

1969

## A History of the East Indian Indentured Plantation Worker in Trinidad, 1845-1917.

John Allen Perry  
*Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_disstheses](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses)

---

### Recommended Citation

Perry, John Allen, "A History of the East Indian Indentured Plantation Worker in Trinidad, 1845-1917."  
(1969). *LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses*. 1612.  
[https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_disstheses/1612](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/1612)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [gradetd@lsu.edu](mailto:gradetd@lsu.edu).

This dissertation has been  
microfilmed exactly as received

70-259

PERRY, John Allen, 1933-  
A HISTORY OF THE EAST INDIAN INDENTURED  
PLANTATION WORKER IN TRINIDAD, 1845 - 1917.

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and  
Mechanical College, Ph.D., 1969  
History, modern

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan

© John Allen Perry 1970

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

A HISTORY OF THE EAST INDIAN INDENTURED PLANTATION  
WORKER IN TRINIDAD, 1845-1917

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Latin American Studies Institute

by

John Allen Perry

B.S., California State Polytechnic College, 1959

B.S., Henderson State College, 1961

M.A., Louisiana State University, 1967

June, 1969

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost the writer would like to acknowledge his debt to Dr. Jane Lucas DeGrummond for her constant guidance and encouragement throughout the research and writing of this study. A great deal of gratitude must also go to the Latin American Studies Institute at Louisiana State University for my appointment as a fellow in the Institute. This allowed me both the time and the financial assistance for completing this study. The writer also wishes to acknowledge a great debt to the Inter-library Loan Department of the Louisiana State University Library for locating and procuring many obscure titles and documents.

In Trinidad, help came from many sources. Mr. Enos Sewlal, the Trinidad Government Archivist, was extremely helpful in directing the writer to needed sources, especially to British records and the microfilm collection from Britain's Public Records Office in the Trinidad-Tobago Government Archives.

Librarians in Trinidad were always helpful, particularly Miss Shelah Lewsey, Deputy Librarian of the Trinidad Public Library, and Mrs. Gloria Corbie of the Belmont Branch of the Trinidad Public Library. Miss Ursula Raymond, Director of the West Indian Room of the Central Library of Trinidad, was both knowledgeable and helpful in locating rare and useful books. Members of the staff of the Library of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad were very

helpful, particularly Miss Maritza Pantin who located every piece of material of usefulness in the library collection.

Trinidadians in all walks of life were generous and helpful with their information, conversation, opinions and hospitality. Of particular notice was Mr. H. P. Singh who managed to expose this writer to as many viewpoints, interviews, conversations and the like as were possible. Issac and Rosabell Seesaran of Penal, Trinidad were likewise helpful in touring the writer about Southern Trinidad where a good many of the plantations and Indians are located.

For a great deal of clerical assistance and moral support while doing field research, the writer must thank his wife, Judy Perry.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TOPIC	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	ii
LIST OF FIGURES . . . . .	vi
ABSTRACT . . . . .	vii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
The Island and Its History . . . . .	4
II. TRANSITION FROM SLAVE TO FREE LABOR . . . . .	16
The End of Slavery and Apprenticeship . . . . .	16
Work Habits of the Creole of African Descent . . . . .	20
Alternatives . . . . .	25
III. THE EAST INDIAN'S HOMELAND . . . . .	36
Caste . . . . .	36
The Man and the Land . . . . .	40
IV. THE COMING OF THE EAST INDIAN . . . . .	49
Recruitment . . . . .	51
The Voyage . . . . .	59
Distribution . . . . .	67
V. THE INDIAN AT WORK . . . . .	73
VI. THE OPTION TO RETURN . . . . .	96
Land in Lieu of Return Passage . . . . .	104
VII. SOME PROBLEMS . . . . .	111
The Woman and the Family . . . . .	111
Health . . . . .	124
Religion . . . . .	136
Integration . . . . .	138

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

TOPIC	PAGE
CHAPTER	
VIII. CONCLUSION . . . . .	146
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	152
VITA . . . . .	160

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
1. Physical Map of Trinidad . . . . .	5
2. Land Use in 1797 . . . . .	12
3. Political Map of Trinidad . . . . .	15
4. India During Emigration . . . . .	37
5. United Provinces of India . . . . .	38
6. An Indenture Contract . . . . .	50
7. East Indians Entering Trinidad . . . . .	72
8. Trinidad Sugar Areas in the 1850's . . . . .	74
9. Work Records of the Woodbrook Estate . . . . .	80
10. Release from Indenture Certificate . . . . .	97
11. Free Land and Bonus in Lieu of Return Totals . . . . .	110
12. Description of Hospital Form . . . . .	132
13. Record of Treatment Form . . . . .	133



## ABSTRACT

When the apprenticeship experiment (designed to help slaves make the transition from slavery to full freedom) ended in the British Colonies, the planters in Trinidad found themselves without the steady labor they needed for their plantations. The bulk of the newly freed apprentices left the estates to establish subsistence plots and villages. Due to such factors as high wages and attitudes toward field labor by the ex-slaves, few of the newly freed slaves engaged in steady work on the plantations. Two or three days work would provide enough wages to subsist the rest of the week and the ex-slaves saw little reason to work more.

In desperation, the planters tried various means to prevent the ex-slaves from obtaining provision grounds; but they failed and turned to importing a new work force. The planters tried American Negroes and free labor from Africa. When this did not provide enough workers, Chinese and various Europeans were solicited; but this likewise proved to be unsatisfactory. Finally, the planters turned to the East Indian to solve the labor problem.

An indenture system was established which brought East Indian immigrants to Trinidad from 1845 to 1917. In India agents went about the country, making contracts with recruits, and then sending these recruits to depots at the ports of embarkation. Calcutta emerged early

in the indenture period as the main port of embarkation.

Early voyages to Trinidad were plagued with high mortality but eventually the main hazards of the voyage were eliminated. Upon arrival in Trinidad the Indentures were processed at an immigrations depot from which the immigrants were allotted to the plantations that applied for labor.

The estates were required by law to meet certain standards before they were eligible to receive Indentures and could lose their laborers if at any time they failed to meet these requirements. For various reasons the five-year contract to one estate was eventually established. Transfers to other estates occurred mainly because of marriage problems and labor unrest.

Work on the estates followed much the same pattern as that which had been established during slavery. Central sugar factories which were established on the island after the 1870's changed mill work, but the field work patterns continued pretty much unaltered. Some planters sold their sugar lands to sugar companies and went into the expanding cocoa industry taking their Indentures with them. These estates required a different work routine.

After the five year indenture period and the ten year residence period expired, the Indenture had the option of returning to India. Inducements were offered in the way of land or bonuses so that he would remain in Trinidad, but few Indians accepted either the inducements or the option to return to India. Most took their savings from the plantation years and went into a business of some sort on their own.

Some of the problems that arose from the introduction of East Indians into Trinidad were as follows: the East Indians' reception by the Creoles of Negro descent, the shock to the East Indians' family pattern, mortality rates and health in general of East Indians on the estates, and the manifestations of the East Indians' religion which were both amusing and distressing to the host society.

Arguments for and against the necessity of Indian Immigration waxed and waned during the Indenture period from 1845-1917. A combination of circumstances including the sugar market, public opinion, World War One, and a definite movement in India to stop the indenture program finally brought, in 1917, the end of the emigration of workers from India to Trinidad.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

While labor on the plantation has been a problem everywhere, this study is an attempt to describe the endeavor to solve the problem in one area in the Western Hemisphere.

It is necessary to define some basic concepts within which this study takes place. First, what is a plantation? Leo Waibel has developed a rather widely accepted definition:

A plantation is not only an agricultural undertaking; it is also an industrial enterprise. It not only produces agricultural products; it also prepares them and makes them fit for transportation.....Since the installation of expensive machines pays only if production is on a large scale, it follows that the plantations are almost always large estates of several hundred to several thousand acres. These large areas require, as do the associated factories, a great number of laborers. The labor problem is thus of paramount importance to the plantations....<sup>1</sup>

Waibel goes on to say that this demand for labor has resulted in the mass migration of labor into the plantation areas.

Occasionally some confusion arises from not drawing the proper distinction between the plantation and the hacienda. Although some forms of the plantation were adopted by the Hispanic colonizer the hacienda has been historically more characteristic of the Hispanic areas

---

<sup>1</sup>Leo Waibel, "The Tropical Plantation System," Scientific Monthly, Vol. III (1941), 156-160.

of the Americas. Some cash crops were grown on the hacienda but they were primarily for the local market. The hacienda was more a way of life than a business. It allowed the owner to live the life of a caballero which gave him that distinctive position in society that the Spaniard desired. Labor was needed on the hacienda as it was on the plantation, but the labor produced the subsistence articles needed by the inhabitants of the hacienda. Labor on the plantation, on the other hand, was needed to produce the cash crop; and the importation and purchase of much of the food consumed on the plantation has been a characteristic feature of the plantation area.

