

From Bharatvanshi to Hindustani. The End of Indian Indenture and its Impact on Indians in Suriname

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Abstract

The Indian indenture system in Suriname, as introduced in 1873, was a dynamic phenomenon. Begun as a new system of slavery as many people called it, it evolved gradually, because of improvements in the system during the decades to come.

Indian indentured migration to Suriname was based on the emigration treaty of 1870 signed by the British and Dutch governments. This gave the right to the Dutch colonial authorities in Suriname to recruit indentured labourers in India. However, there was much resistance in India against the migration of labourers overseas. According to Major Pitcher (1882) and Grierson (1883) most of the resistance was based on misconception about indentured labour and the conditions of the labourers in different countries.

The missions of Major Comins in 1891 and McNeill & Chiman Lal in 1913 were mainly in favour of continuation of indentured migration and elimination of its shortcomings. One of the results of Comins' mission for Suriname was promotion of colonization through the introduction of favourable conditions for immigrants to settle in Suriname after expiration of their indenture. They could get a piece of land on favourable conditions. Many immigrants used this opportunity to settle in the country and build a community, known as Hindustanis. Those who settled in the colony were making progress in economic sense. This is probably the main reason why leaders of the Indian community were in favour of continuation of migration from India. The abolition had also its impact on social and cultural developments of the Indians.

In my paper I will analyse the responses of the authorities, the planters' class and the Indians themselves on the new situation. I will also try to answer the question of social, economic and cultural impact of the abolition of Indenture on the Surinamese society in general and the Indian community in particular.

Introduction: Historical background of Indian Indentured migration to Suriname.

Immigration of indentured labourer in Suriname began ten years before the abolition of slavery with the introduction of Chinese immigrants, and lasted until 1929 when the last indentured labourers from Indonesia (Netherlands East Indies) arrived. From 1930 to 1939 we had a system of free assisted emigration from Indonesia and there was a plan to introduce about 100.000 free immigrants in order to settle them as colonists. The outbreak of the Second World War prevented the execution of this plan (Ismael, 1949; Colonial Report 1939).

See table 1: Number of (indentured) immigrants in Suriname

Immigrants	Years	Numbers
Chinese	1853 - 1879	2.625
West-Indians	1863 - 1892	2.675
Portuguese	1853	480
Indians	1873 - 1916	34.122
Javanese	1893 - 1939	32.956
Total		72.858

Source: Colonial Report 1939, App. nr E.: p.30; Hassankhan M. and Hira. S. Database Chinese immigrants. IMWO, Paramaribo, 2001.).

In the number of Indians are not included about 2600 Indian immigrants who migrated from British Guyana to Suriname after expiration of their contract. This happened between +1895 and 1926 (see Registers VR in CBB; See also de Klerk: 1953: 37). They are totally integrated in the Indian community in Suriname in contrast to the thousands of the immigrants from Guyana who came to Suriname since the 1970s¹.

Indian indentured immigration to Suriname was based on the Emigration convention signed in 1870 between the Governments of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. This

¹ In contrast to the older immigrants from Guyana, the new immigrants from Indian descent from this neighbouring country do not speak Hindi or Sarnámi (Hindustani), even if they are living in Suriname during decades. They learn to speak the Sranan (lingua franca of Suriname) and even Dutch (the official language). Their children who are born in Suriname are used to speak also Sarnami, besides the Sranan and Dutch.

convention was ratified in February 1872. Notice of termination by the British government was given in March 1918 and it ceased in September 1919.n. (Emigration Convention 1870, art. XXIV); (For Off. to India Off. (I.O.) 3 Oct. 1917 in J&P 4495, 1917).

Although the convention was signed by the two imperial governments, the Indian government had the right to suspend the recruitment in case it believed that proper measures were not taken to protect the emigrants upon their arrival, during their stay in the colony or during their return to India. (Emigration Convention 1870, art. XXIV).The Indian government used this right only once in 1875. ². Although emigration to Suriname was resumed in 1877/1878 after certain conditions from the Indian government were met, especially regarding health care, provision of a daily ration to sick and weak labourers. During the period of Indian indentured emigration to Suriname, there was, however a constant threat of suspension of the recruitment in India. This was for instance the case in 1884, when there were a number of complaints of labourers about their treatment and about low wages. In that year there was a serious uprising, which resulted in a number of death casualties, among which the only female who died in a confrontation between labourers and the police³.

