

NEW INDIAN IMMIGRATION AFTER 1845

By Odeen Ishmael

The planters were also at this period agitating for state-aided immigration even though this was opposed by the influential Anti-Slavery Society in England. But in Guyana, the planters, who held a majority in the Combined Court of Policy, decided to pressure the British Government to agree to help fund immigration from India. Their chance came in 1840 when the Combined Court of Policy was presented with a proposed tax ordinance which would approve funds totalling \$206,000 to pay civil servants in the Colony. The planters refused to approve it unless immigration from India and elsewhere was permitted. The British Government then sent the Governor of Trinidad, Sir Henry McLeod, to negotiate with the planters who eventually won their demand. After the British Government agreed to re-open immigration, the Combined Court of Policy passed the tax ordinance.

While the sugar planters managed to obtain a limited quantity of labour from Madeira, West Africa, the West Indies and Europe, it was not until 1845 that immigration from India resumed, this time with the aid of government funds. In that year, two ships transported 593 Indians from Calcutta while one ship brought 233 from Madras. A steady flow continued in 1846 when 4,019 arrived from Calcutta and Madras. In 1847 a total of 3,461 arrived and 3,545 came the following year.

Many of these new immigrants (who came from 1845 to 1848) were unsuitable for field work since they were generally poor city dwellers. On arrival in Guyana, some of them abandoned their tasks on the plantations and resorted to a life of wandering, begging and doing menial jobs.

When this new batch of Indians first began to arrive in 1845, they refused to sign any written agreements with the plantation owners. As a result they had the option of working for not more than four weeks. In 1846, this increased to six months, but the planters felt that even this period was insufficient. Two years later, the hiring period was extended to one year; later in 1848, the British Government agreed to extend it to three years just before another ban was placed by the Indian Government on emigration from India. This ban was implemented because of the high death rate among Indians in Guyana.

When Indian immigration to Guyana resumed in 1851, the indentured labourer was required to agree to a contract period of five years. This was reduced to three years in 1853.

Hardships Faced by the Indians

By Odeen Ishmael

The planters, after finding that they could no longer punish the Indian immigrants by flogging, used their political clout to pass in the Court of Policy the Immigration Ordinance in 1864. This Ordinance declared that employers must provide suitable houses, hospital accommodation and medical attention for the Indians. It also stipulated that wages were to be same as those paid to Africans who worked on the plantations.

But the Ordinance also spelled out the obligations of the Indian labourers and punishments for breaking the laws. If an indentured Indian refused to attend daily roll call, or to do work given to him, he was placed before a magistrate and faced a fine of \$24 or up to two months in prison. He would also forfeit his wages if he was drunk on the job or used insulting language to his supervisors. If he was absent for seven consecutive days, or found more than two miles from his workplace on a work day, he was also charged for deserting and faced a punishment of up to two months in prison. The law also specified that an indentured labourer must obtain permission from the manager if he wanted to visit any area away from the plantation on which he was indentured.

While the Indian indentured labourers were forced to carry out their obligations, they rarely obtained the benefits stated in the Ordinance. Their housing conditions were extremely poor and they continued to live in barrack ranges - referred to as "logies" by the Indians - which afforded almost no privacy to families. Medical attention was rudimentary and was not always provided.

It was also usual for homes of the indentured labourers to be forcibly entered by supervisors to compel them to go to work, to search for stolen goods, to make arrests, all without warrants. The Indians voiced their complaints over the treatment they received, but very little was done by the plantation owners to improve the situation.

Work stoppages began to break out from time to time and they were sometimes led by ex-soldiers who had served in the Indian army and had taken part in the famous Indian Mutiny of 1857. In 1869, a strike broke out at Leonora and the deputy manager was assaulted during the demonstrations by the workers. The police eventually broke up the demonstration and arrested the leaders who were later sentenced to prison.

The manager of the plantation could make life difficult for the indentured Indians. He could force them to move from their residence to one which was more inconvenient, and he could suspend them from work, impose fines and even expel them from the plantation.

On the other hand, the estate owner encouraged the Indians to practise their religions, and even donated land and money to help them build their temples and mosques.

One of the chief problems that faced Indians during the early years was the shortage of women of their own ethnic group. This shortage often led to murders; there were situations in which wives were killed by their jealous husbands after the wives deserted them for other men.