Perhaps the hacienda existed on Trinidad in its early Spanish history; but the coming of the French, and later the British, resulted in the plantation being the characteristic man-land relationship in Trinidad.

Where in the Americas does the plantation system prevail? Charles Wagley has divided the Americas into basically three culture spheres: Euro-America, Indo-America, and Plantation-America.<sup>2</sup> Wagley delimits the Plantation-America area spatially from Northeast Brazil, through the Guianas, the Caribbean and into the Southern United States. He makes a case for cultural similarities throughout the area such as monocrop, rigid class lines, multi-racial societies, weak community

---

<sup>2</sup>Charles Wagley, "Plantation-America: A Cultural Sphere," in Caribbean Studies, A Symposium, ed. by Vera Rubin (Seattle: 2nd ed., 1960), 3-13.

structures, the presence of peasants similiar to European peasants, similiar family structures, and other traits that persons moving from place to place throughout Plantation-America would recognize as familiar. He concludes by saying" "Finally, given the essential similarity in development of institutions, Plantation-America offers a magnificent laboratory for the comparative approach."<sup>3</sup>

John P. Augelli developes a similar concept to Wagley's Plantation-America with his Rimland-Mainland culture areas of Middle America.<sup>4</sup> Augelli recognizes much the same distinctions that set the area apart as does Wagley and states that Gilberto Freyre's study of the Brazilian plantation<sup>5</sup> is applicable in many ways to the United States South and to the West Indies.<sup>6</sup>

Trinidad, just as other regions of Plantation-America, was confronted with the "labor problem" which eventually resulted in the importation of East Indian Indentures as plantation workers. There is little or nothing that tells the story from the East Indian's point of view. Only three witnesses purported to be giving the Indian's view

---

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>4</sup>John P. Augelli, "The Rimland-Mainland Concept of Culture Areas in Middle America." Annals of the Association of American Geographers, LII (1962), 119-129. See also, Robert C. West and John P. Augelli, Middle America: Its Lands and Peoples, (Englewood Cliffs: 1966), Chapter I.

<sup>5</sup>Gilberto Freyre, The Masters and the Slaves (New York: 1956).

<sup>6</sup>West and Augelli, Middle America, 15.

in the Sanderson Report in 1909.<sup>7</sup> One was discredited<sup>8</sup> and the others seemed rather uninformed.<sup>9</sup> As a result of this paucity of Indian viewpoints, interviews with as many Indians as possible were made by the writer in order to obtain their opinion of the investigations and reports that were conducted concerning the Indian Indentured workers. They indicated that they thought the reports were generally fair and accurate.

### The Island and Its History

Trinidad, an island located off the Northeast coast of Venezuela, is an extension of the South American mainland. A fault depression separates Trinidad's east-west Northern Range from Venezuela's coastal Cordillera. Trinidad's Northwest promontory is thirteen miles from Punta Penas on the mainland. In addition to the Northern Range, the Central and Southern Ranges extend east to west across the island. The names are descriptive of their location. At the southeastern edge of the Southern Range are the Trinity Hills which prompted Columbus to give the island its name. The rugged Northern Range abuts the Caribbean on the north coast and contains Trinidad's highest peaks ranging up to 3,000 feet. The less rugged Central Range (often called the

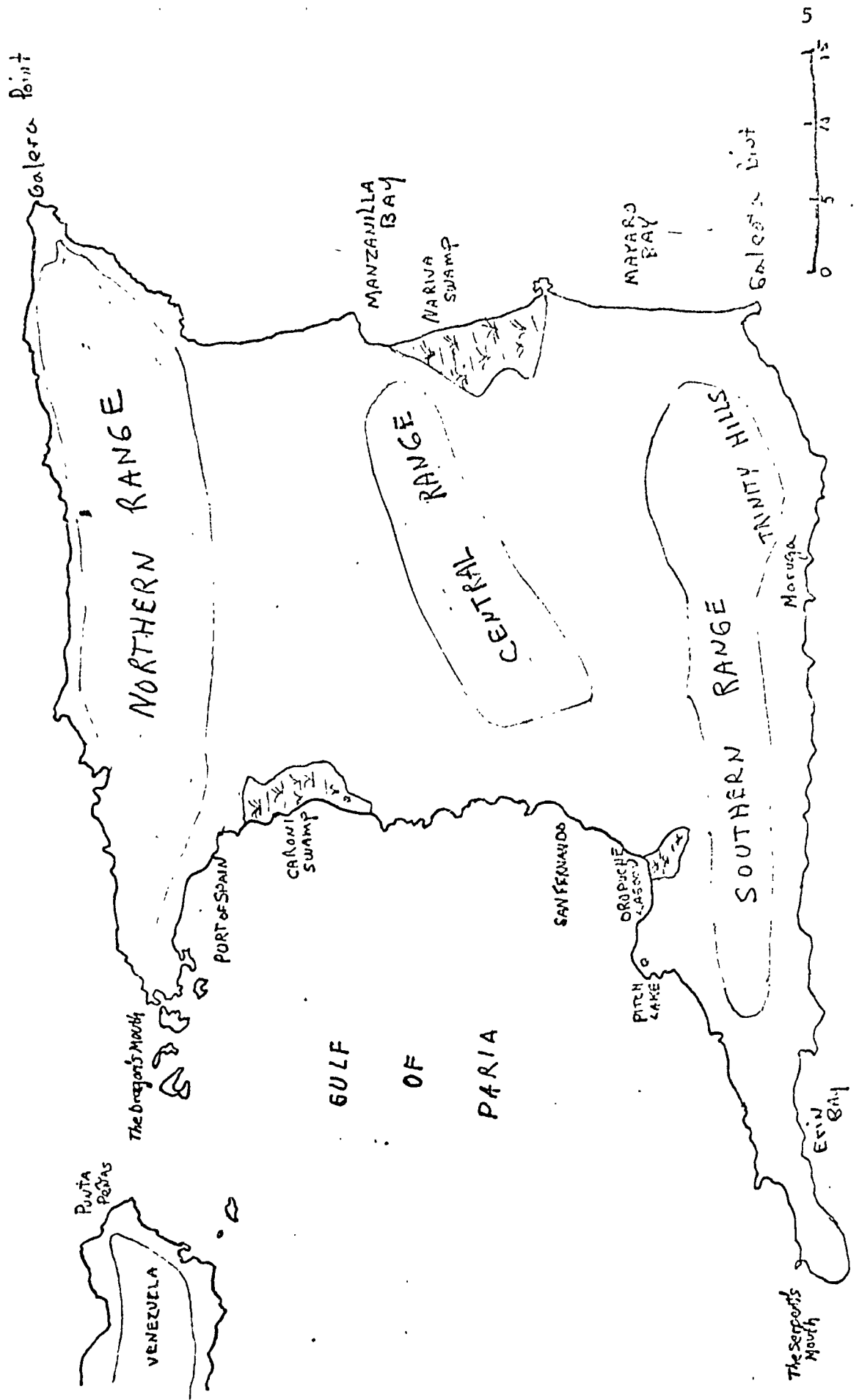
---

<sup>7</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5192, "Report of the Committee on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates."

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 225-236 and 307-309.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 311-314 and 384-393.

Figure 1 TRINIDAD  
Physical





Montserrat Hills) with peaks up to 1,000 feet takes a slight northeast angle cross central Trinidad from Pointe-a-Pierre on the Gulf of Paria to Manzanilla on the Atlantic Coast. The Southern Range and Trinity Hills extend along the south coast.

These three ranges bound on the north and south two island-wide lowland plains. The Northern Plain, rarely above 100 feet elevation, ranges in width from five miles in the east to fifteen miles wide on the western coast. Along the northern edge of the plain are mountain valleys cut into the southern flank of the Northern Range. Streams from the Northern and Central Ranges flow into the plain. The southern lowlands are more undulating. The western extremity of the lowlands include the famous sugar-lands of Naparima.

The 1,864 square mile island of Trinidad has few safe harbors except on the west coast. The Gulf of Paria, bounded by the extended promontories of the west coast of Trinidad has placid waters. But the entrance on the north, the Dragon's Mouth, and to the south, the Serpent's Mouth (so named by Columbus) have tricky currents because of the tides. Power vessels have no trouble with these eddies but they were a hazard to the sailing ships. Chaguaramas Bay is a notable exception to the lack of good harbors and was suggested for years as the most favorable site for the Caribbean based British fleet; it finally became a United States Navy base during the Second World War. The first and second cities of the island, Port-of-Spain and San Fernando, also have harbors. The north coast's high surf where the Caribbean and the Atlantic meet makes the steep slopes of the Northern Range even less

hospitable to approach. The long coconut-fringed beaches of the eastern coast, with their Atlantic breakers rolling in, offer little more than off shore open anchorages. Even so, some produce was shipped to Port-of-Spain by this hazardous method in the nineteenth century. On the south coast the mouth of the Moruga River will allow small boats to land and a few dubious anchorages exist westward to Erin Bay. Another feature of part of the east and west coasts is the mangrove-filled swamps that attracted the East Indian rice growers.

