause for a moment of silence for the many who passed away due to Covid-19, are still grasping for safety, here in USA and in India – as well as other countries. We pray for a permanent cure very soon for this disease for all of humanity. We also mourn the loss of life due to pervasive gun violence and other atrocities inflicted on innocent people.

We also recognize and condemn the atrocities against people in many parts of the world, and we urge peaceful resolutions of conflicts and disputes, in particular inter-ethnic conflicts which result in deaths, deprivation and displacement of untold masses of people.

Thank you.

Introduction

I am very pleased to have been selected to make this presentation and I look forward to sharing useful information, history, statistics and perspectives which would provide a better understanding of the subject matter:

I also appreciate all those who are attending this lecture, many of my associates and friends, and others from several continents and time zones. Thank you for being supportive and I do hope to meet your expectations.

Background

When Veena Shetty of The India Center of New York contacted me about this lecture, she pointed out that my background and expertise would provide useful information for the subject matter.

My full name is Ashook Kumar Ramsaran. Note that the spelling of my name was registered at the time of my birth by non-Indians who were the civil servants at that time, and actual spelling was based on phonetic interpretation.

My father's name was Ramsaran; my grandfather's name Ram Lochand.

One of the very early Indian arrivals in then British Guiana, my great grandfather named Pooriya left Kolkata aboard the ship Adelaide and arrived in then British Guiana (now Guyana) in 1853. The journey took approximately 100 days and there were average 400 passengers per ship load bound for the colonies. Normally 10% of passengers died per trip.

My great grandmother named Radhah left Kolkata aboard the ship Colgrain and arrived in then British Guiana (now Guyana) in 1860.

They were married just a few years later and raised a family together.

My grandfather named Ramlochan was born in 1867. My father named Ramsaran was born in 1914

Background

I was born in Guyana in 1968, attended high school thanks to a scholarship from the plantation company. I graduated 2 years earlier than children of my age, worked briefly as a primary school teacher, then in the magistrate's court before getting married and leaving Guyana for the USA at an early age for studies abroad.

I would have gone to UK but my parents could not afford the costs, so I decided to come to USA where more opportunities were available after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1965.

Like my great grandfather Pooriya in 1853, I was one of the early arrivals from Guyana in USA.

I attended technical university and obtained a bachelor's degree and master's degree specializing in computer electronics - while raising a family and becoming settled and assimilate to a new homeland.

I must credit my forefathers for their pioneering spirit, endurance and determination to make a better livelihood for themselves and their families – and in doing so, make the new land or country a better place.

To that extent, I believe that we, as persons of Indian origin (PIOs) have succeeded beyond expectations.

You should know that I am not a Diaspora scholar as defined in pure academic terms. I have done a lot of research, traveled widely to India and countries of the Indian Diaspora, organized and participated in Diaspora conferences, seminars and symposia in India, Europe, UK, USA, Central America, the Caribbean and other places.

I am the only non-academic board member of St. John's University College of Caribbean and Latin American Studies (CLACS) and collaborate annually on issues of interest and concern on migration to the United States. In addition, since 2004 through 2015, I have chaired and/or made presentations at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) in India, the annual convention for engagement with the Diaspora.

I am convinced that I do bring the unique experience, emotions, enthusiasm, interest and energy of a person of Indian origin (PIO).

I will attempt to provide you with the insights, history, experiences and perspectives on the basis of documented history, research and writings of so many scholars and writers who labour continuously to tell the story of our journeys. I will refer to the works of acclaimed scholars, researchers and writers such as Dr Basdeo Mangru, Dr Clem Seecharran, Dr Mohan Gautam, Dr Visnu Bisram, Dr Chandershekar Bhat, Mr. Deo Gosine and others. To them, we owe a debt of gratitude.

The Indian Diaspora Council convened the centennial commemoration of the abolition of Indian indentureship in 12017 in Trinidad which was an astounding success.

Please note that this lecture is a discussion about the journeys from India to the former British colonies and the lives of the Indians who took that journey and their descendants. A further discussion on the journeys of their descendants subsequently to other countries should be another lecture session.

Definition

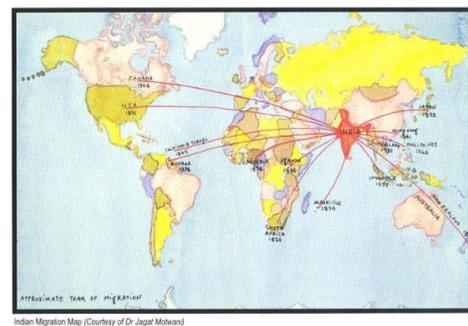
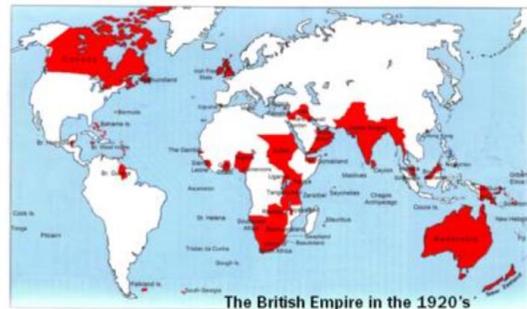
It is generally known that a **Girmitiya** is a descendant of Indian Indentured labourers who were taken to Fiji during the period of Indian indentureship by the British. Girmitiya can be defined as Indian Indentured labourers and their descendants encompassing of **all** Indian Indentured labourers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

Girmitiya today total between 12-15 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.