In general, the East Indians were isolated in their communities on the sugar estates and many of them wanted to remove themselves from this seclusion. One of the ways open to them was to return to India after their period of indenture. (Actually there was a steady return to India until 1949 when the last batch of 311 left Guyana. Between 1843 and 1949, a total of 75,547 Indians left Guyana for India and they took with them over five million dollars in cash and jewellery).

Some Indians also moved to Georgetown and New Amsterdam to search for better jobs. While some gained success, others who possessed no skills resorted to begging and sleeping on the pavements.

In an effort to obtain economic freedom, peasant farming was seen as a positive avenue. Those who managed to save some money purchased plots of land from the African landowners and involved themselves in vegetable farming and rice cultivation.

Some plantation owners, realising that more and more Indians were attracted to independent peasant farming, tried to prevent them from leaving plantation work by influencing the Court of Policy to enact legislation in 1853 to halt this process. This law forced the Indians to serve as indentured labourers for the first five years, and for the second five years as either a free labourer or as an indentured labourer. This regulation was amended in 1858 to allow for a payment of \$50 to each Indian adult (or \$25 to a minor) who re-indentured himself. The aim behind this law was to keep the Indians on the plantations and prevent them from competing on the free labour market.

INDIAN SETTLEMENTS

By Odeen ishmael

In 1885 the Government appointed a Commission headed by the Attorney General, J. W. Carrington, to determine how a land settlement scheme could be established for Indians in compensation for their return passages to India. The Commission met with plantation owners, groups of Indians and other interested persons, and visited a number of places suitable for settlement. The Commission subsequently established a Return Passages Committee in September 1896 to obtain the sites and to select the settlers.

In 1896 Helena, an abandoned sugar plantation on the west bank of the Mahaica River, was purchased by the Government. It was then surveyed and divided into lots, and the old drainage canals were also cleared.

Distribution of house lots and cultivation plots to the selected settlers began in April 1897, and by the time this process was completed, 1,206 persons were in possession of land in the settlement. However, all the persons granted land in Helena did not move from their former places of residence to reside there. Some owned farms elsewhere and they had to sell those properties before they could move. In addition, many of them were employed on the on-going Demerara railway project for relatively good wages and were not ready to surrender their jobs to settle permanently at Helena. As a result, the settlement suffered from neglect.

The Carrington Commission felt that the settlers could not manage Helena without Government support. The Governor, Sir Walter Sundall, therefore, appointed Rev. James Cropper of the Canadian East Indian Mission as superintendent of Helena, and also of Whim, another Indian settlement which had started on the Corentyne.

Cropper was faced with numerous problems at Helena due to the fact that many of the new proprietors were not living there, and also because those who were occupying lands were very poor. The long drought of 1899 worsened their plight since their crops, particularly rice, suffered badly. Thus, the collection of rates for the maintenance of infrastructure was not an easy task.

The Whim settlement started in September 1898 when land for housing and cultivation was allocated to settlers. By March 1899, land was shared out to 574 persons.

Many of the persons granted land at this settlement previously resided at the nearby sugar estates of Port Mourant and Albion where they had jobs, mainly as cane cutters, when they were not working on their own lands. The long drought in 1899 forced many of them to abandon their plots and return to Port Mourant and Albion, but they gradually returned to Whim as the weather conditions improved. Some of them also experienced severe economic problems because they incurred heavy debts after borrowing from money lenders to finance the building of houses. It took some time before they could eventually pay off these debts.

The settlers cultivated mainly rice, but also planted coconuts, coffee and fruit trees. With their earnings from the sugar estates they were able to erect better houses than their counterparts at Helena.

Current expenditure to maintain the settlement was defrayed from rates collected from the new proprietors. However, progress was slower than expected and the Government decided not to expand the settlement.

A third settlement for Indians was established at Bush Lot in West Berbice. The area was an abandoned estate which was heavily indebted to the Government for rates, and the proprietor sold it to the Government for \$1,200. Comprising of an area of 1,306 acres of which 463 acres were waste land, it was handed over to the Return Passage Committee in March 1897.

The early settlers of Bush Lot experienced the problems associated with the drought of 1899 and their rice crop was severely affected. Even though house lots and cultivation plots began to be distributed from 1899, it was not until February 1902 that Bush Lot was officially declared an Indian settlement. A sum of \$40,000 acquired from the immigration fund was spent on laying out the settlement and the digging by shovel-men of a canal, over three miles long, to the Abary River to obtain water supply.