In Suriname there was resistance of the indentured labourers against ill treatment and low wages from the beginning. The main cause for tensions between employers and employee was the fact that in contract to what was stipulated in the emigration treat and in the contracts, signed by both parties, the wages were based on task work and not on time work. The workers were supposed to complete a day's task within seven hours. The wages were calculated on the basis of the tariff of tasks and wages from 1861. (Speciale Wetgeving, Tariffs of Tasks and Wages, GB 1861, nr. 1). In the contract was stated clearly that the labourer would earn at least 60 cents a day, for a day's work of seven hours in the field or 10 hours in the buildings/factory. Task work could be given only with consent of the labourer (Emigration Treaty, art. X.). It was however a practice that since the beginning the employers used task work. It is important to consider that the size of the task work of the Labour regulation of 1861 was based on 10 hours' work by free labourers. This means indentured labourer was required to complete the same task in seven hours. It is not surprising that many labourers were not able to complete the task in one day, as a consequence of which he had to work more days to complete a task. My impression is that the employers realised that this was not realistic, reason why they paid for a task more than was required by the 1861-regulation. Apart from that, the Indian government insisted that under any circumstances, the labourer should earn a minimum of the equivalence of 24 cents

² This happened two years after the commencement of the Indian indenture in Suriname, because the health situation of the labourers was very bad so after their arrival in 1873 and 1874. The British consul in Paramaribo, who was the protector of emigrants on behalf of the British/Indian government sent reports to the authorities in London about the high mortality and bad healthcare during the first years of immigration. According to his annual report over 1874, the death rate among the immigrants in 1874 was around 18.5%, which was much higher than the death rate among all other labourers. (Consul Cohen to Earl Derby, 22 May 1875, in report respecting the Condition of Coolies in Surinam, London 1877)

³ For this victim a monument is being made while in certain circles she has been proclaimed a hero. According to Bhagwanbali (2011) she was a leader of the uprising, although I have not find any proof of that in the records in the archives of Suriname, the Netherlands and London.

Guianese currency (60 cents Dutch currency) for every day he worked. About this matter there has been an intensive correspondence between the British consul in Suriname, FO, IO and GOI. This resulted among others in a final decision of the Indian government, that there would be no compromise in the question of the minimum wages. (IOR, P 171, Proceeding 1873 – 1874)⁴. During periods of a crisis, the plantation managers tried to reduce the wages in one way or another in order to reduce the negative effects of the crisis on the income of the plantation. Sometimes the wages were increased a bit to pacify the labourers, but often there could not be reached a compromise between the plantation management and the labourers. In many cases the workers laid down the work and were not willing to resume the work until their demands were fulfilled. In these cases the DC or the Agent General was asked to intervene. The normal procedure was then to appoint a so called independent committee of experts, consisting of managers or overseers of neighbouring plantations. According to a private and informal communication of the Agent general to an Itinerary Judge, in almost all cases the conclusion of the investigating committee was: “the labourers are wrong in their demands, because the rate of the tasks were higher than the prescribed minimum in the Labour regulation of 1861.” (Immigration Department, Ingekomen en uitgaande stukken, 1902). In these cases the judge was required to follow the advice of the investigating committee, even if he believed that the labourers were right and the management wrong.

This culminated sometimes in violent resistance and clashes between labourers and colonial authorities, such as in the cases of Plantation Zorg & Hoop and Zoelen in 1884 and Mariënborg and Alliance in 1902. (See Bhagwanbali, 2011; Hoefte, 1987a, 1998). In most cases resistance was expressed in other forms. Most authors speak about active and passive resistance, which could be individual or collective. (Hira, 1983; Hoefte 1987 A; Brij Lal and Munro, 1993). In this respect I prefer the term introduced by James Scott. (1990), namely daily forms of resistance). In the subaltern/postcolonial approach of history, we talk about agency of the oppressed or subaltern people. They made a deliberate choice about their decision to resist or not to resist and which form of resistance. (Huddart 2007: 20; Lall, B, 2014; Hassankhan, 2014).

Critics and the practice of indentured labour

The indentured system has been criticized from the beginning, starting with the critics of the Anti-Slavery Society (Mangru, 1991: 112 - 113).

According to critics the recruitment and transport of indentured labourers was a renewal of the slave trade, while many people believed that there was a lot of fraud and deception. Within India there was a popular resistance in UP and Bihar against recruitment of indentured labourers, reason why each of the governments of these two provinces appointed an official to investigate the reasons of resistance and what could be done to improve the system of recruitment and to make indenture migration more popular. The two investigators were Major Pitcher for the United Provinces and Grierson for Bihar. Their respective reports were submitted in 1881 and 1883).

⁴ See Contract with emigrants proceeding to Suriname, in the proceedings of 1874, dated 17 July 1874: India office to Government of Bengal)

According to Pitcher there the feelings varied from place to place and depended on the class to which the people belonged. According to him there were four classes of people (Grierson, 1883: 16-17). His conclusion was that in places or regions where the people were informed about the situation in the colonies, for instance by returned migrants or via letters, the people were not against emigration. Grierson recommended that government should be instructed not to interfere and discourage people to emigrate. A second advice was that the emigration authorities in the colonies should encourage and enable the emigrants to send at least once a year a letter for their relatives or friends in India. To this end pre-printed envelopes should be provided to the emigrants in the colonies.