The rivers of Trinidad offer as little value for shipping purposes as three-fourths of the coastline just described. The only successful use of river transport was some sugar transport in flat-boats in the nineteenth century on the lower reaches of the Caroni River. The rivers reaching the coast either flow into swamps or their mouths are blocked by sandbars. Moreover, inland streams alternate between roaring torrents in the wet seasons and trickles in the dry season.

The wet season occurs from June to December with rain occurring two out of three days. Occasionally a petit careme (short dry spell) occurs in October. During the dry season from January to the end of May it rains one day out of three. There are occasional variations in these patterns that seriously concerned the planters. Dry Septembers sometimes meant fires in the sugar cane. Rainy spells during the dry season disrupted harvest and transport over the dirt roads.

Rain is unevenly distributed over the island. The eastern end of the Northern Range receives as much as 150 inches annually. A belt five miles inland from the east coast extending from the Northern Range

to the Trinity Hills receives up to 100 inches per year. To the east and the west of this belt the rain decreases dropping to 50 and 60 inches along the western end of the island.

The easterly trade winds are felt throughout the island except in a few lee locations. Besides bringing moisture, the winds add to the comfort of residents, although the temperatures are never excessively high. The island is far enough south generally to escape the hurricanes.

Most of Trinidad was originally covered by tropical rain forest. The highest peak in the Northern Range is still covered to its summit with forest. Stands of Mora excelsa occur at Matura, Mayaro, and Irois.<sup>10</sup> Some savannas of coarse grasses, sedges, and shrubs occur in scattered areas on the Northern Plain and in southwestern Trinidad.<sup>11</sup>

At the time of Discovery by Columbus the island of Trinidad was peopled by the Igneri, a subgroup of the Arawak, and a small group of Caribs who occupied the northwestern corner of the island. Of the two, the Igneri, had superior agriculture based upon cassava. They fished for cascudur in the rivers, dug in the sand beaches for chip-chip (a shell fish), and hunted the lappe and the agouti.<sup>12</sup>

The island was ignored (except for a slave raid now and then)

---

<sup>10</sup>R. C. Marshall, The Physiography and Vegetation of Trinidad and Tobago, Forestry Memoirs, No. 17, (Oxford: 1934), 22.

<sup>11</sup>J. S. Beard, "The Savanna Vegetation of Northern Tropical America," Ecological Monographs, Vol. XXIII, No. 2, 1953, 152.

<sup>12</sup>C. R. Ottley, An Account of Life in Spanish Trinidad (1498-1797), (Port-of-Spain: 1955), 2.

until 1530 when Antonio Sedenó was appointed Governor from Puerto Rico. He never effectively occupied the island; and it was not until 1592, when Antonio de Berrio was appointed Governor, that another attempt was made. Berrio used Trinidad primarily as a base for his forays into the mainland in search of El Dorado. Some 2,200 Spaniards, men, women, and children, were brought into the colony in 1600 as settlers but their number was reduced by disease and Indian raids in ten years to sixty persons.

The main occupation in the early years of Spanish occupation was tobacco cultivation for trade with the Dutch, English, and French. This trade was illegal, but the Spanish neglected to send vessels of any sort to Trinidad, so the residents in desperation, traded with the foreigners. The first Spanish vessel to call at Trinidad in 19 years did so in 1614. In 1653 the residents petitioned the crown because no Spanish vessel had been sent to Trinidad in twenty years. In 1662 the same petition was again entered but now it had been thirty years since a Spanish ship had arrived. As a result the residents carried on an open trade with the Northern European ships and flouted the commands of the Council of Indies to cease doing so. Even Trinidad's slaves were purchased from the Dutch.

Early in the 1600's wild cocoa was discovered on Trinidad and its cultivation expanded as an alternative to tobacco until an unspecified disaster curtailed its development in 1725. Although cocoa continued as a crop, it did not regain its importance again until the latter nineteenth century.

By 1777, after nearly 300 years of Spanish rule, there were only

340 Europeans, 870 free mulattoes, and 200 Negro slaves in Trinidad.<sup>13</sup> The 2,000 or so Amerindians had been denied to the settlers in 1716 as a source of forced labor because of the Arena Massacre in which Capuchin priests administering a reduction had been killed.<sup>14</sup>

The year 1783 was one of the many turning points in Trinidad's history. This was the year that the famous cedula of population was issued by the Spanish Crown. It came about largely through the efforts of Philip Rose Roume de St. Laurent, a Frenchman on Grenada, who suggested that French planters with their slaves be allowed to settle in Trinidad. Each white immigrant was to be granted four and two-sevenths fanegas of land and half that amount for each slave brought with them; this was an obvious inducement to bring slaves. Free non-whites would receive half this amount but equal amounts for any slaves they introduced. The French Revolution prompted even more French to seek refuge in Trinidad. So many French came that by the time the British took

---

<sup>13</sup>A Spanish census quoted by Donald Wood, Trinidad in Transition (London and New York: 1968), 32. Lavaysse writing in the early nineteenth century gave the population in 1783 as 126 whites, 295 free people of color, 310 slaves and 2,032 Indians: Jean Francois Dauxion Lavaysse, A Statistical, Commercial, and Political Description of Venezuela, Trinidad, Margarita and Tobago (London: 1820), 332.

<sup>14</sup>Eric Williams, History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago (London and New York: 1962), 27.

Trinidad in 1797, most of the population was French.<sup>15</sup> French patois was the standard language and French planters set the tone of daily life. Sugar had become the main industry of Trinidad and the population stood near 20,000.

Trinidad became a refuge also for those fleeing from the strife torn mainland in the early 1800's. Not only Spanish speaking refugees came, but also French who were forced to move a second time because of revolution. Many slipped in undetected but between November 1814 and January 1817, 3,823 were granted official permission to remain in Trinidad.<sup>16</sup>

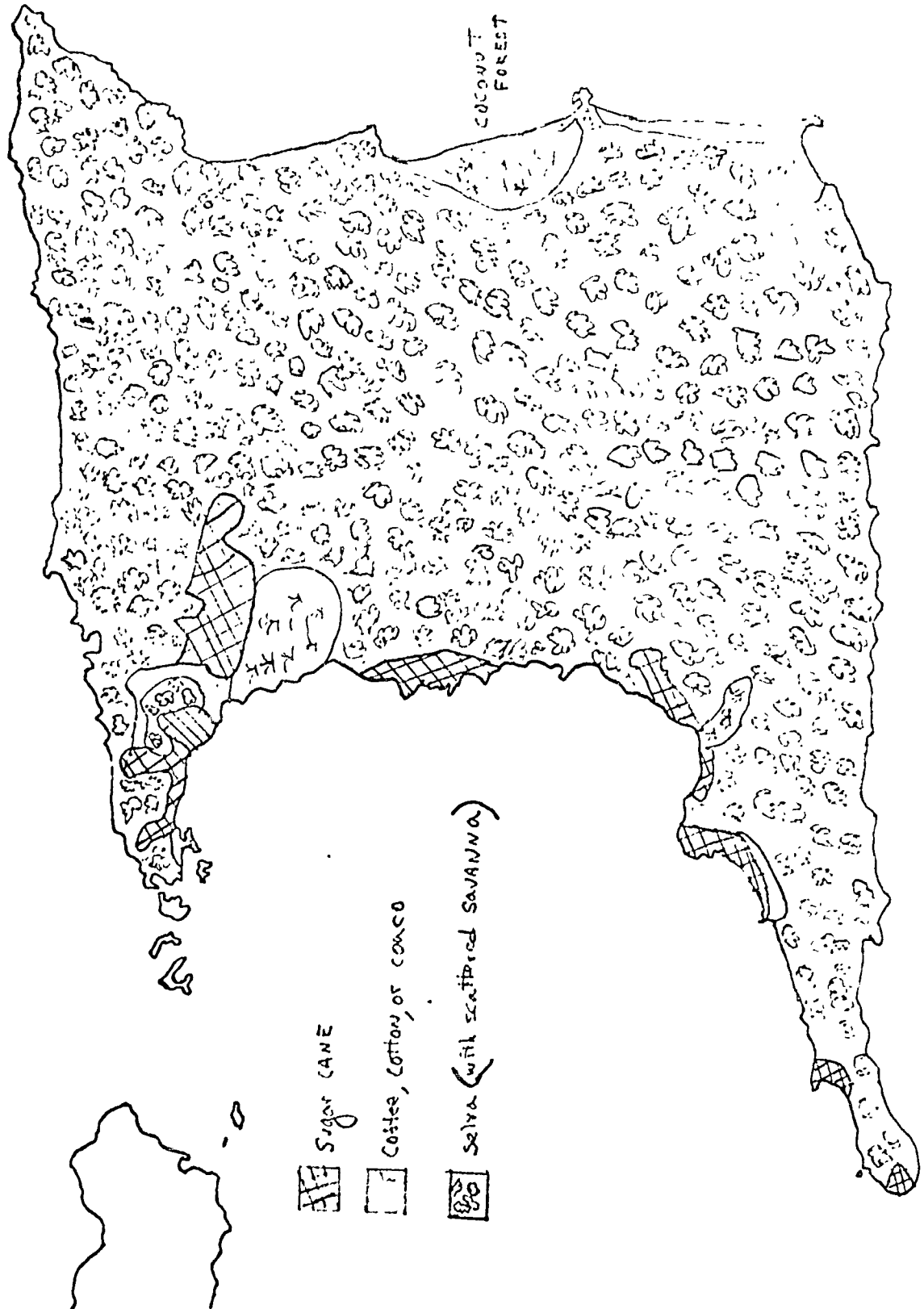
When the British took the island many British planters from other islands in the West Indies moved their families and household goods to take up residence with the French and Spanish planters who were already in Trinidad. Added to this group were the operators of merchant houses and agents of absentee proprietors. The houses engaged in all aspects of the sugar trade: capital, estates, transport, and refining. The people brought in by these houses - managers, overseers, bookkeepers and the like - considered themselves to be transients, not permanent