As at Helena and Whim, many of the persons granted lands, did not move to Bush Lot immediately and so the erection of dwelling houses progressed slowly for the first few years. Although land was allotted to 1,227 persons when the settlement began, only 394 were in occupation in 1904, and 632 by 1911.

To maintain the village, such as clearing drains and fixing the streets, residents were asked to give voluntary labour, but they were not cooperative and they refused to do so unless they were paid.

Maria's Pleasure on the island of Wakenaam started in 1902 when 168 lots were distributed. However, only 40 persons built homes and rice and coconuts were cultivated. But since most of the new land owners could not be found, not enough rates were collected.

In 1903, the immigration agent reported that some owners were using their house lots for cultivation purposes while their cultivation plots were left unoccupied. The following year the Government expressed dissatisfaction with the problems occurring in Maria's Pleasure and decided to place this settlement, as well as Bush Lot, Whim and Helena, under the control of the Board of Health. This was eventually done in March 1905.

In 1905, the Government abandoned the scheme to settle Indians in exchange for their return passages, and agreed instead to assist them in purchasing land. In 1912-13, the Government purchased the abandoned estates of Unity-Lancaster on East Coast Demerara from their owners and improved the drainage and irrigation canals. The land was then divided into one-acre plots which were sold for \$20 each.

Around the same period Clonbrook, another abandoned estate just a mile to the west of Unity-Lancaster, was also purchased by the Government and divided into house lots and cultivation plots. Each house lot was sold for \$30 while a cultivation plot cost \$20.

On the West Coast Demerara, Windsor Forest and La Jalousie, with a combined area of 3,000 acres, was offered for rent at a rate of one dollar per acre for the first year, and six dollars for each subsequent year. The tenants had the option of purchasing the land by paying \$8.50 per acre for 25 years. A nearby estate, Hague, was also leased out in lots and offered under similar terms.

FOREWORD by Odeen Ishmael on a book by:

Sundararajan, Saroja, *From BONDAGE TO DELIVERANCE – Indentured Labour in Mauritius and British Guiana*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 2006]

Over the years historians have written about the indenture system as it affected Indians taken from their homeland to live and work in lands far across the sea. From 1838, Indians were transported to Guyana (then the colony of British Guiana) to provide manual labour on the sugar plantations after African slavery was abolished in the British Empire. In a period of eight decades of migration, more than 238,000 Indians were moved mainly from north-east and south India to Guyana. Significant numbers were also taken, after the beginning of the Guyana experiment, to other parts of the Caribbean, notably Trinidad and Suriname, and to East and South Africa, Malaya, Mauritius and Fiji. Significantly, in both Guyana and Mauritius, the descendants of these early migrants today make up the majority of these countries' populations.

Even though the Indians replaced African slave labour, their living and working conditions were also very harsh. Housing was deplorable, child labour was common, social amenities were almost non-existent, education facilities for children were scarce, disease was rampant and wages were miserly. In addition, strict regulations, which imposed relatively heavy fines and punishment by whipping, imprisonment and extension of their period of indenture, confined the indentured Indians to the specific plantations which employed them.

Despite these hardships, the indentured Indians, through thriftiness, still managed to save some of their earnings during their five-year indenture. While a small proportion of them eventually returned to India with their savings, the great majority remained as settlers, purchasing plots of land on which they built houses and practised agriculture. In later years, the British colonial government also assisted in the settlement process by establishing Indian villages in various parts of the Atlantic coast of the country.

Significantly, the Indians in Guyana maintained their cultural traditions, particularly their religions, and even from as far back as the mid-nineteenth century they pooled their meagre financial resources and their labour to erect Hindu temples and mosques in areas where they resided. Festivals were celebrated and holy days observed with reverence, and those customs and traditions were passed down to succeeding generations.

Within a short period, caste boundaries were erased, and it became difficult for the Guyanese Indians to identify their original castes. But gradually, difference in social class emerged as some who became wealthy through astute business practices no longer socialised with the majority "working class". Wealthy Indians were able to send their sons to both primary and secondary schools and, from the dawn of the twentieth century, to universities in England to qualify as lawyers or physicians. Some of these educated and wealthy Indians adopted the life styles of the ruling European class, with whom they associated frequently, and it was not surprising that they collaborated with that group to even support harsh actions against the working class Indians.