According to Tinker (1974: 236 ff) abuses and malfunctioning inspired abolitionists to criticise the system and it seemed that the system would die. Sugar interest groups were able to revive the system. Indenture migration was resumed in 1845 and during decades the system not only survived, but was expanded geographically to more and more countries. The rise of modern capitalism in the second half of the 19th century needed the influx of labourers from abroad. This was for the industrialists only possible by long distance migration based on different forms of contracts. The Indenture system was the most criticized one, because it bounded the labourers for a long period, while they could be controlled by penal regulations resulting in imprisonment and/or fines. In addition to that, the records suggest that the judicial authorities were partial in favour of the planters' class. This is indicated among others by the number of convictions of labourers every year and the high number of non-convictions of the employers in cases of accusations by the labourers against their employers. Most intended migrants were not informed about this aspect of the indenture contract. The penal sanctions were deliberately kept secret for the emigrants, until they were confronted with it after their arrival in the colonies. Another aspect is the fact that the labourers were not allowed to leave the plantation without consent of their employer. If caught outside the plantation they could be convicted for vagrancy wilful absent from work or even desertion.

Under these conditions the labourers responded in different ways. Their behaviour varied from acceptance, accommodation and resistance in different forms. It depended on each individual how he or she would respond in different situations. For many of them the period of indenture was a disillusion. They arrived with much hope about the promises made to them by the recruiters about the wages and other conditions of indenture, including free housing, medical care, free drinking water, and the possibility of starting a new life after the termination of indenture

They were confronted with the hard reality of plantation life, where there was no guarantee of the promised minimum wage of 60 cents for male and 40 cents for female. They had to work on task basis, while, especially in the beginning, the task was too heavy to complete in one day. In the records of the Immigration department we can find letters from officials mentioning that many labourers in 1873 could not even earn enough money for their daily ration.

Gradually they learned to adapt themselves to the new circumstances. They tried to make the best of their lives. Although they experience indentured life as a *narakh* (hell) there was light at the end of the tunnel of five years of indenture.

In most of the countries, including Suriname, the indentured immigrant could return to India with free passage, or they decided to stay. Those who stayed could sign a new contract or could work as free labourer on the estate, with some privileges such as a plot of land, free housing, medical care etc. Those who abandoned the estate, settled as a small farmer. In case a person abandoned his right on the return passage, he could get a bounty of 100 Dutch guilders or 40 Guianese dollars. This was a kind of a starting capital. He could get a piece of land for agriculture. This could be crown land to be rented, or they could get it in full ownership. Those who decided to stay, however, would lose their free return passage.

When dr. Comins arrived in Suriname for an investigation about the conditions of the Indian immigrants in Suriname, he advised to make settlement in Suriname more attractive for the migrants, by offering them land under more attractive conditions. He gave Guiana and Trinidad as examples. As a consequence of this, in 1895 an act was introduced to stimulate colonisation of the land by time expired immigrants. They could receive under attractive conditions a piece of land for agriculture. The government created settlements on former plantations while some active plantations promoted the settlement of time expired labourers as farmers on the plantation. They got a piece of land, while they were required to work three or four days a week for the plantation for a wage that was higher than the minimum wage of the indentured labourer. (Suriname, 1915, date?; see also contract between plantation Rust en Werk and a number of labourers, 2 May, 1917).

This meant a change in the aims of the government and plantation owners for the importation of immigrants. Although the main objective was the interest of plantation agriculture, the aim was from 1895 also promotion of small farming and the increase of the population. Those who decided to stay in Suriname retained their right on free passage, until they decided to abandon that in lieu of Nf 100,- (\$ 40.-). Many immigrants received the premium in order to have a start capital as a farmer.

There was a lot of complaints about the regulations and conditions: duration of the contract; return passage; bounties; settlement; wages; the male - female ratio; regulations regarding relations between plantation staff and women; rights and duties of both parties; penalties; justice etc.

In the case of Suriname, there were regular tensions about the wages that ended often in strikes or sometimes in collective violent resistance. This act was the ultimate means to seek redress, but it was dangerous for the participants, because the colonial authorities were not inclined to accept an open challenge of their authority. They hit hard back, by sending troops, together with the police. At the three occasions of violent clashes between the colonial authorities and the labourers there were deaths on the side of the labourers. That is the reason why the labourers sought other ways to survive during their term of indenture. Their

resistance acts were meant to get improvement of their living and working conditions, and probably not to attack the system as such.

We see also a gradual improvement in the living and working conditions of the labourers. During their indenture they could get also a small plot to plant for their direct needs. So they could save money on food. We see also that in many cases they needed not to work the whole week, because there was not enough work during the whole week. Although their average annual wages were low, they were able to save money.

