

Indians made significant contributions to Guyana

DEAR EDITOR,

Indo Guyanese have made a significant contribution to the development of the country. They came to British Guiana as indentured labourers to work in the sugar estates and in order to augment their meagre earnings, they engaged in farming and later their offspring did not only continue but expanded into large scale agriculture. The indentured workers were called “coolies” and up to this day Indo Guyanese are labelled as coolies. What is remarkable is that the coolies who were illiterate ensured that their offspring were properly educated and they denied themselves of the basics for the education of their children. Today, there are thousands of Indos who have received high education so much so that they are scattered all over the world — many of them are world renowned in the field of medicine, technology and other important areas. There are also hundreds of Afros who did extremely well in the educational, cultural, sports and other areas.

Indentured labourers were brought to the then British Guiana after the abolition of slavery because the ex-slaves and their off spring hated the land maybe because of their forced labour and moved into the towns and cities where most of them were employed as government employees – some of their children became teachers, police officers, postal workers, etc., while the Indos remain in the rural countries and concentrated in large scale farming. This trend continued for several decades and maybe up to this day.

It was on May 5, 1838, the first ship landed on British Guiana shores which continued until 1917 bringing a total of 238,809 indentured labourers to work in the sugar estates. May 5 has been designated as Indian arrival date. The Luckhoo family is one that excelled. Lokhooa was among the first to arrive. He educated himself and became a qualified interpreter became a Christian and called himself Moses Luckhoo. His offspring did extremely well especially in the legal field. His son, Edward Alfred Luckhoo became the first Solicitor and Edward’s son Lionel Alfred became the greatest criminal lawyer and was later knighted by the Queen. He was Guyana first High Commissioner to London and a few other European countries. He was also High Commissioner for Barbados. He wore two caps representing both Guyana and Barbados shortly after independence. In the early days, the outstanding Indians were Joseph Ruhoman, a writer and later Ayube Edun represented the workers in the field of trade unionism.

Among the Indos who excelled are Sir Shridath Ramphal who was Commonwealth Secretary General for 15 years. In the field of business — trade and commerce, Yesu Persaud who celebrated his 90th birthday recently, was honoured by at least three universities. A lecture room at the University of Warwick was named in his honour. Dr. Cheddi Jagan, can also be singled out for his role in politics and in the field of sports – Rohan Kanhai, Shivnarine Chanderpaul as outstanding cricketers. Dr. Basdeo Mangru, and Dr. Clem Seecharan are two historians who wrote several bookson Indian history and culture. President David Granger also penned about Indians in his book titled “Indian presence. There are few organizations, which propagate Indians including GOPIO and the Indian Diaspora Council which is headed by Berbician, Ashook Ramsaran, who is known in India, Mauritius, Fiji, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Space does not permit to identify more. It is unfortunate that the country’s historical background, culture and achievements have not been highlighted to any significant degree. The late Wordsworth Mc Andrew tried, but he was not given encouragement and he unfortunately had to leave Guyana for New Jersey where he died 11 years ago. It was only two months ago a monument portraying the indentured labourers from India was completed with financial assistance from the Indian government. It was erected at Palmyra, three miles outside the town of New Amsterdam.

Oscar Ramjeet

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Oscar Ramjeet is a Guyanese born attorney and journalist. He served as Solicitor General in St Vincent and the Grenadines as well as Belize. He was admitted to practice law in Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, St Lucia, Montserrat, British Virgin Islands as well as the Southern District of the State of New York in USA. He studied journalism and public relations in Germany, and was correspondent for BBC, AP and several Caribbean newspapers.