Reason for Indian Indentureship

The indentured labor trade was initiated to replace freed African 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.

MAPS



INDIAN MIGRATION

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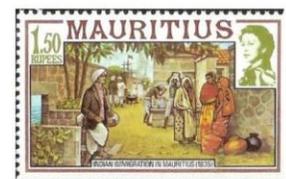
Arrival History by Country & Territory:

Country	Date of First Arrival & Ship Name	Number of Arrivals
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 - <i>Aurèle</i>	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>Aurèle</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	1,000 from 1857 revolt
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
Mauritius	November 2, 1834 - <i>Atlas</i>	451,796

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



Kolkata Memorial 2011 (Photos by Ashook Ramsaran)



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.

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.

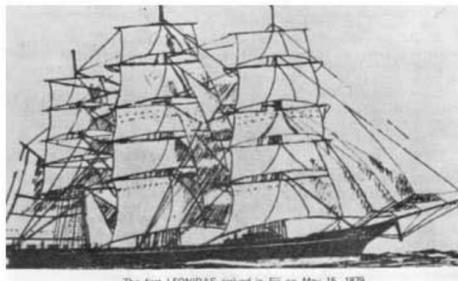
March 20, 2017 marked the centennial of official abolition of Indian Indentureship, an era spanning the years 1834-1917. The history and consequences of Indian Indentureship are deeply embedded with tremendous significance, importance, meaningful history and reflections to millions of descendants living 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.

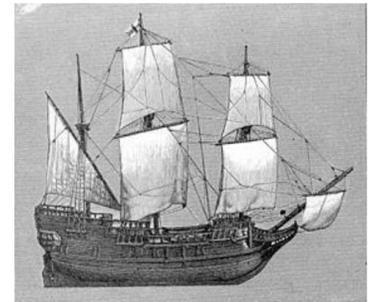
SHIPS



'S.S. Whirby' and the 'S.S. Hesperus' arriving at port Georgetown, British Guiana, on May 5, 1838



The first LEONIDAS arrived in Fiji on May 15, 1879.

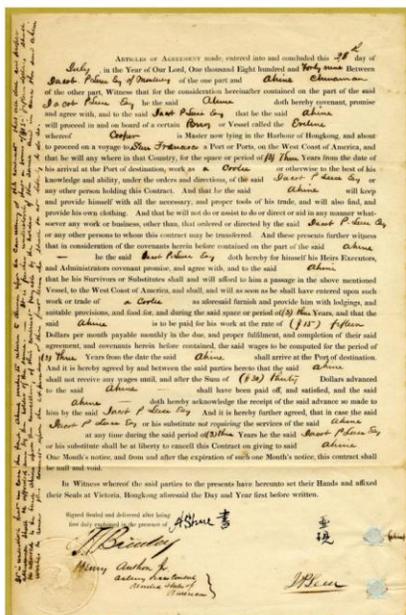


Places of Recruitment

Sailing From	Province	Districts of Recruitment
Calcutta and Bombay	Northwest Provinces	Allahabad, Azimfhur, Mirzapore, Beneras, Gahazeepore, Goruckpore, Meerut, Cawnpore, Barielly, Agra, Jansie, Jounpore
Calcutta and Bombay	Oudh	Oude, Lucknow, Seetapore, Sultanpore, Faizabad, Roy Bareily
Calcutta and Bombay	Central India	Indore, Nagapore, Jubbulpore, Raipore, Remah, Gwalior
Calcutta and Bombay	Bihar	Shahabad, Patna, Gya, Arrah, Sarun, Tirhoot, Chumparan, Monghyr, Bhagulpore
Calcutta and Bombay	Bengal	Calcutta 24, Pergunnahs, Howrah, Nuddea, Burdwan, Moorshedabad, Jessore, Pubua, Rungpore, Cooch Behar, Purneah, Chota, Nagpore, Bankoora, Birbhum, Midnapore, Sonthal, Pergunnahs, Dacca, Mymensingh, Backergunge, Fureedpore
Calcutta and Bombay	Bombay Presidency and Orissa	Cuttac, Balasore, Pooree
Calcutta and Bombay	Punjab Dependencies	Delhi, Umballa, Jullunder, Amritsur, Lahore, Peshawar, Ferozepore, Gujarat
Madras	-	Salem, Combaconum, Tanjore, Cuddalore, Trichinopoly, Chittoor, Madura, Chingleput
(To Mauritius)	Telugu District	Ganjam, Vizagapatnam, Godavari, Guntur
(To Mauritius)		Pondicherry and Cochin

CONTRACT

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The Indenture Agreement

The following is the indenture agreement:
 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 chatacks 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.

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."