After 1895, more and more time expired labourers decided to settle in Suriname permanently. We see their involvement in agriculture, but at the same time many of them had an additional source of income, via husbandry. Some people choose another profession, such as cart driver, a food seller, a small trader in agricultural products and in charcoal. In different settlements, there were rice mills and many of the mill owners became money lenders.

The number of Indians with a piece of land was in 1900 some 1830, while in 1905, this number doubled to 3.873. see for more details table 2

Table 2: British Indians and other immigrants with a plot of land

Years	Br. Imm.	Tot. Imm. (all imm.)	Tot. ha
1900	1.830	1.969	6.474
1905	3.873	4.097	8.105
1910	4.892	5.185	13.124
1917	7.965	8.815	19.670
1920	7.885	9.481	22.240
1925	8.647	11.547	25.603
1930	8.261	12.284	29.463
1935	11.859	18.607	42.675
1939	11.950	20.172	43.985

Source: Colonial Reports, relevant years

When in 1902 a massive uprising took place on plantation Mariënborg that resulted in the killing of the manager of the largest and most influential plantation in Suriname. Many people were shocked and there were voices to replace Indian indentured labour by Indonesian labour. In the long run however, the planters and the government realised that the Indians were very important for the colony, because they moved gradually from plantation labour to small farming on own plots. See table 3

Table 3: Number of Indians on and outside the plantations

Years	On plantations		Outside plantations	Total
	Indentured.	Non-indentured		
1900	2.637	1.522	n.a.	n.a.
1902	4.011	3.826	n.a.	n.a.
1905	2.935	1.804	n.a.	n.a.
1910	6.119	1.693	11.871	19.683
1917	3.217	2.068	28.035	33.320
1920	1.014	1.813	30.365	32.889
1925	65	922	31.546	32.533
1930	4	818	35.101	35.923
1935	-	1.336	39.441	40.777
1939	-	1.530	44.144	45.674

Source: Colonial Reports, relevant years

THE ROAD TO THE ABOLITION OF INDIAN INDENTURE

The termination of Indian indenture has not come from resistance against the system from within the colonies or by the Indian indentured labourers. The first round of the campaign was in South Africa, where Gandhi led the resistance movement against discriminatory measures of the South African government against Indians. It is important to stress that the Indian population consisted of two sections. The first ones were the traders among whom there were also rich and educated people. They wanted equal civil rights in the country. Gandhi has experienced the decimation personally when he was put out of the train because he travelled first class. This was not allowed for non-whites. For the whites all Indians seemed to be like the coolies, who were from the lower classes. In Natal the white population saw the immigration of indentured labourers as a danger for the white supremacy, reason why in 1908 a Bill to end indentured immigration was introduced in the Natal Assembly. It was approved by the majority while the representatives of plantations and industry voted against: (Tinker, 1974:304). It was the imperial government who blocked this bill and decided to appoint a committee to investigate the whole system and to recommend improvements (Tinker: 304). This committee is known as the Sanderson Committee.

In the meantime the Indian National Congress adopted the struggle with G.K. Gokhale as the most prominent spokesman. . On 25 February 1910 the Legislative Council adopted a resolution submitted by Gokhale. This decision took effect on 1 July 1911. The Imperial government decided to cooperate in this matter otherwise the interests of the empire would be harmed, by abolishing the system. We will deal in a later paragraph with the arguments used

by the nationalist movement for the abolition of indentured labour. (see p. ...) With the termination of indenture immigration in Natal, the discrimination of the Indians did not come to an end, and the next step in the struggle was a total abolition of indentured labour. According to Basdeo Mangru the abolition in South Africa was the first effective blow at indenture. (Mangru, 1993:102).

According to Ashutosh Kumar the struggle to abolish indentured labour in South Africa was an elitist movement, not in the first place for the benefit of the labourers:

“It is important to note that while Gokhale moved a resolution for abolition of the indenture system, his central focus was the political rights of non-indentured Indians in South Africa and his arguments to abolish the system came only as indentured Indians lowered the high status of non-indentured Indians”. (Kumar, 2014: 7):

The Sanderson committee comprised largely of senior statesmen or retired officials and conducted an exhaustive survey of the indentured system (Mangru: 1030. It held 71 meetings heard 83 witnesses. According to Mangru only two of the witnesses were Indians. The committee was settled in London and did not visit any colony

The report of the committee was published in 1910. The following is an extract from Tinker : p. 308 – 312). The general conclusion according to Tinker was that indentured emigration was beneficial with some drawbacks. It advised the continuation of the policy of “benevolent neutrality”. It criticised the methods used to persuade people to emigrate . recruiting should be restricted to the eastern districts of UP and the north and south Bihar. An emigration Agency should be established in Benares . For the colonies the main criticism was about the enforcing indenture by use of penal sanctions. The committee advised also to limit the length of reindenture to one year. Its opinion regarding the different colonies:

- Ceylon and Malaya were natural outlets for Indian emigration; they did not need indentured labourers ;
- British Guiana needed indentured labourers, while for Trinidad a gradual reduction should follow;
- For Mauritius there was no need for emigration, while emigration to Fiji was subject to racism of Australians or “the prejudices of the young nations of the Empire against the coloured mans”.
- For east Africa there was room for emigration provided that a certain proportion of women was guaranteed. Because of the prejudices of the whites against Indians, further emigration should be discouraged.
- British Honduras was according to the Committee a promising field.