On occasions when Indian workers went on strike to protest the poor working and living conditions on the sugar plantations, the “upper class” Indians never openly objected to the brutal measures applied by the colonial authorities to end those work stoppages. It was, therefore, not surprising that the British authorities utilised the services of some of them in the early 1920s to petition the Indian leader, Mohandas Gandhi, to lift his opposition against the continuation of Indian indentured migration to Guyana.

This account by Dr. Saroja Sundararajan is a welcome addition to the studies on the history of the indentured Indians in Guyana and the influence their struggles brought to bear in later years, especially after World War II, on the independence movement and the fight for democracy. The Guyanese leader, Cheddi Jagan, whose parents were transported from India as infant children of indentured Indians, very often referred to the struggles of the Indian workers on the sugar plantations. Actually, it was the shooting to death of five of them in 1948, three decades after indentured migration from India was halted, that propelled Jagan to dedicate his life to end the bondage and exploitation of the Guyanese people. His leadership and actions against the oppressive colonial rulers brought about an alignment of forces in the British and American administrations which led to the overthrow of his government in 1953 and again in 1964. The declassified documents recently released by both the American and British governments tell the sordid tale of their opposition to the man whose entire life was dedicated to improving the lives of the people of his country.

By also examining the pattern in Mauritius, Dr. Sundararajan points to the glaring similarities, and also the obvious differences, in the experiences of the Indians in that country and in Guyana. Clearly the similarities are stronger, and no doubt these have helped ever since the 1950s, despite the wide distance of physical separation, to breed very close cooperation between the peoples and governments of both countries.

This historical review, *From Bondage to Freedom: Indenture Labour in Mauritius and British Guiana*, is of special importance, and unusual at the same time, since it examines the entire issue from the perspective of a writer from the Indian motherland. Indeed, it presents a fresh look to the sufferings, struggles, sacrifices and successes of the Indian migrants who took the first steps to far off lands and helped to build the foundations of entirely new nations.

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**REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR ODEEN ISHMAEL AT THE SYMPOSIUM, "COPING
IN AMERICA: CARIBBEAN EAST INDIANS IN THE UNITED STATES", AT ST.
JOHN'S UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK, MARCH 20, 1999**

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I wish to congratulate the Committee on Latin American and Caribbean Studies of St. John's University, along with the Guyanese East Indian Civic Association of New York, for sponsoring today's symposium aimed at examining issues affecting the Caribbean East Indian community in the United States. This is a courageous activity since the Guyanese co-organizers who themselves are persons of Caribbean East Indian heritage have recognized that there exist in the Caribbean East Indian community specific problems which have to be confronted and addressed.

Today, various presenters have addressed many of these issues, and I am sure that many ideas were also elicited from among the participants who sit in this audience. But I feel that this discussion should also reach the wider audience of the members of the community whose problems and perspectives have so eloquently been addressed today. In other words, the ideas generated and germinated in this forum should not remain a sterile academic exercise. Follow-up activities should occur at regular intervals in the local communities to get inputs from those at the grass-roots while also spreading the message to all those whose interests came under the analytic microscope today.

I want to deal with three main aspects affecting East Indian integration and involvement in the society. First, I will deal with the background of attitudes towards East Indians in the Caribbean. Secondly, I will touch on the problems of community participation by Caribbean East Indians in the United States; then finally, I will look at how Caribbean East Indians, for their own social, political and economic advancement, need to establish alliances and cooperation with other Caribbean ethnic groups. The statements I will make are very general and some may find them controversial, but I want to believe that some controversial ideas flowed quite a lot today.

Let me deal with the first aspect.

Caribbean East Indians in the United States who have migrated mainly from Guyana and Trinidad have over the years suffered from being properly identified geographically and culturally by Americans. The poverty of geographical knowledge, even seemingly by educated Americans, causes them often to package Caribbean East Indians as people from India. As we have experienced, basic knowledge as to the geographic location of Guyana and to a lesser extent, Trinidad, is common within the established American society.