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

Indian Arrival in the Caribbean Region



Name of Destination Colony	Arrival Year	Language Spoken
Guyana (British Guiana)	1838	English
Trinidad	1845	English
Jamaica	1845	English
Martinique	1853	French
Guadeloupe	1854	French
Cayenne (French Guiana)	1854	French
Belize (British Honduras)	1857	English
Grenada	1857	English
St. Lucia	1859	English
St. Vincent	1861	English
St. Kitts (St. Christopher)	1861	English
St. Croix (Danish West Indies)	1863	English
Suriname (Dutch Guiana)	1873	Dutch

From 1838 to 1917, over half a million Indians from the former British Raj or British India, were taken to thirteen mainland and island nations in the Caribbean as Indentured workers to address the demand for sugar cane plantation labour following the abolition of slavery. Attempts at importing Portuguese, Chinese and others as indentured laborers had failed. Much like cotton, sugarcane plantations motivated large scale near-enslavement and forced migrations in the 19th and early 20th century.

Following the emancipation of slaves in 1834 in the United Kingdom, many liberated Africans left their former masters. This created an economic chaos for British owners of sugar-cane plantations in the Caribbean region, and elsewhere. The hard work in hot, humid farms required a regular, docile and low-waged labour force. The British looked for cheap labour. Since slavery had been abolished, the British crafted a new legal system of forced labour, which in many ways resembled enslavement. Instead of calling them slaves, they were called indentured labourers. Indians, primarily began to replace Africans previously brought as slaves, under this indentured labour scheme to serve on sugarcane plantations across the British Empire.

The first ships carrying *indentured* labourers for sugarcane plantations left India in 1838 for the Caribbean region. In fact, the first two shiploads of Indians arrived in British Guiana (now Guyana) on May 5, 1838 on board the Whitby and Hesperus. These ships had sailed from Calcutta. In the early decades of the sugarcane-driven migrations, *indentured* Indians were treated as inhumanely as the enslaved Africans had been. They were confined to their estates and paid a pitiful salary. Any breach of contract brought automatic criminal penalties and imprisonment. Many of these were brought away from their homelands deceptively.

Many from inland regions over a thousand kilometers from seaports were promised jobs, were not told the work they were being hired for, or that they would leave their homeland and communities. They were hustled aboard the waiting ships, unprepared for the long and arduous four-month sea journey. Charles Anderson, a special magistrate investigating these sugarcane plantations, wrote to the British Colonial Secretary declaring that with few exceptions, the indentured labourers are treated with great and unjust severity; plantation owners enforced work in sugarcane farms so harshly, that the decaying remains of immigrants were frequently discovered in sugarcane fields. When labourers protested and refused to work, they were not paid or fed: they simply starved.

The sugarcane plantation-driven migrations led to ethnically significant presence of Indians in Caribbean. In some islands and countries, these Indo-Caribbean migrants now constitute a significant proportion of the population. Sugarcane plantations and citizens of Indian origin continue to thrive in countries such as Guyana, formerly British Guiana, Jamaica, Trinidad, Martinique, French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Grenada, St Lucia, St Vincent, St Kitts, St Croix, Suriname and Nevis.

By some estimates, over 2.5 million people in the Caribbean are of Indian origin. Many have ethnically blended with migrants from other parts of the world, creating a unique syncretic culture. Not just British colonies, sugarcane production affected human history in colonies controlled by other pre-World War II powers. France, for example, negotiated with Britain leading to Act XLVI of 1860, whereby large numbers of Indian indentured labourers were brought for harsh sugarcane plantation work in French colonies in the Caribbean region. The Caribbean colonies of the Netherlands too benefitted from the indentured laborers from India.

Migration of Indians to the Caribbean Region

In recent years, attempts to commemorate the Indian presence and contributions have come to fruition: In 1995, Jamaica started to celebrate the arrival of Indians in Old Harbour Bay, St. Catherine Parish on May 13. In 2003, Martinique celebrated the 150th anniversary of Indian arrival. Guadeloupe did the same in 2004. These celebrations were not the fact of just the Indian minority, but the official recognition by the French and local authorities of their integration and their wide-scale contributions in various fields from Agriculture to Education, Politics and to the diversification of the culture of the Creole peoples. Thus, the noted participation of the whole multi-ethnic population of the two islands were in these events.

St. Lucia and many Caribbean countries have dedicated commemorative days to acknowledge the arrival and important contributions of their Indo-Caribbean populations. St. Lucia celebrates its Indo-Caribbean heritage on May 6. Other dates when the India Arrival Day is celebrated in the Caribbean include May 5 (Guyana), May 10 (Jamaica), May 30 (Trinidad and Tobago), June 1 (St. Vincent), and June 5 (Suriname).

Indian Heritage & Perspectives

Indian heritage and culture are the cornerstone of the diaspora, transcending time and place, surviving obstacles and severe situations, remoteness and influences. Despite speaking different languages, living in different and sometimes remote places, sustaining and improving our lives, we share heartfelt feelings of Indianness and the urge and yearning to connect and belong. Meanwhile, we have inherited and taken a lot from India and transformed our lives and the new countries of our birth or adoption.

The Indian diaspora is a continuing phenomenon and can be likened to “the export of people seeking better lives for themselves and their families” which we achieve, and subsequently we flourish after assimilation and adaption with each succeeding generation, while adding to economic progress of our respective countries of domicile.

Indian heritage, culture and values are the driving elements for sustenance, survival, achievement, pride and progress at all levels.