One of the recommendations of the Sanderson Committee was that officials from India should visit the colonies from time to time in order to get a better impression of the working of indenture in the colonies.

In line with the conclusions and recommendations of the Sanderson committee, indentured immigration was abolished in Mauritius. In Fiji the penal sanction was abolished, followed

by Guyana and Trinidad. It is remarkable that the Sanderson committee did not say anything about Suriname.

The next stage of the campaign of the Indian nationalist against indentured labour was to abolish the whole system. Gokhale submitted on 4 March 1912 a resolution to the Legislative Council calling for prohibition of recruitment of indentured labourers not only for the colonies, but also for Indian plantations. , which did not get the majority vote: all non-official members voted in favour of the resolution while the official members voted against.

McNeill and Chimanlal report.

In 2013 the Indian Government sent McNeill and Chimanlal to Fiji, British Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica and Suriname. In their report they mentioned positive as well negative aspects of the conditions of the emigrants.: low wages, disproportion of women, suicide, high scale of convictions , morality of women. According to Tinker the (328) evidence could have formed the basis for an advice to restrict or abolish indenture. The overall conclusion was however: *“A careful study of the facts elicited during our inquiry will result in the conclusion that that its advantages has far outweighed its disadvantages. The great majority of emigrants exchange grinding poverty ... for a condition varying from simple but secure comfort to sold prosperity”*. (Tinker , 328).

Before the report was published, the world experienced the massive satyagraha movement from Gandhi in Natal at the end of 1913. Thousands of persons were arrested and put in jail, including Gandhi. This had a positive effect on the anti-indenture movement in India. The report was received by the Indian Government in 2014 and was sent to the provincial governments in order to get their opinion and advice. After receiving their comments the Indian government produced a long memorandum which was sent to India Office on 15 October 2015.

Memo to IO about the indentured system. J&P 4522/ W4939/14 1915, GOI to IO 15 Oct. 1915

The Government of India urged the imperial government to assent to the total abolition of the indentured labour system in the four British Colonies where it still prevailed, and in Suriname. Lord Harding reminds that in 1910 the general conclusion of the Sanderson report was in favour of the continuation of indenture system that was considered to be to the benefit of the colonies and of most of the emigrants . McNeill and Chiman Lal also approved the system and concluded that the advantages outweighs the disadvantages and that the great majority of the immigrants ..

According to Harding certain facts and figures in the report have led the GOI to consider whether the economic benefits were not outweighed by the other draw backs and whether the popular feeling in India was not based on “solid as well as sentimental reasons.” GOI dealt with the following matters in the report: death and suicide rates, the proportion of sexes, prosecution for labour offences, and the methods of recruitment. Finally it deals with the economic advantages of emigration from the Indian point of view and the objections of the Indian public against the continuation of the system...

After studying the statistics GOI concluded that from a moral and social point of view the case against indentured emigration is very strong. According to the GOI the expected diminution in the Indian labour supply could have almost no effect in Jamaica, and it would be not “a really grave matter” for Demerara and Trinidad, while for Fiji it would be a serious matter. (page 11)

Considering the matter from the point of view of India and its interest, indentured emigration was negligible, because the number of indentured emigrants in 1913 was for all colonies 7.736 while non-indentured emigration to the strait settlement was 117.783 and to Ayton 190.059 (p.11)

The conclusions of the Indian government was that the real advantages to the labourers came after expiration of his indentured period, *“but whatever maybe the extend of the economic advantage arising from the emigration of indentured labour, the political aspect of the question is such that no one, who has at least the interest of British rule in India, can afford to neglect it”* .

“ It is one of the most prominent subjects in Indian political life to-day: and its discussion arouses more bitterness, perhaps, than that of any other outstanding question. For Indian politicians, moderate and extreme alike, consider that the existence of this system, which they do not hesitate to call by the name of slavery, brands their whole race in the eyes of the British Colonial Empire with the stigma of helotry. How, they ask, will a European colonial ever admit us into the fellowship of citizens of the Empire, when he knows that men of our country and colour can be purchased for five years for five shillings a week? It is firmly believed also in this country, and it would appear, not without grave reason, that the women emigrants are too often living a life of immortality in which their persons are, by reasons of pecuniary temptation or official pressure, at the free disposition of their fellow recruits and even of the subordinate managing staff....Indian public opinion has strengthened and grown more articulate since the debate of 1912, while the favourable impression created on our minds by Lord Sanderson’s report, on which our defense of the system in 1912 was mainly based, has been considerably qualified, as has been indicated in the earlier paragraphs of this dispatch, by the information which has subsequently been elicited by Messrs. McNeill and Chimman Lal” (p. 14)

The Secretary of State for India replied to IO, that although he was surprised with the opinion of GOI, he would accept the policy advocated by GOI and would invite the Colonial Office

“to co-operate with me in advising the most suitable means for giving effect to it with due consideration of the interests of the Colonies affected, and with adequate safeguards for the protection and well-being of immigrants under the new system which you suggest should take the place of indentured labour” (ARA, Buiza A 135,: INV. NR. 282: CO to FO 11 Feb.. 1916).