---

<sup>15</sup> Lavaysse gave the population in 1797 as 2,151 whites, 4,467 free people of color, 10,100 Negro slaves, 2,200 Amerindians, a total of 18,918: Description of Venezuela, Trinidad, etc., 327. Anthony Maingot gave the breakdown of the population as follows: French: white - 1,095, colored - 2,925, total: 4,020; Spanish: white - 505, colored - 1,751, total: 2,256; British: white - 663, colored - 599, total 1,263 (sic): "The French In Trinidad," Independence Supplement of the Sunday Guardian, Port-of-Spain, 26 August 1962, 31-32.

<sup>16</sup> Parliamentary Paper, 1823, XVII, 16, "Papers relating to the Island of Trinidad."

Figure 2  
Trinidad Land Use 1797



residents. They created much the same resentment as occurred between the Creoles and the Gachupines in Spanish America. They were also very quick, whatever their station, to adopt the attitudes of the White planter class:

Here we find young overseers and clerks, ignorant mechanics, and other persons of low and obscure situations, who on their first arrival from Europe, were modest and respectful to everybody, soon entering in the spirit of a system which invites to oppression, and domineering with unbridled tyranny over every individual of a browner complexion than themselves.<sup>17</sup>

Even with this influx of British citizens the British found themselves in much the same situation after 1797 as the Spanish had been earlier. They ruled, but the French reigned. The Cabildo was continued as an instrument of government along with other Spanish and French institutions and customs; but Britain did not allow Trinidad, with its preponderance of non-British population, to become a self governing colony. From the time of conquest in 1797 until the twentieth century, Trinidad was a crown colony.

From 1797 to 1801 the Governor held absolute power in Trinidad. He had the aid of a Council of Advice of his own choosing after 1801 but the final responsibility still rested in his hands. The Trinidad planters, however, continued to agitate for self-government. Their insistence finally resulted in the forming of the Council of Government (later known as the Legislative Council) in 1831.

The Council consisted of the Governor in the capacity of

---

<sup>17</sup> Jean Baptiste Phillipe, A Free Mulatto (London: 1824), 196.



President, six official members and six unofficial, or nominated, members. The unofficial members were chosen by the Governor from among the residents. The official members were the Chief Justice, the Colonial Secretary, the Attorney General, the Colonial Treasurer, the Protector of Slaves, and the Collector of Customs, all appointive offices. The Council had legislative power but with review by the Colonial office.

Trinidad was considered as a sugar island from the beginning by the British. General Picton, the first Governor, wrote in 1799:

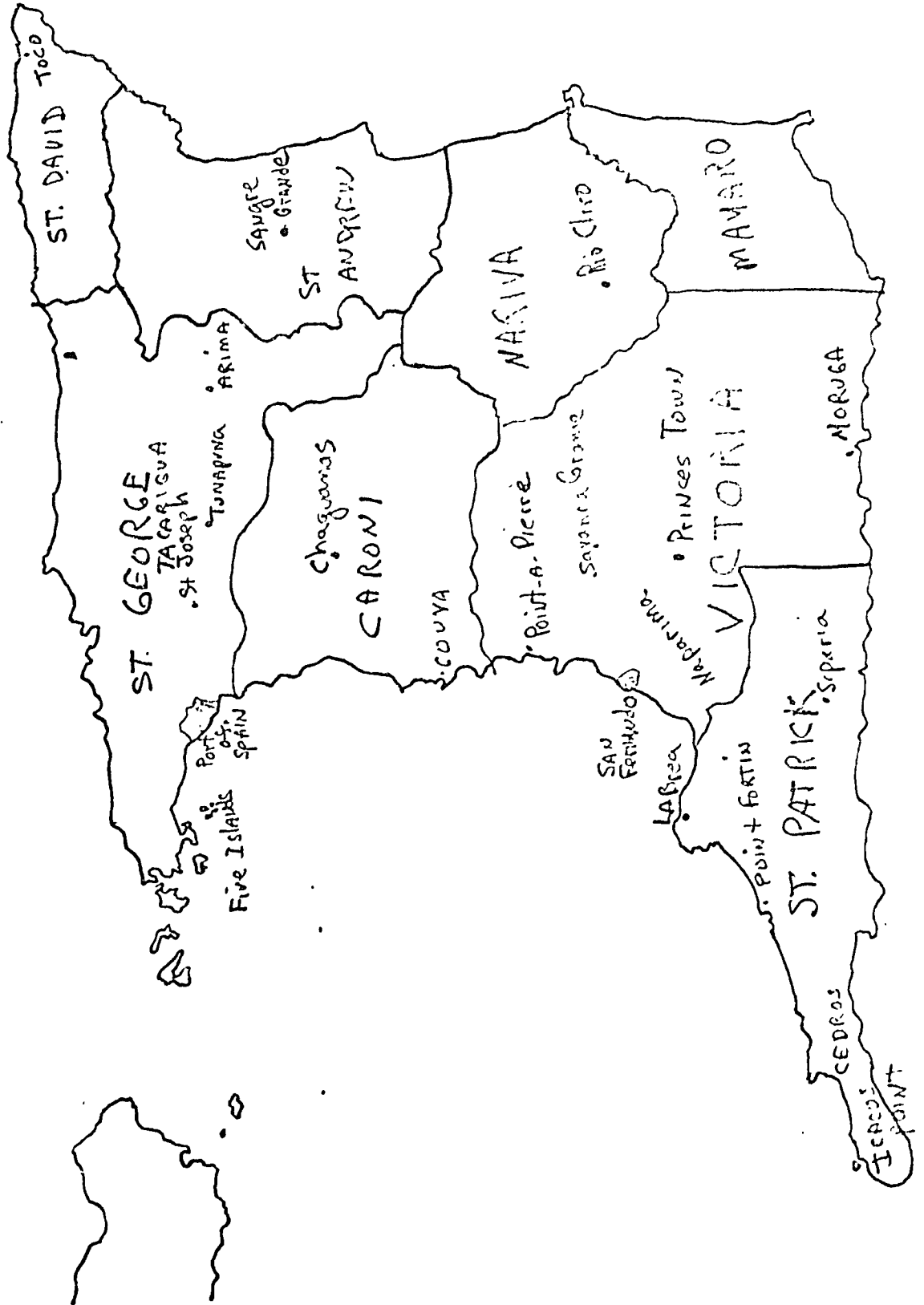
Trinidad should be regarded as a sugar Colony, the lands being generally more favourable to the Production of Cane, than Coffee or Cotton. The quantity of land to be granted should certainly depend upon the means of cultivation, but everything considered to the smallest class of sugar plantation cannot consist of less than 200 acres of good land, of which 100 acres for cane, 50 for pasture, and 50 for Negro grounds, establishments and Casualties.<sup>18</sup>

Sugar production historically in Trinidad has been along the west coast because the best conditions prevail there; better terrain, better soil, more desirable rainfall conditions (wet and dry); and, probably most decisive historically the possibilities of transportation. Roads stayed quagmires in spite of Pitch Lake (the source of asphalt roads the world over); and ports, where sugar could be loaded for overseas shipment, were on the west coast. All indications pointed to an expanding sugar industry in Trinidad until 1834 when emancipation created a labor shortage.