Indian Heritage & Perspectives *(Cont'd)*

Our diaspora is molded by culture, heritage and values while it also adds to and sometimes influences those traits in both subtle and visible ways: language, clothing, lifestyle, technology and social values.

The older diaspora, which I refer to as the legacy diaspora, of the Caribbean, Africa, Mauritius and Oceania, have retained more of the Indian culture and heritage intact and in its original form for the many reasons associated with remoteness, harsh living conditions, sense of belonging and togetherness, sustenance and bonding – while some adaptation was necessary, such as with foods and clothing, some conversion to Christianity, and break down of the caste system. Later, some Indian music and songs witnessed a fusion combination such as “Caribbean Chutney”.

It seems that wherever we Indians go, we take certain staples that sustain us: Mantra; Music; Massala; Memories; Mentoring; the importance of Mataji; the value of Money; and of course, thrift and hard work.

Simultaneously, we have a knack for reconciling our two (2) identities – our inherent Indianness and birth or newly adopted citizenship. We learn very easily to adapt, co-exist and progress in other countries with multi-ethnic societies far away from India or the Caribbean. Indian heritage is such a powerful asset in the diaspora that some colonial powers marginalized persons of Indian origin curbing cultural observances and by making it difficult to maintain cultural traditions.

Despite such efforts, those Indians persevered and sought more to preserve and protect Indian by culture, heritage and values, and survived and remained vibrant.

I want to stress that adherence to heritage and cultural origin should not – and must not – diminish national loyalty. In fact, assimilation and adaption are key attributes to progressive lives in other birth or newly adopted countries.

Our heritage includes “blessings as well as yokes of burdens”. These are topics for an extensive discussion.

With innovation, modern communications, advanced transportation and increased levels of mobility, as well as increased opportunities in other countries, there is re-migration or second journeys. There also some repatriation to the Caribbean countries after retirement.

Especially among older (legacy) diaspora, there is the yearning to find one’s roots with research and regular trips by PIOs from Caribbean, South Africa and Mauritius to find’s family and “roots”. The “Tracing our Roots” was first discussed at a session I organized at PBD20005 in Mumbai because of the need. The Kolkata Memorial, a diaspora initiative that I worked closely with Government of India to dedicate, is a beacon of acknowledgement of those who left India as indentured laborers from 1834-1920.

One must acknowledge and be grateful for the indisputable and invaluable role of civic, cultural, religious and advocacy organizations in preservation of inherent culture and values. These have helped promote assimilation with ease, generally peaceful co-existence among multi-ethnic societies while advancing diaspora advocacy organization addressing the concerns and interests of the global Indian community.

Indian heritage has undoubtedly influenced our lives and in time, we have also influenced the lives of others (non-Indians) in our midst. Visible examples include: Gandhi as model of tolerance and perseverance for those seeking peace, civil rights and equality in USA, South Africa and other countries; celebration and general acceptance of Holi and Diwali by non-Indians.

Courage, reliance, determination, thrift and hard work, competitiveness, faith reverence and respect – hallmarks of Indianness derived from culture, heritage and values that are maintained, nurtured and remain with us beyond the shores of India and the Caribbean.

Footprints

Our ancestors arrived barefoot from India to the Caribbean – just like Africans who were made slaves. It is ironic that we should talk about footprints because they physically left their footprints on the landscape as well. They have made a lasting impact on the lives of people and the countries where they lived: Socially, culturally, economically and politically. We came for opportunity seeking better lives. We came seeking better lives and we achieved beyond expectations.

The 1st journey 1838-1917 was charted for us by others with little or no choice of destination – a form of servitude. The 2nd journey is for opportunity by choice and circumstances. On this 2nd journey, we are designing the road map and leaving footprints along the way.

Our second migration from Caribbean to North America and other countries are also part of the journey and impact on our lives and the lives of our descendants.

Our footprints are indelible and last forever – because of the historical significance of our journeys, because we make an earnest effort to make sure the steps, the journeys and experiences are fully documented regardless of moments of dispute or controversy or even unsavory episodes. We have progressed and will continue to make an impact wherever we go or whatever we do – with more footprints along the way. These are footprints that cannot be denied, diminished, disregarded or neglected.

Documenting the Journeys

We must recognize those whose efforts contribute to tracing the footsteps, follow the footprints and documenting the journeys. These include our many historians, researchers and writers, singers, including poets – among the known ones: Peter Rohuman, Dwarka Nath, Badseo Mangru, V. S. Naipaul, Balkrishna Naipual, Dhanpaul Narine, Baytoram Ramharack, Tyran Ramnarine, Clem Seecharan, Lakshmi Persaud, Jean regis Ramsamy, Pat Dial, Guitra Bahadur, Shundell Presad, Khalil Ali and so many others then - now and to follow. It is important that we encourage more to do research and document this amazing phenomenon.

Efforts are being made to include Caribbean migration history in the schools where our people reside in USA and Canada – for this and the next generation to become more aware while education others about our history to crease more understanding among people of different backgrounds and ethnicity. We should also remember and recognize those who were the pioneers in the struggle for rights and freedom from colonial domination. There are many who are living as well as those who have passed on.

The KIndan Diaspora Council has proposed to the Govt of India a Diaspora Museum and Conference Center to be located in Kolkata, the port from which most of Indian indentured departed. We request that to proceed as it is central to Indian migration to the former British colonies.