He suggested to the Colonial Office to organise an inter departmental committee to consider which form of emigration should come after termination of indentured. Secretary of State for Colonies decided to organise an Inter Colonial Conference on emigration in order to discuss the matter and to do recommendations. (Mangru: 115-116). This conference was held in in June 2016 and came to the conclusion that immigration of labourers is important not only for the colonies but also for the empire. They regretted “that the emigration of indentured Indians

should have evoked the feeling amongst Indian Politicians of implied stigma against the race". According to them the colonial governments were anxious "to remove by all practical means any condition which may be repugnant to Indian opinion and to afford to the immigrants", Regarding the kangani system would be difficult to implement for the Caribbean colonies.' (Mangru: 117

Pandit Malaviya announced that he would move a motion in the legislative council to abolish indenture. GOI was willing to accept the resolution and asked IO for permission to announce it. On 10 March 1916 the India office informed Gov. of India that it would not be possible for the GOI "to continue to defeat by a bare official majority, resolutions in their legislative Council urging the abolition of indentures," the secretary of State for India has accepted the conclusion that indentured emigration must be abolished, (because), "the strong and universal feeling in India on this subject make it an urgency." India office has informed GOI dd. 11 March 1916 that he accepts their policy. India Office agreed with CO to organise the interdepartmental conference to discuss the consequences of abolition and to work out a scheme for assisted migration. (Tinker:343). Malaviya submitted his resolution on 20 March 1916 and gave a historical account of indenture in which he repeated the all objections to the system. He added that the purchasing power of 12 annas in Fiji was worth 5 annas in India.. He proposed not to reform the system but to abolish it.

Vice Roy Lord Harding responded and said that the government accepted the resolution. There was one reservation implying that the existing system of recruitment would be maintained until new conditions would be worked out in collaboration with CO and the Crown colonies. (Tinker 344).

According to Harding a the labourer did not need to go overseas because economically he could do as well as in the jute mills of Calcutta. (Tinker, 346). During the year 1916 there was a need for recruits for the army and the British government needed also the service of the Emigration ships. There was not enough capacity to find enough labourers for emigration, while there were no ships available .

At the same time the campaign for popular support against emigration was intensified. Several organisations were active (Tinker 346-347; Kumar, 2013). The main points of criticism was the moral aspect and the discrimination of Indians. People who were active in the propaganda were among others Gandhi, Andres, Totaram Sanadhia, Mrs Sarojini Naidu. Sanadhia was an former indentured labourer from Fiji who returned to India in 1914 to join the Nationalist Movement. He published an autobiographical book My twenty One years in Fiji with the purpose of making the nationalist aware of the situation of indentured labourers in Fiji. Kumar, 2013; Hassankhan, 2013 and 2014). Sanadhia used also the case of the Indian women Kunti, who's remarkable story about her escape from a n attempted rape and how she heroically saved her honour by jumping in a river (Lal, B., 2000: 195-214; Kumar, 2014)

In his campaign during the beginning of 1917 Gandhi demanded that before 31 July 1917 indentured labour should come to an end in all colonies (Gandhi, 2016, p. 355 – 356)- . At the same time the needs for ships and troops for the war was so urgent that ON 20 March 2017 the Government of India imposed for military reasons a temporary prohibition of the emigration of unskilled labour to the colonies. (Mangru, 119). In a despatch of 23 March to

IO the GOI stated that “it was unthinkable that indentured emigration, halted by the war-time emergency, could ever be revived ‘ and that there would be an interval before any assisted scheme could be adopted (Tinker, 350). In July 1917 the report of the Inter-departmental Conference on Assisted Emigration from India , to British Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica and Fiji came out. The scheme included migration of family s or individuals with a three years contact as labourer, and an indexed wage. After six months the labourer could choose his own employer. After three years he could receive a piece of land. If he accepted, he would lose his right on free return passage. (See Report in L/P&J/6; See also Tinker 354 ff). The scheme was condemned by many Indian politicians and according to Gandhi it was a continuation of indentured labour in a milder form. The implementation was therefore postponed.