Sadly, however, we have to note that despite the fact roughly a combined total of one million East Indians live in Guyana and Trinidad, there are many people in the Caribbean itself who still see the region as "African". This is even reflected in sections of Caribbean literature; and you will recall that a former West Indies cricket captain raised eyebrows and tempers when he described the West Indies cricket team, as "African".

If we examine the demographics of the English-speaking Caribbean, we will discover that as much as 20 percent of the people are East Indians. Despite this, and the fact that East Indians have been living in the Caribbean for more than 160 years, some influential political

and social players in the region still behave as if Caribbean East Indians either do not exist or are below the competence of the African majority segment of the society.

Up to about ten years ago, the view was constantly expressed, especially in Guyana, that CARICOM leaders at that time opposed Dr. Jagan, not just for his ideology, but also for his ethnicity. The considered opinion was all of those leaders had African roots and prejudices, so they saw him as an East Indian leader trying to take power away from Africans. That was why it was felt they were content to render support to a regime that continuously rigged elections which kept the "usurper" East Indian leader from gaining power on behalf of the majority of the people. Gladly, times have now changed, and a more democratic and understanding leadership is developing in CARICOM. We are now seeing a gradual positive change in attitude towards national political leaders of East Indian heritage.

In 1988, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, speaking at a function here in New York to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the arrival of East Indians in the Caribbean noted: "It is shortsighted to see the 'Caribbean man' only as a 'Black man' and Caribbean culture as African culture. Apart from the different countries of their origin, both our black slave and indentured ancestors watered the sugar cane with their blood. Through their struggles and sacrifices, they have made valuable contributions to our historical and social development. They have both achieved great successes in all fields of endeavor professions, literature, art and culture."

It is obvious that political and other prejudices against East Indians by those who propagate the opinion that the Caribbean is "African" have shaped negative attitudes among older groups of Caribbean East Indians who have migrated to the United States. On the other hand, the younger generation of Caribbean East Indians living in this country, particularly in the large cities, are more and more identifying themselves with the Caribbean particularly through the music with which they have a close affinity and understanding. Pressure from some quarters to make them identify themselves with India have not succeeded, for they are seeing themselves not as Indians, but as Guyanese or Trinidadian, or in general as West Indians or as I have heard stated elsewhere, as West Indian East Indians. It is part of a social and cultural evolution process.

Let me now deal with the second aspect the problems of community participation.

It is estimated that more than three hundred and fifty thousand documented and undocumented Caribbean East Indians, ranging over three generations, live in the New York metropolitan area. A sizeable proportion has obtained American citizenship, but it is safe to say that they have done very little to participate in the political process of their adopted country. In recent Mayoral and Congressional elections, many Indo-Caribbean Americans did not bother to vote. Maybe they have become so quickly Americanized that they now copy the pattern of the general American voting public, almost half of whom fail to exercise the franchise for which others sacrificed their lives to win for them. I understand that a very small percentage vote in elections at the local level in district council elections of community school board elections.

Obviously, this is not good enough. All Caribbean Americans of all ethnic groups must show more civic responsibility by participating in the political process. Not only must they come out and actively support candidates who promote the economic and social welfare of their communities, but they must also assume leadership roles in those communities. By doing, so they present worthy examples for their children to emulate while, at the same time, assisting them to integrate into the American society. We need to see more and more

Caribbean Americans not only attending PTA meetings, but becoming executive members of those PTAs, contesting for positions on school boards, contesting in political races for city councillors and even aspiring to greater political heights. Others obviously will have to actively support them along the way.

It is of interest to note that if we compare our Caribbean demographics with those of Cuban Americans, for example, and if Caribbean Americans are as politically active and involved, there should have been at least one or two persons of Caribbean origin in the United States Congress by now.

Caribbean Americans can also play key roles in lobbying on behalf of their home countries. The fact remains that the great majority want to see social, economic and political progress in their home countries. They do maintain contacts through family connection and occasional visits, besides sending remittances to family members and friends at home now and then. They want to see their home countries advance economically so that the living standards of their citizens can also improve. They must, therefore, use their voting strength to influence supportive opinions in American political circles towards their home countries.

Lobbying for increased trade and aid does not have to take place only on Capitol Hill in Washington, but it can be done effectively even at the local level. I have found that the local politician, be he or she a city councillor or a member of the State Congress, is very useful in influencing his or her Member of US Congress in promoting winnable positions. Remember, Caribbean Americans form a very large constituency especially in New York. The local politicians are aware of this, and at the same time, Caribbean Americans must also remind them of this fact from time to time by visiting them or writing them to update them on Caribbean issues.