---

<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Eric Williams, History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago (New York and London: 1962), 74.

Figure 3  
Trinidad: Political



## CHAPTER II

### TRANSITION FROM SLAVE TO FREE LABOR

The question of labor was forced upon the planters with the end of slavery and apprenticeship; the work habits of the emancipated slave made it even more imperative. The planter was compelled to choose between the alternatives open to him if the sugar industry was to continue.

#### The End of Slavery and Apprenticeship

Some scholars give more credit to humanitarian than to economic pressures for bringing about the end of slavery in the British Caribbean. Eric Williams says these scholars are more sentimental than scholarly, and reminds them that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Williams does state emphatically that "To disregard it (humanitarianism) completely, however, would be to commit a grave historical error and to ignore one of the greatest propaganda movements of all time."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Eric Williams stresses the economic theme in his study: Capitalism and Slavery (London: 1964). Reginald Coupland in his The Empire in These Days (London, 1935), is an example of one who stresses the humanitarian causes of abolition and eventual emancipation. He created imaginary conversations with William Wilberforce who worked so diligently in Parliament for Abolition. In these conversations the religious aspects were stated as being paramount in the restriction of the slave trade, 264.

<sup>2</sup>Williams, Capitalism and Slavery, 178.

Whatever the cause - the demise of mercantilism and the rise of capitalism, or the awaking of humanitarianism in Great Britain - slavery did come to an end in the British Caribbean in 1833; and a long established labor system ended with it.<sup>3</sup>

Coercive labor had a short reprieve in the form of the apprenticeship system invoked as a sort of transition from slave to full free. Generally the provisions were uniform throughout the British Caribbean. The Emancipation Act provided that slave children under the age of six were to be free on the 1st August 1834, and all children born subsequent to this date would also be free. The Act also provided for moral and religious instruction for these children. All other slaves were to continue working for their masters under an apprenticeship system. The predials, or field laborers, were to be apprenticed for six years, or until the 1st August 1840; and non predials (such as domestics) were to be apprenticed for four years, or until the 1st August 1838. The specific provisions for working conditions were as follows: Three-quarters of every week (40½ hours) apprentices were expected to work for their masters. Masters were to continue to provide housing, clothing, food, and medical care. They could, if they desired, provide provision grounds in lieu of food. During the remaining one-fourth of

---

<sup>3</sup>The Abolition Act, sometimes confused with the Emancipation Act, refers to the prohibition of the slave trade and was passed in 1807. The Emancipation Act, freeing the slaves, was passed in 1833. Parliament provided a fund of 20,000,000 pounds sterling with which to compensate slave owners, and allocated about 5% or 1,039,119 pounds to Trinidad.

the week (13½ hours) the apprentice was free to work on his provision grounds, or to work for wages. With the money earned from the sale of provisions, or from wages, the apprentice could pay for the remainder of his apprenticeship time and become "full free." To insure that the provisions of the Act would be carried out properly, the Bill provided for special magistrates, later referred to as Stipendary Magistrates.

Negroes in the British Islands were dubious as to whether the apprenticeship system was genuine. They felt that it was something devised by the planters in order to keep the freed slaves on the plantations. In Trinidad they called their masters "dam tief," and the Governor an "old rogue." They were fully convinced that the King could well afford to pay for their full freedom and did not buy them just half free.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the newly emancipated slaves flowed into Port-of-Spain and demonstrated against the apprenticeship system. Their demonstrating did not go beyond abusive shouting, and the Port-of-Spain Gazette reported that not one cutlass or "beau-stick" could be found among them.<sup>5</sup>

Bad feelings were not abated in the least by the conduct of the planters in their dealings with the apprentices. William Sewell complained of the lack of foresight among the planters in their labor

---

<sup>4</sup>Eric Williams, History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago (New York and London: 1962), 88; Gertrude Carmichael, The History of the West Indian Islands of Trinidad and Tobago, 1498-1900 (London: 1961), 85.

<sup>5</sup>Port-of-Spain Gazette, 1 August 1834.

relations.<sup>6</sup> In spite of the reluctance of the planters the Council issued a Proclamation with the following provisions aimed at ameliorating working conditions:

- One day a week for themselves, a Saturday, so that they could attend market.
- Limitation of daily labour to nine hours between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m., with time allowed for meals.
- The continuation of all privileges, indulgences and allowances which had been established by law or custom for three years before the Emancipation Act.
- An hour a day for mothers to suckle children under twelve months.
- A reduction of working hours for mothers of more than three children and a grant of one dollar a year for each child.<sup>7</sup>

In the face of the hostility of the planters to any tampering with the apprenticeship system the British Government passed a resolution to end the system in 1838, two years earlier than planned. Governor Sir George Hill appointed Dr. Jean Baptiste Phillipe, the first colored member of the Council, to draw up a resolution to this effect. It was passed with little opposition and the Rules of Procedure were suspended so that it might go through all the stages in one day in order that apprenticeship could end 1st August 1838.

Thus the planters were denied the second form of coercive labor. The effect varied from colony to colony, depending on the density of population and the availability of unoccupied land for settlement.

---

<sup>6</sup> William G. Sewell, The Ordeal of Free Labor in the British West Indies (London: 1862), 112; an excellent work to demonstrate the typical attitude of the planters is: Jean Baptiste Phillipe, A Free Mulatto (London: 1824).

<sup>7</sup> Council Minutes, 14 June 1838.

Barbados, because of the density of occupation, offered the emancipated little alternative but to remain on the land and work for wages. Antigua had such faith in the lack of alternative that they had dispensed with the apprenticeship system and granted full freedom in 1834.<sup>8</sup> Trinidad, however, was one of the colonies in which unoccupied land was available and labor relations were vastly different.

#### . Work Habits of the Creole of African Descent

Lord John Russell observed in 1840 in a dispatch to the Governor of British Guiana that: "It is not to be expected, that men who can subsist in comfort without hard labour, will continue to devote themselves to it..... A few acres of ground will produce provisions for a family, with some surplus to sell at market, and bring home manufactured goods."<sup>9</sup>

Thus it was to be with the Creoles of African descent upon release from apprenticeship; and because it was, planters were in great anguish. The wailing and gnashing of teeth commenced even before the end of apprenticeship. Planters accused the home government of being weak and predicted that the laborers in Trinidad would leave the plantations in mass and thus ruin Trinidad's sugar industry. Planters accepted the fact that free men would much prefer living in villages, or on their own farmsteads instead of on the plantations subject to the

---

<sup>8</sup> Sewell, Ordeal, 141.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Williams, Trinidad and Tobago, 92.

whims of the owners.<sup>10</sup> However, they feared that peasants would live idly in villages, and work only two or three days a week for wages. This, to the planters, would be immoral and a regression to barbarism.

Peasants did leave the estates and form villages. It was reported in 1846 that 5,400 laborers were living in new villages.<sup>11</sup> The villages formed at this stage of Trinidad's history are still a prominent characteristic of Trinidad's landscape.

Most of these villages were formed by those who bought their plot or by planters who wished to keep a labor force near at hand.<sup>12</sup> But the opportunity for "squatting" drew many more laborers away from the estates. Of the 208,379 acres held in private ownership by the planters at the end of Apprenticeship, only 43,265 acres were in cultivation; moreover, there were over one million acres of undeveloped Crown land.<sup>13</sup> This provided ample land for those who chose to "squat." Of the 11,000 freed apprentices only 4,000 remained on the estates.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1840, VIII, 527, "Report from the Select Committee on East India Produce," 390.

<sup>11</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1847, XXXIX, 325, "Immigration of Labourers into the West India Colonies," 125.

<sup>12</sup>Horatio Huggins, "Minutes of Evidence" in W. H. Burnley, Observations on the Present Condition of the Island of Trinidad and the Actual State of the Experiment of Negro Emancipation, (London: 1842) 102. Huggins, a planter and sole owner of Bronte estate and half owner in Union Hall and Nassau estates, subdivided some of his land and sold it at over \$1,000 per acre.

<sup>13</sup>Burnley, Observations, 45.

<sup>14</sup>Sewell, Ordeal, 110-111; Dr. Meikleham "Minutes of Evidence" in Burnley, Observations, 54.



The worst fears of the planters with regard to losing the services of the laborers altogether did not come to pass. Laborers had been caught up in the rising expectations of the nineteenth century, and settled near populated areas in order to be available for hire.<sup>15</sup> Here too were shops where they could buy fine clothing, and also places of entertainment. Creoles of African descent are still characterized today as working solely for the purpose of dressing well and to "fete."