Conclusion about reasons for abolition of Indian Indenture

There was a general understanding among pro and contra indenture people that the economic befits for the emigrants after their indenture were large. According to the Sanderson committee and McNeill/Chiman Lal found that the economic benefits outweighed the social and moral disadvantages. The Indian government (harding) did not agree with the conclusions of both reports. Harding had analysed the McNeill/Chimanlal reports and came to other conclusions than the authors of the report. The nationalists accentuated the social and moral aspects of indentured labour , especially regarding the treatment and position of women, the disparity in the number of male and female, the rate of suicide, lost of casts. I agree with Ashutosh kumar that the view of the nationalists, even that of Gandhi, was an elitist view. This paper does not give me the opportunity to go deep in the matter of the position of women. My own conclusion is that the women during and after indenture, at least in Suriname, had a better position than in India, economically as well socially. I have not done research on the patter of suicide, but the well-known Historian Brij Lal from Fiji the sexual jealousy because of scarcity of women was not the main and only reason for suicide. There was a combination of other causes.(Lal, 2000: 218).

THE IMPACT OF THE ABOLITION

General impact

The first consequence of the abolition was that return migrants did not have any opportunity to leave India. There were thousands of return migrants who could not stay or were not accepted in their home surroundings. They left their villages and came to Calcutta in order to find a job or to leave for one of the colonies (Tinker: 365; Bal and Sinha, 2006). Tinker describes the situation around 1920 in Kolkata:

“These repatriates , after spending all their savings, have drifted back to Calcutta in the hope of finding ships to take them back to their home in the colonies.”. They were temporarily accommodated in the former Surinamese depot from an emergency organisation, named Emigrants friendly Service Community. Het ends his story with the following:

And so the story of indentured coolies ended. India which had called so loudly for the removal of their disabilities, had no place for them when they finally came home. The sugar plantations, where they had been used so badly, offered their only hope. It was a strange end to a strange story” (Tinker, 365-366)

For the Indian communities in the Caribbean the termination of indenture migration meant the a definite stop of migration from India, although small numbers of individuals came as traders and business people. The Indian communities were more or less cut off from their mother country and had to integrate in the new and had to integrate in their new environment. In many cases the family ties between home and destination were cut off and most of the emigrants and their descendants became off rooted, until recently when a search for roots originated and has been stimulated by the Indian government.

In 1921 the Indian government introduced a new emigration act regulating the free emigration of skilled and unskilled people. The migration to Ceylon, the Strait Settlements and Burma continued, while that to the other countries came to an end. From all colonies only British Guiana got an experiment with assisted emigration. Although Fiji was in want for labourers, it did not get them from India, because of labour unrest in 1920.

The consequences for Suriname

The Surinamese authorities as well as the Indian community were are of the anti-indenture feelings in India. Since 1910 the Indians in Suriname were organised in the Surinaamse Immigranten Vereeniging (Association of Immigrants). Its leader was the head-interpreter of the immigration department, Pandit Sital Persad Doobey. Since 1911 he accompanied retour migrants on their way to India, while he was also used as a *laukeh* for the recruitment of emigrants.

The SIV promoted the settlement of Indians in Suriname. After the abolition of indenture the leaders promoted the integration of Hindustanis in the Surinamese society. The immigrants in Suriname were treated as Dutch subjects. In 1913 Sital Persad visited India and made a tour through the recruitment areas. He met officials and other influential persons about the anti-emigration feelings and explained to them that Indians in Suriname are well treated and that they had a lot of opportunities after expiration of their contract. His report was sent by the Emigration Agent in Calcutta to the Immigration department and the newspapers of January 1914 wrote articles about the “successful mission”. (Suriname 20 January 1914). According to Sital Persad, most of the persons whom he spoke to were not aware of the conditions of Indians in Suriname, and told him that they would not anymore resist indenture recruitment. (Sital Persad, 1914, Report).

When the news about the termination of indenture Reached Suriname, the SIV send a petition to the Indian Government through the Foreign Office. In the petition the SIV staed that the termination of emigration would cause serious consequences for the Hindustani population. For the existence and growing of the Indian community the reinforcement of emigration from India was important. The settlement of Hindustanis was growing in number

and in importance. The ties with the homeland could be a source of power and support to national undertakings.

“ They (the Hindustanis MH) fear that a sudden prohibition to emigrate will be a death blow to those aspirations , and a very grievous wrong to those who have settled, reared families and acquired properties in this colony.”. The petition ends with the request

“that if the present emigration system be altered this this action shall not impede a well conducted emigration to this colony, where the chances of success, measured by the success in the past, are so apparent and real”⁵.

In 1920, when the indentured emigration was permanently terminated, a delegation of the Indian community, consisting of Sital Persad and two executive members of the SIV was sent to India to talk with the Indian leaders in order to get permission for a form of assisted emigration to Suriname.(Suriname, 26 Oct. 1920). The mission returned without any assertion from the Indian leaders. A peculiarity is that a number of return migrants came with Sital Persad to Suriname.