Now, finally, I will look at the need for Caribbean East Indians to work in alliance and cooperation with other Caribbean ethnic groups and organizations, particularly with Afro-Caribbean Americans. They will gain little by working separately from others. In a sense, all the Caribbean groups, irrespective of ethnicity should operate as an extension of how various groups should operate in their home countries.

In the United States, Indo-Caribbeans, who generally tend to stay aloof from the political system, must become constructive participants in the social and political process in their communities. They must study the political and socialization process in this country. By and large they have gained economic success very quickly since migrating to the United States. But they have to recognize the importance of other players within the system from which they are benefitting. For example, they do not totally understand that progress made in this society for minorities were chiefly the results of long, arduous struggles by groups as African Americans, by the Civil Rights Movement and by other immigrant groups who arrived before them. They also ought to be made aware that education, health, safety and welfare standards are the results of efforts made by these and other groups.

There were many in the past who saw the positives of each of the two major ethnic groups of the Caribbean benefitting from the experience of each other. The Guyanese historian Peter Ruhoman, who in 1938 wrote a history of East Indians in Guyana, noted that the Africans "are a great people; they have been so from the earliest times". He encouraged East Indians to emulate the successes of the Africans as educators, politicians, doctors, lawyers and other professionals.

Some Black Caribbean intellectuals also posited that Africans should learn from Indians. George Lamming, writing in 1966 about the values of East Indians, stated: "Those Indian hands whether in British Guiana or Trinidad have fed all of us. They are, perhaps, our only jewels of a true native thrift and industry. They have taught us by example the value of money; for they respect money as only people with a high sense of communal responsibility can."

A number of studies in the Caribbean have shown that both Caribbean East Indians and Caribbean Africans have evolved socially and culturally. These peoples of the Caribbean are not the same as their relatives in India and Africa, nor as their ancestors who were transported to the Caribbean so many generations ago. Because of common struggles it is clear that they have many common values. Actually, there are more uniting than dividing them. Here in the United States, as in the Caribbean in Guyana, Trinidad and Suriname and elsewhere they must find the means of working in cooperation, including collaboration at the political level.

In 1988, the then the Opposition Leader of Trinidad and Tobago, Basdeo Panday, speaking at the New York forum on 150th anniversary of the arrival of East Indians in the Caribbean, urged Caribbean East Indians to move away from isolationism. He declared: "We must move away from the politics of parochialism and group interests, real or perceived, to the politics of nation building and the pursuit of national interests. We must be able to advocate sectional interests in national terms. If our struggle is against racism and discrimination and for the equal treatment of Indians, we must realize that Indians cannot get justice in isolation from the rest of the society. The struggle must therefore be a struggle for equality and justice, equity and fairness for all, regardless of race, color or creed. If we are prepared to give our lives so that Indians may be treated with dignity and self-respect, then we must be equally prepared to die in defense of those same rights, not only for Indians, but for Africans and Chinese, Europeans and whites, and blacks, browns and yellows..."

Today as Prime Minister he continues to hold these very positive views.

I totally concur with the position expressed by the distinguished Prime Minister. I hope you all do as well.

Thank you very much.

Posted March 20th.1999

Remarks by Ambassador Odeen Ishmael at the Indian Arrival Day Commemoration Organised by the Florida Hindu Cultural and Religious Association at Lantana, Florida on June 8, 1997

I am indeed very happy to be with all of you today to participate in your programme by which you commemorate "Indian Arrival Day" for the first time in South Florida. Let me from the onset congratulate the executive and members of the Florida Hindu Cultural and Religious Association for having the vision to organise such an activity which highlights the history, culture and achievements of people of Indian origin in the region of the Caribbean.

Of course, when we talk about "Indian Arrival Day" we refer to the commemoration of the arrival of the first Indians in the Caribbean, and not in the United States. I want to get that part very clear since as we all know, there has also been a large migration of people from the Indian subcontinent to the United States, particularly after 1960.