Even though the laborers remained close at hand, the planters found cause to complain. Workers were free to establish their own working habits and to come and go as they pleased, much to the distress of the planters and managers. The latter complained that although they managed a six-day week they could never be certain who would appear for work on which day.<sup>16</sup> This was especially true of the day after the weekend. Because of the wage rate, freedmen found it necessary to work only three or four days a week to supply their own needs.<sup>17</sup> The

---

<sup>15</sup> William Knox, "Minutes of Evidence" in Burnley, Observations, 110. Others gave evidence to this affect also.

<sup>16</sup> Frederic Maxwell, "Minutes of Evidence," in Burnley, Observations, 51-52.

<sup>17</sup> At the end of Apprenticeship the wage for one task was 30¢, but it soon went up to 50¢ and even 60¢. In addition to the wage, daily allowances were given of ½ pound of salt cod, a pound of plantain, and 2 or 3 glasses of rum. Workers could live upon the estate free of rent, and medical attention was gratis also: Colonial Office, 295, Vol. 125, Mein to Normanby, 18 May 1838. Planters valued these allowances at about 10¢ per task: Richard Darling, "Minutes of Evidence," in Burnley, Observations, 78. Burnley observed that one could earn as much in an hour in Trinidad as it took a whole day to earn in Tortola: Burnley, Observations, 27.

Agricultural and Immigration Society,<sup>18</sup> in trying to determine subsistence cost, questioned planters and managers. One planter replied that he could never reliably determine this from the native laborers, but that immigrants from other British islands told him that they needed to spend only twenty or thirty cents per week on flour or meal. With flour or meal and their allowance of dried cod fish they could subsist comfortably.<sup>19</sup>

The use of the task to measure one's labor was a decided advantage to the Trinidad planter. Most other colonies paid by the day. A task was a square area the size of which varied from estate to estate and season to season. On the Philippine estate in South Naparima, a task was a square of sixty feet if the cane was particularly weedy, but enlarged to seventy or eighty feet if relatively clean. The size of a task had been established during slave days, and planters generally complained that the Protector of Slaves and the stipendary magistrates had been duped into thinking that the small size the slaves claimed for a task was a good day's work.<sup>20</sup> As a result of long custom the task could not be enlarged and laborers generally finished a task in four

---

<sup>18</sup>The Trinidad Agricultural and Immigration Society was formed in April 1839 in order to investigate and make suggestions for the solution of estate problems. From the Society's name it is not difficult to determine what the members felt to be the solution.

<sup>19</sup>Richard Darling, "Minutes of Evidence," in Burnley, Observations, 80.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 64.

hours.<sup>21</sup> Two tasks, they claimed, could be easily accomplished in one day, and some American Negro immigrants regularly did three tasks a day.<sup>22</sup> A story circulated about the island that one American Negro had done six tasks in one day.<sup>23</sup>

Task labor could not be employed for all the work necessary on an estate. Weeding, trenching, and most other out-of-crop work lent themselves well to task, but in time of crop it was limited primarily to cutting cane, and carting and crooking<sup>24</sup> the cane to the mill.<sup>25</sup> The manufacturing of sugar began anywhere from five to seven in the morning and continued until five or six in the evening. The laborer was paid by the day and the wage rate was about 60¢ per day with additional allowances of pork, biscuits, and two or three glasses of rum.<sup>26</sup> Workers generally preferred manufacturing to field work even though it paid less.<sup>27</sup> Even so, the planters complained that it was nearly

---

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>23</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1842, XXIX, 379, "Papers relative to the West Indies: Reports of Stipendiary Magistrates," 57.

<sup>24</sup>Crooking is the term for carrying sugar cane on the backs of mules.

<sup>25</sup>Darling, "Minutes of Evidence," in Burnley, Observations, 64.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 80

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

impossible to get steady labor.<sup>28</sup> It should be noted, however, that some planters reported that they were able to obtain all the labor they needed.<sup>29</sup>

Unreliable labor was not as serious a problem for weeding and the like as it was during the cutting and grinding season. If labor faltered during these processes, maximum sugar yield could not be secured. The lack of reliable, steady labor during this particular time was most galling to planters. They constantly complained that no amount of inducement would persuade the laborers to work steadily during this period.<sup>30</sup> It was this factor, more than anything else, that caused planters to seek alternatives to the existing supply of labor.

#### Alternatives

There seemed to be two possibilities for securing a steady labor force: (1) devise a system to regulate emancipated laborers, and keep them moving to unoccupied lands, or (2) introduce a new labor force.

The problem of laborers leaving the estates and taking up

---

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 64; Lional Lee, "Minutes of Evidence," in Burnley, Observations, 116-117.

<sup>29</sup>Joseph Anthony Guiseppi, "Minutes of Evidence," in Burnley, Observations, 85.

<sup>30</sup>Darling and Lee, "Minutes of Evidence," in Burnley, Observations, 64 and 117; Lional Lee, administrator and part owner of Orange Grove estate had two laborers arrested for work stoppage, but the example did not bear fruit and he declined to report laborers to the magistrate again as it was too time consuming during a period when time was of the essence.

provision grounds was evident as early as 1832. Lord Howick, Under Secretary of State for the Colonies discussed the problem in a memorandum:

The great problem to be solved in drawing up any plan for the emancipation of the Slaves in our Colonies, is to devise some mode of inducing them when relieved from the fear of the Driver and his whip, to undergo the regular and continuous labour which is indispensable in carrying on the production of Sugar... Their (the planters) inability.... to pay liberal wages seems beyond all question: but even if this were otherwise, the experience of other countries warrants the belief, that while land is so easily obtainable as it is at this moment, even liberal wages would fail to purchase the sort of labour which is required for the cultivation and manufacture of Sugar.... The examples of the western States of America, of Canada, of the Cape of Good Hope, and of the Australian Colonies, may all be cited in order to show that even amongst a population a much higher state of civilization than that to which the slaves in the West Indies have attained, the facility of obtaining land effectually prevents the prosecution by voluntary labour of any enterprise requiring the co-operation of many hands. It is impossible therefore to suppose that the slaves (who, though as I believe not more given to idleness than other men are certainly not less so) would if freed from control be induced even by high wages to continue to submit to a drudgery which they detest, while without doing so they could obtain land sufficient for their support.... I think that it would be greatly for the real happiness of the Negroes themselves, if the facility of acquiring land could be so far restrained as to prevent them, on the abolition of slavery, from abandoning their habits of regular industry... Accordingly, it is to the imposition of a considerable tax upon land that I chiefly look for the means of enabling the planter to continue his business when emancipation shall have taken place...<sup>31</sup>

Prior to the ending of Apprenticeship, availability of land became the subject of a circular despatch to every Governor of the

---

<sup>31</sup>Quoted in Williams, Trinidad and Tobago, 86-87.

British Colonies in the Caribbean. Secretary of State Glenelg gave his views, asked for information, and suggested action on the subject. He contended that easy availability of land would draw the laborers off the estates and to subsistence plots. As the population increased and land became less available, the people would turn to producing staples again in order to earn money for purchasing necessary provisions. This, he noted, would be the "natural" process, but plantation economy would in the meantime wither away, and this would be an undesirable turn of events. The alternative would be an "unnatural" course, or a forced system of preventing the laborers from leaving the estates. This could be done by preventing squatting on Crown lands, and by setting the price of land beyond the reach of the ordinary laborer.<sup>32</sup>

Squatting was never successfully prevented. The Governor did not submit the evidence asked for in Glenelg's circular despatch,<sup>33</sup> but he did issue a Proclamation (30 March 1839) against squatting. It was a nullity, however, as Burnley rather bitterly related.<sup>34</sup> To begin with, squatters were very difficult to discover in the vast wooded areas of the island. But even when apprehended, trial was difficult. Some of the squatters had documents granting them rights to Crown lands.

---

<sup>32</sup>Appendix B of Burnley, Observations, 137-140; the despatch may also be found in Colonial Office, 295, Original Correspondence, Trinidad.

<sup>33</sup>Lewis Pantin, "Minutes of Evidence," in Burnley, Observations, 101.

<sup>34</sup>Burnley, Observations, 9.

These had been issued at random and were very imprecise. Many had been given to Venezuelan peons to develop cocoa estates. When squatters were called before Magistrates, these officials were unable to interpret such grants. Even when someone was convicted of squatting the poor communications on the island prevented the Governor from reviewing the case within the four day statutory provision. However, the most serious factor in the prevention of squatting was the lack of desire on the part of planters to report squatters. Some of the planters interviewed by the Agricultural and Immigration Society related that they could not run the risk of losing labor by reporting squatters.<sup>35</sup>

When it became obvious to planters that they could not prevent squatting, they turned to the second alternative for securing a steady labor force - the introduction of another labor force. But, regardless of whoever came and from whatever source, it behove the planters, as Burnley observed, to proceed with caution, as those who opposed immigration felt it would be "a new system of coercion as unjust as the one recently abolished."<sup>36</sup>

Peons from the mainland of Venezuela migrated annually to Trinidad during crop time and returned to the continent after harvest.<sup>37</sup> This source of labor, however, does not seem to have had much serious

---

<sup>35</sup> Lewis Pantin, William George Knox, "Minutes of Evidence," in Burnley, Observations, 99-100 and 111, respectively.