The Indian Diaspora Council is in the planning stages of a virtual museum to house records, books, history and artifacts from the 22 countries to which Indians went as part of the indenturedship era.

Achievements

For a region with slightly over 1 million people of Indian origin, we have made tremendous strides and remarkable achievements while overcoming many hardships and obstacles. We have produced prime ministers, presidents, cabinet ministers, the best cricketers, Nobel laureate, legal minds, professions, entrepreneurs, scholars and scientists. These are stalwarts on whose shoulders we stand tall, who made it possible for us to be courageous and be recognized. They - and we – owe it all to those who made those first footprints.

Guyana: Presidents Cheddi Jagan, Bharrat Jagdeo, Donald Romotar & Irfan Ali

Trinidad: Prime Ministers Basdeo Pandey & Kamla Persad-Bissessar

Suriname: President Chandrikaprasad Santoki

Nobel Laurate: Sir V S Naipaul

Commonwealth Secretary General: (1st): Sir Shridath Ramphal

Cricketers: Rohan Kanhai, Joseph Solomon, Sonny Ramadhin, Alvin Kalicharran, Sew Shivnarine and several others

Historians & Writers: Dwarka Nath, Clem Seecharran, Basdeo Mangru, Vishnu Bisram, Arnold Thomas, Winston Tolan, Brindsley Samaroo, Marina Buidhos, Lakshmi Persaud, Janet Naidu, Balkrishna Naipaul, Khalil Ali, and many others.

Singers: Seeta Panday, Terry Gajraj, Ramdew Chaitoe, Sundar Popo, Rakesh Yankarran, and many others

Academics: Prof Clem Sankat, Prof Tota Mangar, Prof Kumar Mahabir, Prof Sherry-Ann Singh and many others.

Entrepreneurs: Yesu Persaud, Deo Gosine, Boysie Siew, Helen Bhanwansingh, Imran McSood, Brian Ramphal, Ken Singh and so many others.

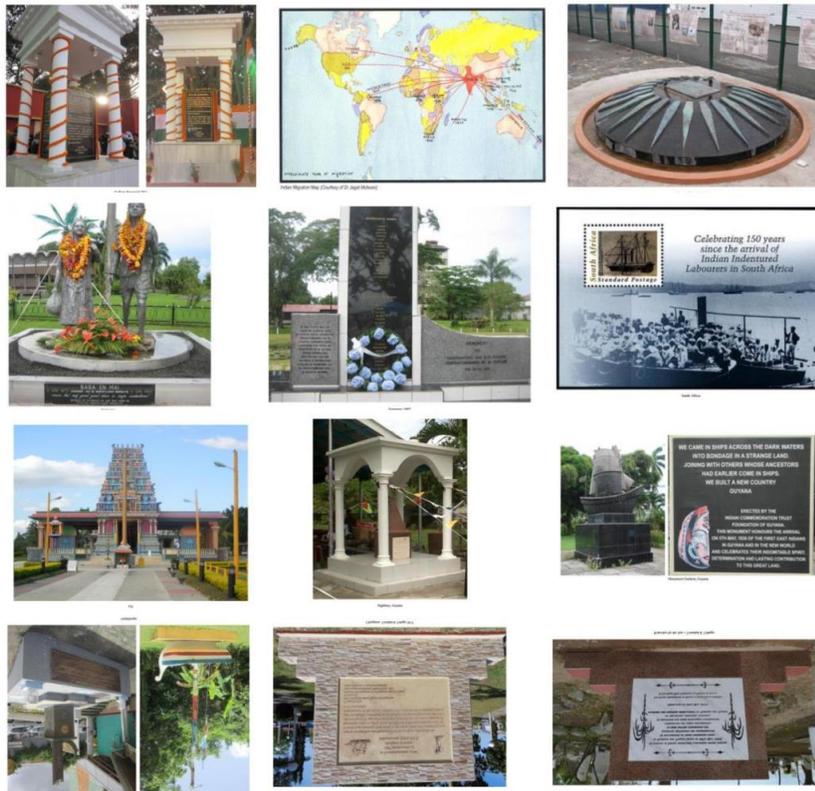
Monuments & Incriptions

I strongly believe in establishing markers as we make these journeys – markers which transcend time and place, cultures and creeds – markers for past, present and future – in recognition and remembrance of our journeys.

I am honored to have collaborated with the Government of India for the construction and dedication of the Kolkata Memorial on the banks of the Hugli River at a place called Demerara Kidderpore Depot in Kolkata on January 11, 2011. The Kolkata Memorial has meaningful significance to millions of descendants of those who left India as indentured Indian laborers from 1834 thru’ 1920. I am honored to have written the inscription expressing the hopes and aspirations of those early pioneers and their descendants.

I stated in one my published articles in 2010 that, “Our ancestors who left those shores truly deserve their place in the annals of Indian history and the journeys of people of Indian origin in the Indian Diaspora. We should all be very proud of our ancestors who made the first journey that has become an integral part of our history as well. We certainly owe them a lasting tribute, recognition of their sacrifices and a truly worthy remembrance”.