The migration of Indians to the Caribbean has a greater meaning to us since that process established new roots in a new land and chartered a new chapter in the history of people of Indian origin. It also posed new and difficult challenges to the early migrants and succeeding generations to maintain cultural traditions which have been buffeted by other existing and invading cultures. In the process, Indians in the Caribbean have, as a result of various factors, lost the gift of the languages of their ancestors, but have managed to cling to their religions and family traditions, and have made positive advances in solving caste differences while blending their culture forms with a variety of other culture patterns found in their respective countries into a generally solid unit.

Unfortunately, I can only speak of the historical experiences of Guyana. For us, Indian Arrival Day is celebrated on May 5, for it was on that day in 1838 -- 159 years ago -- the first batch of Indian indentured immigrants landed in Guyana.

You will recall that in 1838, in the Caribbean region, most of the people were Africans who had been brought as slaves by the European plantation owners. By that year, slavery had lost its usefulness, and the British Government, which ruled many of the Caribbean territories, abolished slavery on August 1, 1834. But the slave owners were not willing to let their African slaves go, so their friends in the British Parliament allowed them to continue extracting more labour from them for four more years.

Since the slave owners now knew that they would no longer have free African slave labour, they began to look around for new sources of cheap workers on their

plantations. In 1834 they managed to recruit small groups of Portuguese from the islands of Madeira and the Azores and they were put to work as indentured labour on the sugar plantations of Guyana. But these people were by no means agricultural workers so their productivity level was very low. A payment of about 10 cents a day was also not very encouraging to them as well. So, as soon as their indenture was completed, they moved to the towns to find other better paying jobs or went into the interior region to look for gold.

The sugar planters and the British Government then began a new task of looking elsewhere for further inexpensive replacements. They initially thought about China, but because of the distance, their minds turned to India. The economic situation in some Indian states at that time was very depressed. This was particularly so in Bihar, near to Calcutta, which continued to be ravaged by flooding, cyclones and the occasional famine. It was therefore easy to recruit indentured migrants from this state especially when lucrative promises of easy working conditions and good wages were made to them.

There is no doubt that most of the recruits were fooled by the recruiting officers, many of whom were Indians themselves. Since most of the migrants were illiterate and had probably never ever travelled more than a few miles from their own home villages, they were also misled to believe that the new place where they were being taken to was not very far away. They did not have the concept of distance, and maybe they felt that they would have the opportunity to see their relatives and their friends and their home villages on a fairly regular basis.

They marked their indenture contracts -- most could not sign their names -- and these were duly witnessed by the Indian recruiters. In most cases, the indentured Indian was bonded for five years during which he or she would be housed and given a daily wage, which ranged from about 8 to 24 cents. At the end of the indenture, return passages would be guaranteed and a small lump-sum of money would be given. Later, those who opted to remain in the new land were each given small plots of land instead of the lump-sum of cash.

When the first batch of returnees went back to India and reported the harsh conditions under which they lived and worked, the recruiters had a more difficult time to convince people to migrate to Guyana. The result was that some people were kidnapped, and there were even stories of arrangements being made for convicts to be sent. People who ran the jails made some money on the side in furnishing recruits for indenture.

Those who recruited the migrants then moved to other states to carry out their operations. The result was that indentured labourers were collected from other states

such as Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Mysore and Kerala and parts of what is now Pakistan.

There are stories, too, that some Indian soldiers who participated in the Indian Mutiny of 1857 were indentured to Guyana as part of their punishment.

What were the realities the immigrants encountered when they arrived in Guyana? They were herded in logies (or barrack ranges) with very little sanitation facilities. Significantly, some of these logies were the very ones in which the African slaves used to live. Further, they were prevented from leaving the plantation to which they were bounded under penalty of the law. These penalties included fines and imprisonment. The amount of days lost from work due to this imprisonment was added to the indenture period. Permission had to be sought from the plantation owner in order to visit places outside of the plantation.

The indentured labourer had the so-called right to complain about his treatment to the Immigration Department in Georgetown, but for him to do so he had to obtain permission to leave the plantation. If he decided to go without permission, he was punished for breaking the law.

The arrival of the Indians in Guyana brought about a new set of social relations in the country. First of all, it brought about distrust between the Indians and the Africans. When the Africans were freed from slavery, most of them left the plantations, but they felt that they now had some bargaining power to demand reasonable wages for paid employment there. However, the arrival of the Indians on the plantations undercut this bargaining power since the Indians were working in the same jobs for very meagre wages.