<sup>36</sup> Burnley, Observations, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Guiseppi, "Minutes of Evidence," in Burnley, Observations, 85.

consideration, possibly because it was migratory and thus considered as unreliable as were emancipated slaves.

Soon after Apprenticeship ended, immigrants from other islands were attracted to Trinidad by high wages. The lack of consistency in numbers made these immigrants an unreliable source of labor; but even more disconcerting was the fact that as soon as they had saved enough to purchase subsistence plots, they too left the estates.<sup>38</sup> Planters on the other islands were by no means happy with this emigration of workers from their islands either.<sup>39</sup>

The United States and Africa were generally considered to be the best sources of immigrant laborers. These two sources also presented problems. William Burnley appointed Agent in Britain and the United States for the recruitment of labor, traveled to the United States and delivered glowing talks on the advantage of immigrating to Trinidad.<sup>40</sup> The initial group of Negroes from the United States numbered 216, and their enthusiastic reception elicited the appointment by the Governor of Trinidad of recruiting agents in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.<sup>41</sup> This optimistic action was premature. A group of Negroes in Baltimore who were interested in migrating sent two agents of their own to investigate at first hand what the opportunities were,

---

<sup>38</sup> Sewell, Ordeal, 118.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Colonial Office, 295, Vol. 125, Mein to Normanby, 25 April 1839.

<sup>41</sup> Council Minutes, 1 April 1841.



and they concluded that British Guiana had more to offer.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, emigrants returning from the islands painted a dismal picture of the West Indies in general; and stories began to circulate that the usual fare for workers in the Caribbean was "lizards, monkeys, and parrots."<sup>43</sup> The number of recruits soon dwindled to nothing.

Planters reasoned that if Negroes were the "best" workers for the sugar industry, then Africa should still be the best source of the needed labor. The difference would be that free laborers would be recruited rather than slaves.

There was a fear among authorities that African chieftains, Arab slave traders, and the like might be tempted to offer captured slaves under the guise of "volunteer recruits." This possibility narrowed the field of recruitment in Africa down to the British colony of Sierra Leone.<sup>44</sup> Here recruitment could be supervised and controlled. Even so, most of the volunteers for recruitment were slaves freed from slave trading ships captured by the British navy.

After Great Britain passed the Abolition Act in 1807 there was a great deal of diplomatic maneuvering to induce other nations to join with Great Britain in stopping the slave trade. The two most noteworthy

---

<sup>42</sup>Nathaniel Peck and Thomas Price, Report of Mistfers Peck and Price, Delegates to visit British Guiana and the Island of Trinidad, for the purpose of ascertaining the Advantages to be derived by Colored people migrating to those places. (Baltimore: 1840).

<sup>43</sup>Norman Lamont, Burnley of Orange Grove (Port-of-Spain: 1947), 8.

<sup>44</sup>Joseph Denman, West India Interests, African Emigration and Slave Trade (London: 1848).

agreements were with Spain and Portugal.

Cuba's plantation economy was expanding and Spain was extremely reluctant to offend Cuba at a time when its American Empire was crumbling. As a result Great Britain's overtures toward ending the slave trade were fended off with whatever skill Spain was able to muster. Eventually Spain relented and a treaty was signed with Great Britain September 23, 1817.

Spain issued a royal decree December 18, 1817 prohibiting any Spanish subject from engaging in the slave trade on the coast of Africa "north of the equator." Violators were subject to ten years imprisonment in the Philippines and their slave cargoes would be declared free. By May 20, 1820 the decree had been extended to "south of the equator." Foreign ships engaging in slave traffic to the Spanish colonies were declared subject to the same laws.

The navies of Britain and Spain were authorized search and seizure privileges. Tribunals were established in Sierra Leone and Havana for the trial of violators. An equal number of judges from Spain and Britain were to serve on the court.<sup>45</sup> The emancipados, or slaves freed from confiscated slave ships, were to be freed in whichever port the trial was held.

The treatment of emancipados in Cuba soon came under criticism. The British Counsuls charged that captain generals were selling the emancipados to the slave owners. The law provided that emancipados

---

<sup>45</sup>Spain rarely had judges in Sierra Leone.

were to be taught a trade and then released; plantation owners rarely, if ever, fulfilled this commitment and the time limit on service led to abusive treatment of the emancipados.

Continual haranguing on the part of Britain led to a new treaty in 1835. This treaty was hardly more effective than the first so Britain shifted most of its patrol activities to Africa. The next year Britain discontinued delivering emancipados captured in Cuban waters to Havana.<sup>46</sup>

Portugal signed similar treaties with Great Britain on the abolition of slave trading January 22, 1815 and July 28, 1817. Search and Seizure, joint tribunals at Rio de Janeiro and Sierra Leone, freedom for captured slaves, were provisions of the treaties; but Portugal also hesitated in extending the treaty south of the equator.

Brazil, after independence, faced the dilemma of needing the support of its slaveholding class and the diplomatic recognition of Britain. In 1826 Brazil accepted a treaty which embodied the provisions of the Anglo-Portuguese treaty of 1817 for the desired diplomatic recognition.

The same sort of evasiveness occurred in Brazil as in Cuba. The Brazilian plantation economy wanted the labor of the slave cargoes freed under the provisions of the treaty and went to any lengths to obtain it. Smuggling itself continued unabated.

---

<sup>46</sup>See Arthur F. Corwin, Spain and the Abolition of Slavery in Cuba, 1817-1886 (Austin and London: 1967).

Britain, her patience at an end, passed the Aberdeen Bill August 8, 1845. This provided that Brazilian ships engaged in the slave trade were to be searched, seized, and brought before the Admiralty courts of Britain rather than the mixed courts as provided under the previous treaty. The Emperor of Brazil protested and was offered the alternative of a new treaty or the continuance of the Aberdeen Act.

During this time a new cabinet was formed in Brazil. It drafted the 1850 law which finally put an end to the Brazilian slave trade. In 1850 the number of slaves imported dropped to 23,000 as contrasted with 54,000 the previous year; in 1851, only 3,287 slaves were brought in; in 1852 only 700 arrived.<sup>47</sup>

As a result of Britain's endeavors to stop the slave trade Sierra Leone became a depository of impounded slave cargoes. After recuperating in Queen's Yard, freed slaves were settled on provision grounds. A sizable community developed and it was mainly among these people that enthusiasm for immigration to the West Indies was kindled.<sup>48</sup>

William Hamilton escorted the first group of Africans from Sierra Leone to Trinidad and was therefore appointed by the Agricultural Immigration Society to return for new recruits.<sup>49</sup> In the meantime merchants and missionaries had caused the Africans to have reservations

---

<sup>47</sup>Joao Pandia Calogeras, A History of Brazil (New York: 1963) 189.

<sup>48</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1841, Session 2, XII, 479, "Report from the Select Committee on West India Colonies," 553.

<sup>49</sup>William Hamilton, "Minutes of Evidence," in Burnley, Observations, 67-70.

against emigrating to the West Indies.<sup>50</sup> When Hamilton returned without the delegates who were to report on conditions in Trinidad, suspicions of the Africans seemed confirmed. Actually, the delegates had stayed to take advantage of high wages, but Hamilton had difficulty convincing the Africans of this fact.<sup>51</sup>

Other ships calling at Sierra Leone for recruits met with an equal lack of success until the Governor of Trinidad sent six delegates, one of whom was a Stipendiary Magistrate and the son of a former slave, to placate the fears of the Africans. The mild trust that this visit engendered did not result in a sufficient flow of emigrants to satisfy the planters. The British government tried to aid by employing a regular schedule of ships between Sierra Leone and the West Indies. The number wishing to emigrate, however, did not justify the expenditure; and transport reverted again to private charter.<sup>52</sup>

Great Britain's success in curtailing slave trading decreased the number of captured slaves coming into Sierra Leone. About the only ones still successfully engaged in slave carrying were captains of Baltimore and New England clipper ships; these slavers could generally outrun British ships-of-the-line on duty off the African coast. The result was a declining number of possible recruits for labor in the

---

<sup>50</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1842, XI, 551, "Report from the Select Committee on the West Coast of Africa," 476.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 254.

<sup>52</sup>F. H. Hitchins, The Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners (Philadelphia: 1931), 246.