Markers & Footprints - Journeys of the Indian Diaspora



Compiled by:
Ashook Ramsaran
AshookRamsaran@gmail.com

Indianness & Heritage

Our diaspora is molded by culture, heritage and values while it also adds to and at times influences those traits in both subtle and visible ways: language, clothing, lifestyle, technology and social values. The older diaspora (which I refer to as the legacy diaspora) of the Caribbean, Africa, Mauritius and Oceania, have retained more of the Indian culture and heritage intact and in its original forms for the many reasons associated with remoteness, harsh living conditions, sense of belonging and togetherness, sustenance and bonding. During that process, some adaptation became necessary, such as with foods and clothing, some conversion to Christianity, and break down of the caste system. Later, some Indian music and songs witnessed a fusion combination such as “Caribbean Chutney”.

However, it seems that wherever we Indians go, we take certain staples that sustain us: Mantra; Music; Massala; Memories; Mentoring; Marriage; the importance of Mataji; value of Money and so on.

This identity of Indianness and preservation of culture are often cited by other ethnic groups and used as valuable lessons in consideration of their own expatriates. The Organization of American States and the Commonwealth Symposium in UK recently invited me as one knowledgeable in the Indian diaspora for discussions in El Salvador and Birmingham, UK respectively for recommendations to harness the strength, expertise and assets of their respective groups of expatriates: Latin America; Jamaica; Nigeria and others.

From Durban to Detroit, we have strived to do better for ourselves and have contributed to the new country’s progress in significant ways. We have put a woman in space; cell phones in the hands of working people; wiped out polio; excelled in tennis, cricket, chess, entrepreneurship, medicine and law; earned Nobel prizes for writing and economics, science and technology, etc.

Consistent with the pioneering spirit of our Indian forebears, we have a knack for reconciling our two (2) identities – our inherent Indianness and birth or newly adopted citizenship. We learn very easily to adapt and co-exist and progress in other countries with multi-ethnic societies far away from India

Indianness & Heritage *(Cont’d)*

Indian heritage is such a powerful asset in the diaspora that some other colonial powers marginalized persons of Indian origin curbing cultural observances and by making it difficult to maintain cultural traditions; despite such efforts, those Indians persevered and sought more to preserve and protect Indian by culture, heritage and values, and survived and remained vibrant.

I have always promoted the notion that adherence to Indian heritage and cultural origin should not – and must not – diminish national loyalty. In fact, assimilation and adaption are key attributes to progressive lives in other birth and/or newly adopted countries.

Our heritage includes “blessings as well as yokes of burdens” – such as caste; centuries of traditions that contribute to social injustices; perceptions of differences among us while others (non-Indians) do not; inter-generational issues; “don’t worry”; not my fault; “I am not the concerned person”; there’s always an explanation; “no” is not necessarily the last word; restraint; flexibility and looking for another entrance; knowing everything; not helping the cutlery industry; clash of culture” difficulties; recycled leadership in politics, religious and social organizations; etc, etc.

There is an emerging pattern re-migration, so called second journeys, with innovation, modern communications, advanced transportation and increased levels of mobility, as well as increased opportunities in management, professions, business and entrepreneurship in a growing India. There also some repatriation to India and other diaspora countries after retirement.

Especially among older (legacy) diaspora, there is the yearning to find one’s roots with research and regular trips by PIOs from Caribbean, South Africa, Fiji and Mauritius to find family and “roots”. The “Tracing our

Indianness & Heritage *(Cont'd)*

Roots” was first discussed at a session I organized at PBD20005 in Mumbai because of the need. The Kolkata Memorial, a diaspora initiative that I worked closely with Government of India to design and dedicate, is so symbolic as a beacon of acknowledgement of those who left India as indentured laborers from 1834-1920 (being replicated in Guyana on its 175th Anniversary of Indian Arrival Day on May 5, 2013); the Gadar Centennial independence movement was also a diaspora initiative and will be celebrated as such; Mahatma Gandhi’s return to India to fight for freedom is well known.

One must acknowledge and be grateful for the indisputable and invaluable role of civic, cultural, religious and advocacy organizations in preservation of inherent culture and values – such as GOPIO of which I am privileged to be the current president. These have helped promote assimilation with ease, generally peaceful co-existence among multi-ethnic societies.

Indian heritage has undoubtedly influenced our lives and in time, we have also influenced the lives of others (non-Indians) in our midst. Visible examples include: Gadar movement spawned and encouraged others in diaspora countries in their struggle for their independence; Gandhi as model of tolerance and perseverance for those seeking peace, civil rights and equality in USA, South Africa and other countries; celebration and general acceptance of Holi and Diwali by non-Indians.

Courage, reliance, determination, thrift and hard work, competitiveness, faith reverence and respect – hallmarks of Indianness derived from culture, heritage and values that are maintained, nurtured and remain with us beyond the shores of India.

As a precaution: It behooves us to take steps to promote and preserve Indian culture, heritage and values among the younger generation in the diaspora who could be easily swayed by the influences of technology, mobility and inter-marriage -- lest the diaspora wanes in these attributes that are serving it well.

Living outside of India, we can teach a lot to others while we learn much as well. Living outside of India, we have improved and transformed our lives and the countries where we live. The Indian diaspora is fortunate that nowadays there is freedom to migrate with many available countries which readily accept Indians and persons of Indian origin to settle and become citizens, to make progress at all levels, to bring their extended families, to continue religious and cultural observances, and to live in safety in pursuit of better livelihoods for their families.