Although the import of indentured labourers was stopped, there was a continuous growth of the Indian population . At the same time the male-female ratio became more positive. (see table 4)

Table 4... Indians in Suriname: proportion of males and females 1910 - 1939

Years	Br. Indians	Male		Female	
		Abs.	%	Abs.	%
1910	19.683	11.832	60.1	7.851	39.9
1915	21.696	13.109	60.4	8.577	39.6
1917	25.331	15.489	61.1	9.842	38.9
1922	30.530	17.104	56.0	13.426	44.0
1925	32.533	18.066	55.5	14.467	44.5
1930	35.923	19.456	54.2	16.467	45.8
1935	40.777	21.847	53.6	18.930	46.4
1939	45.674	24.017	52.6	21.657	47.4

Source: Colonial reports, relevant years

One consequence of the end of Indian immigration labour was the decrease of the number of indentured labourers on the plantations. Besides, the number of free immigrant labourers on the plantations decreases in contrast to that of Indonesian labourers. The Indians preferred to work on their own plots as small farmers, where they were their own boss and the fruits of their hard work was for themselves and their families. They made use of the facilities to get a piece of land against attractive conditions, with the possibility to get the land in property. (Grondverordening 1 December 1914). Although the last contract expired in 1921, there was a possibility of re-indenture, mostly for one year. There was every year a small number of

⁵ In the archives I did not find any reply on this petition. The newspapers are also silent on this.

Indians who signed a re-indenture contract. The last one were in 1929. (Colonial reports, 1920-1939)

Macro-economic effects

In contrast to the other sugar colonies, Suriname was not only dependant on Indian indentured labourers. Since 1890 there were immigrants from the island of Java in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). They were called Javanen (Javanese). Since 1917 we had an increase of Javanese immigrants in Suriname. As a consequence the number of indentured labourers on the plantations did not decrease. As the Indians left the plantations, there place was taken by the Javanese. Gradually the Javanese followed the Indians in small farming. The policy of the government changed and the small farming was promoted more and more, by the promotion of colonisation. The focus of immigration moved gradually from the plantation cultivation to colonisation. In the last case, the government tried to import families in stead of individuals. The small farming became more and more important and produced not only for the local market but also for export.

Social effects

Since the end of immigration, the communication with India weaker and scarce. There were no direct ship routes to India. Trade with India was on a low scale. Indian products were available, but probably these were imported via other countries, such as British Guiana, Trinidad, UK and the Netherlands. I assume that many products were also imported via Indonesia, because of the more regular and direct ship routes to Indonesia. The reason for my assumption is that in the Colonial reports is mentioned that every year Indians transferred money to Indonesia.

Since the beginning of the 20th century Indians moved to places outside the plantations and settled as small farmers. This process has been accelerated since the 1920s. In the rural areas there were concentrations of Indian population, where they created their own small local communities resembling village communities. There they settled as families and gradually the joint families evolved in which three to four generations shared all facilities of a household. There was a kind of village life with at some places a kind of pancayats. The people helped each other during the planting season of rice . When there was a wedding of another kind of function the whole family and neighbours helped.

The culture the immigrants brought with them, was preserved ,Aspects of the culture were among others: religion and religious practices (Holy, Divali, Eid, Muharram, etc.), Rituals and ceremonies, clothing/dressing, food and food habits, songs, music and dance, drama (natak). The culture was more folk culture. One important development was the gradual weakening of the caste system; intermarriage between Hindus and Muslims. Although legally the immigrants had the same rights as the rest of the population, during long time they were regarded as foreigners, while the real Surinamese were the Creoles (inboorlingen, according the colonial reports before 1940). After the indentured period there was an accelerated evolving of the ethnic group of Hindustanis, speaking Hindustani as their language, and

having Hinduism or Islam as their religion. The Hindustanis were a minority group, and the majority group or the dominant group expected from them to assimilate. As they were proud of their culture, values etc., they were in favour of a multi cultural society as expressed by Jnan Adhin: Unity in Diversity. (For more information see Publications of Jnan Adhin, Gowricharn, 2013, Hassankhan, 2004).

It was not until the mid of the 1930s new contact with India developed via the import of Indian cinema in Suriname. Another channel for contact was the regular arrival of religious leaders from the continent. Through the religious organisations they taught their children not only the religion but also the language: Hindi or Urdu. Sarnámi Hindustani was spoken, but not written and was lower in hierarchy than Hindi and Urdu..

Concluding we can say that the negative effects of the abolition of indenture were minimal. There was not a direct collapse of the economy, to the contrary, we had an accelerated development of small farming. The feared decline of the Indian community did not come, but the community survived due to hard work and due to a sober and simple life they not only survived but were successful within the Surinamese society. However, if the migration from India did not come to an end, the demographic, social and political picture in Suriname should look quite different..

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