Continuing

The dialogue continues as the Indian journey continues in so many progressive ways, adaptable to circumstances, conditions, time and place – with preservation of core values, heritage and history. Our pioneering spirit, resilience and determination are hallmarks of our journeys and will continue to sustain us as the journey continues.

Our history is being written by what we do and how our journey continues – and we leave more indelible and amazing footprints to remember and follow.

As a precaution: It behooves us to take all necessary steps to promote and preserve Culture, heritage and values among the younger generation in the diaspora with the influences of technology, mobility and inter-marriage -- lest the diaspora wanes in these attributes that are serving it well.

Living outside of the Caribbean, we can teach a lot to others while we learn a lot as well. Living outside of the Caribbean, we have improved and transformed our lives and the countries where we live.

All diaspora are fortunate that nowadays there is freedom to migrate with many available countries which readily accept migration and becoming citizens, to make progress at all levels, to bring their extended families, to continue religious and cultural observances, and to live in safety.

Renewed Engagement with India

It seems that destiny has a way of devising ways to come full circle. Indian indenturedship to the Caribbean region was based on economic motivation – cheap labor for the British plantation owners.

Renewing the engagement with India can provide tremendous economic advantages for both India and the Caribbean region with its huge, untapped marketplace for Indian pharmaceuticals, science and technology, academic, health, textile and dairy products for the entire Caribbean, Latin America and South American markets.

Full circle is Indian economic motivation to take advantage of these opportunities in many sectors. It may be advantageous for India to set up an economic hub in the Caribbean region to advance its agenda beneficial to both India and the region.

Conclusion

I trust that my presentation was informative and adds to the dialogue on Indians in the Caribbean.

My presentation in 25 minutes is just a brush stroke on a huge canvas of our journeys, history, challenges and opportunities. More details and more information can be obtained from the many scholars and writers who are the real experts on this topic.

.....

Ashook K. Ramsaran



Born in Guyana, Ashook Kumar Ramsaran is a third generation Indian whose ancestors came to Guyana as indentured laborers (1853 & 1860). He worked in Guyana's magistrate's courts before emigrating to the US in 1968 where he earned his BSEE and MSEE degrees. He was VP of Engineering in an international communications company before launching his own electronics manufacturing enterprise in New York called Ramex which has been listed among the Top 100 Indian Owned Businesses in USA for 10 consecutive years.

Ashook K. Ramsaran is Founder/President of the Indian Diaspora Council (IDC) and past president of Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO). He is the Executive VP of GOPIO International and Chairperson of GOPIO's Tracing Our Roots Committee. He is Co-Founder & DG of the Guyanese East Indian Civic Association (GEICA), and Director of the Caribbean Business Council (CBC).

He is actively engaged in the Queens Civic Congress, New York Presbyterian Hospital Advisory Council, St. John's University Center for Caribbean & Latin American Studies and was accorded a special recognition by St. John's University in 2007 and a scholarship for Diaspora studies was established in his name.

Ramsaran also collaborates with New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA - NYC) on annual events on immigrant experiences in New York City. He has been honored as an "Outstanding Immigrant" by New York City Council and serves annually as "Principal For The Day" in the New York Public School system. He was honored by a Special Proclamation by City of New York in 2009 for his outstanding contributions as an immigrant in the US and was the recipient of "Asian Heritage Award" in New York in 2010.

He was featured in the Global Indian 2010 publication of "Top 25 Indian Luminaries of the World" and several local, national, regional and international publications. In 2011, he was listed among "The Top 25 Most Influential Indians in North America" and was given a special award in Toronto, Canada.

Ramsaran collaborates with India's Ministry of Overseas Indians Affairs on global Indian Diaspora matters and the annual Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) events. He initiated and chaired the first "Tracing Our Roots" session at PBD 2005; speaker at PBD 2007; PBD2008; PBD2009, PBD2010 and PBD2011. He was the Convenor of GOPIO's highly successful 20th Anniversary Convention 2009 in New York. Ramsaran collaborated closely with the Government of India to dedicate the Kolkata Memorial India in 2011 in remembrance of indentured laborers sent to British colonies from 1834 thru' 1920. Ramsaran is spearheading the effort by the Global Indian Diaspora Heritage Society for a museum/resource center in Kolkata where Indian indentured laborers were processed prior to assignment in British colonies.

Ramsaran received the Government of India's Pravasi Samman Award by the President of India in 2011 - the highest honor bestowed by the Government of India to a person of Indian origin living outside of India.

GIRMITIYA MIGRATION ARRIVAL HISTORY

Definition:

While it is generally known that a Girmitiya is a descendant of Indian Indentured labourers to Fiji, the Indian Diaspora Council International has defined a Girmitiya as a descendant 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.

Arrival History by Country & Territory:

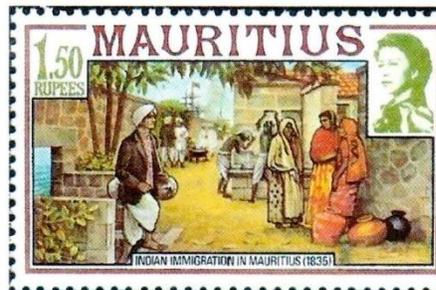
Country	Date of First Arrival & Ship Name	Number of Arrivals
Guyana (formerly British Guiana)	May 5, 1838 - <i>Hesperus</i>	238,909
Trinidad & Tobago	May 31, 1845 - <i>Fatal Razak</i>	143,939
Guadeloupe	December 24, 1854 - <i>Aurélie</i>	42,326
Jamaica	May 7, 1845 - <i>Maidstone</i>	36,412
Suriname (formerly 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
Mauritius	November 2, 1834 - <i>Atlas</i>	451,796

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 – Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC)



Kolkata Memorial 2011 (Photos by Ashook Ramsaran)



The Indenture Agreement

The following is the indenture agreement:

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.

IMMIGRATION PASSES

FORM No. 15
 No. 311
MAN'S EMIGRATION PASS.
 Issued to *John S. Thompson*
 Name *John S. Thompson*
 Rank *1st Class*
 Age *30*
 Sex *Male*
 Height *5 ft 10 in*
 Eyes *Blue*
 Hair *Dark*
 Complexion *Fair*
 Occupation *Merchant*
 Date of Birth *1888*
 Place of Birth *London*
 Signature *John S. Thompson*
 Date *14/10/1914*

BOY'S EMIGRATION PASS.
 No. 472
 Issued to *Robert James*
 Name *Robert James*
 Rank *1st Class*
 Age *12*
 Sex *Male*
 Height *4 ft 6 in*
 Eyes *Blue*
 Hair *Dark*
 Complexion *Fair*
 Occupation *Student*
 Date of Birth *1902*
 Place of Birth *London*
 Signature *Robert James*
 Date *14/10/1914*

WOMAN'S EMIGRATION PASS.
 No. 679
 Issued to *Elizabeth*
 Name *Elizabeth*
 Rank *1st Class*
 Age *35*
 Sex *Female*
 Height *5 ft 2 in*
 Eyes *Blue*
 Hair *Dark*
 Complexion *Fair*
 Occupation *Housewife*
 Date of Birth *1879*
 Place of Birth *London*
 Signature *Elizabeth*
 Date *14/10/1914*

WOMAN'S EMIGRATION PASS.
 No. 1117
 Issued to *Elizabeth*
 Name *Elizabeth*
 Rank *1st Class*
 Age *35*
 Sex *Female*
 Height *5 ft 2 in*
 Eyes *Blue*
 Hair *Dark*
 Complexion *Fair*
 Occupation *Housewife*
 Date of Birth *1879*
 Place of Birth *London*
 Signature *Elizabeth*
 Date *14/10/1914*

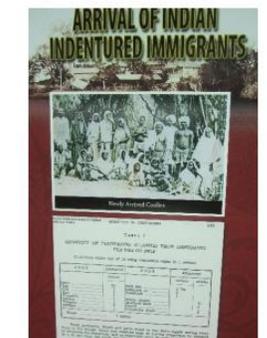
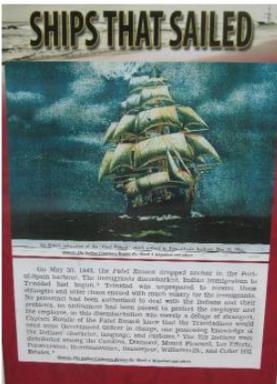
WOMAN'S EMIGRATION PASS.
 No. 2953
 Issued to *Elizabeth*
 Name *Elizabeth*
 Rank *1st Class*
 Age *35*
 Sex *Female*
 Height *5 ft 2 in*
 Eyes *Blue*
 Hair *Dark*
 Complexion *Fair*
 Occupation *Housewife*
 Date of Birth *1879*
 Place of Birth *London*
 Signature *Elizabeth*
 Date *14/10/1914*

MAN'S EMIGRATION PASS.
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 Issued to *Robert James*
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 Sex *Male*
 Height *4 ft 6 in*
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 Hair *Dark*
 Complexion *Fair*
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 Date of Birth *1902*
 Place of Birth *London*
 Signature *Robert James*
 Date *14/10/1914*

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 Date of Birth *1879*
 Place of Birth *London*
 Signature *Elizabeth*
 Date *14/10/1914*

DOCUMENTS



PAINTINGS

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PHOTOS

11



Note: Full credit for photos, paintings, maps, documents, references and information from various sources used in this presentation which is for non-profit educational purposes only.

PROSPECTS FOR TODAY & TOMORROW

- Academic
- Science & Technology
- Youth Corps
- Economic strengths
- Socio-Economic
- Social justice
- Opportunities in many sectors
- Peaceful Co-Existence
- Connections to India

ENGAGEMENT WITH INDIA

- Renewed cultural engagement
- Regional PBD in Caribbean
- Cultural revitalization
- Economic – energy source
- Science & Technology
- Pharmaceutical
- Opportunities in many sectors
- Establish Indian economic hub
- Hemispherical conflict resolution

CONCLUSION

- Emphasis on our history & progress
- Indian Diaspora in the Caribbean
- Opportunities in many sectors
- Growing pains but thriving
- Second journeys, migration trend (next lecture)