West Indies. Planters tried elsewhere in Africa. When this proved unsuccessful and the steamship Growler had proven unsatisfactory in the Government's final attempt to subsidize emigration from Africa, the end of recruiting labor from Africa was in sight. By 1850 only about 6,000 Africans had immigrated into Trinidad,<sup>53</sup> a number which did not satisfy the expectations of the planters. Only a handful of Africans were landed in Trinidad after 1850, and by 1861 planters abandoned attempts to get labor from this area.

Because of paltry success from their efforts in Africa and the United States, planters turned to other possibilities. Europeans had come to the West Indies as indentured servants earlier in the history of the Caribbean, so once again planters tried this solution to their labor problem. Some Britains, a few Germans, some Frenchmen, a number of Maderians came, but all proved unsatisfactory as plantation labor. Sporadic enthusiasm with consequent disillusionment brought a few Chinese to Trinidad, but they too proved unsatisfactory.<sup>54</sup> Finally planters turned to the East Indian.

---

<sup>53</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1851, XL, 625, "Return showing Numbers of Immigrants and Liberated Africans,"

<sup>54</sup>Port-of-Spain Gazette, 1 September 1866.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE EAST INDIAN'S HOMELAND

The archival records<sup>1</sup> indicate that the great bulk of the indentured Indians came from the eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh,<sup>2</sup> mainly Oudh. Oudh was composed of the administrative districts of Allahabad, Azamgarh, Bahraich, Benaras, Basti, Faizabad, Gonda, Borakhpur, Kanpur, Lucknow, and Mirzapur.<sup>3</sup> The following description of conditions in this part of India will give some insight into the background of the indentured Indian who emigrated.

#### Caste

It is a generally held opinion that only the low castes came to Trinidad. Although the evidence seems to bear this out, it also reveals that many in the high castes also left India for work in Trinidad. Although the approximately 433 volumes of Ship's Registers in the Warden's Office, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad have some gaps due to tropical weathering and the like, there still remains enough information

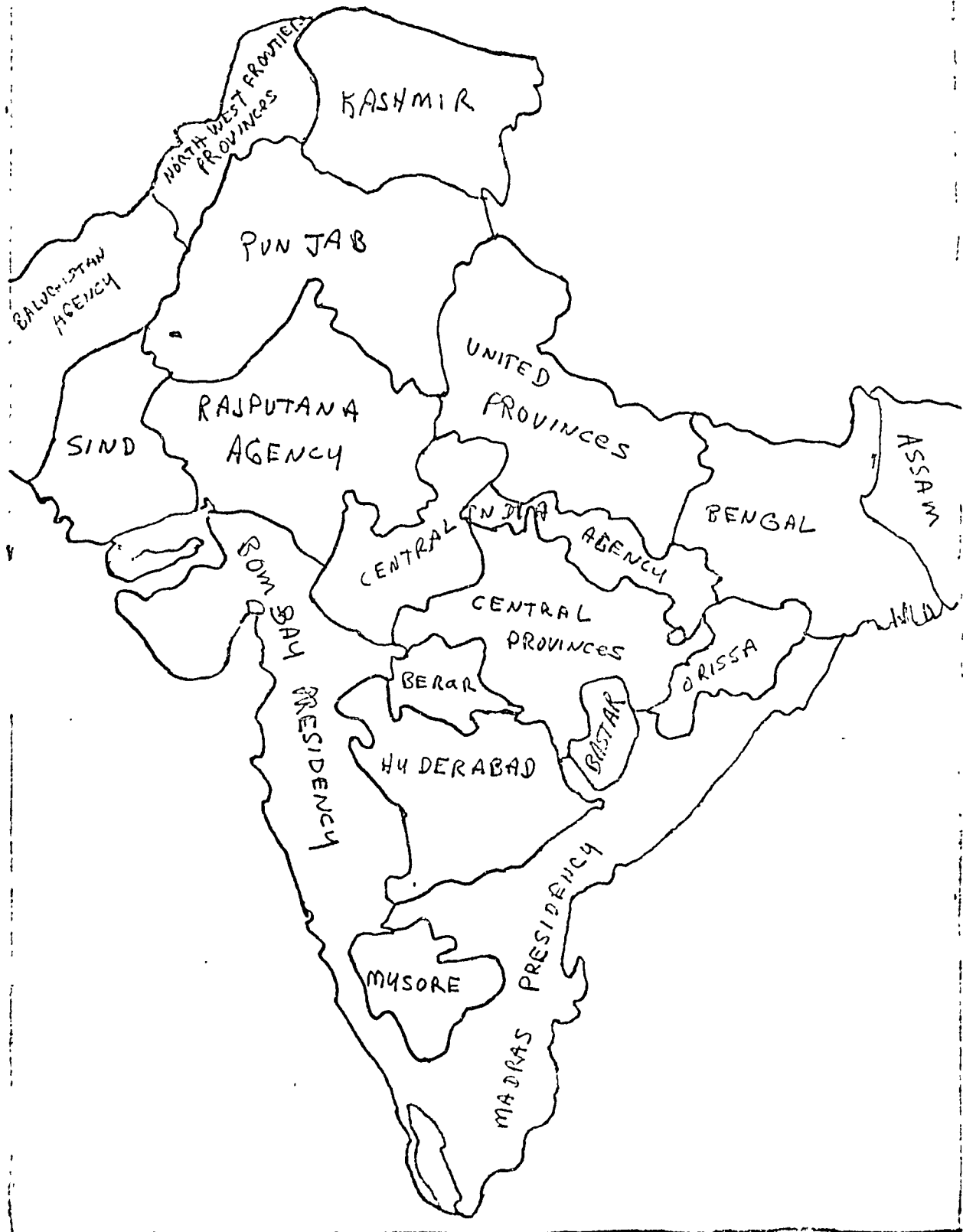
---

<sup>1</sup>Ship's Registers, Wardens Office, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. The Registers list among other things, the caste, the administrative subdivision of the province and the village from which the immigrant came.

<sup>2</sup>Uttar Pradesh was earlier known as "The North Western Provinces and Oudh" and later as the "United Provinces."

<sup>3</sup>See map.

Figure 4. India During Emigration







to establish a trend as to the caste of the Indians who emigrated.

In the extremely complex caste system of India there are four major groupings known as varnas. The following description reflects the 19th century understanding of each varna.<sup>4</sup>

The highest ranking varna is the Brahman. From these ranks came the Pandits and the Gurus. Their proper functions were pedagogical and religious and they were supposed to be supported by the other varnas. Within the ranks of the Brahman varna were and are many subdivisions, but although the higher ranking Brahman castes looked down upon the others, the lower varnas regarded all Brahmans with awe.

The next varna in rank was the Kshatriya. The princes, noblemen and warriors came from this varna.

From the Vaishya varna, the next in rank, came the majority of the artisans, traders, and agriculturalists.

Those considered servile, the common laborer, were drawn from the Sudra varna. They rarely adhered to Hindu dietary laws and most were considered "unclean" by the Hindus.

Crooke identified over 200 castes in Uttar Pradesh and grouped them into three categories.<sup>5</sup> The first category consisted of the "agricultural castes" the top rank having among its members Rajputs of the

---

<sup>4</sup>John C. Nesfield, Brief Views of the Caste System of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh (Allahabad: 1885); Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya, Hindu Castes and Sects (Calcutta: 1896); William Crooke, Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces, 3 vols. (Calcutta: 1896).

<sup>5</sup>Crooke, Tribes and Castes, Vol. I, cxlvii.

Kshatriya varna (who had lost their lands and serfs and were thus compelled to work) and Jats and Bhuihars of the lower varnas. The middle rank occupied by Kurmi and the lowest rank was composed mainly of the Ahir who were herdsmen and shepherds.

The second category consisted of Brahmans. The third and largest category consisted of artisans and village menials. Most representatives were Kori (weavers), Teli (oil-pressers), Kahar and Kewat (fishermen, boatmen, and porters), Chamar (leatherworkers), and Pasi (village watchmen and pigherds). It is important to note that although agriculture was not the hereditary occupation of their caste most were engaged in cultivation.<sup>6</sup>

#### The Man and the Land

The village form and land tenure system that existed at the time of emigration to Trinidad seem to have originated with the invading peoples who periodically swept across India from the northwest.<sup>7</sup> The invaders settled into communities with natural boundaries. Crooke observed "that it is most unusual to find the same tribe occupying both banks of the stream."<sup>8</sup>

Originally they held the land in common, but as cultivation

---

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>William Crooke, The North-Western Provinces of India (London: 1897), 280.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 281.

extended from the original settlement, or Mark site, boundaries were eventually established.<sup>9</sup> Some land was still held in common such as grazing land or woodlands.<sup>10</sup>

The average size of the village was one square mile, but there was a noticeable decrease in the size and population of the village from West to East. In the district of Meirut in the west the average size was one and a half square miles with an average population of 669, whereas in Basti in the east the average was one half square miles with a population of 260.<sup>11</sup> Over all, in the Northwestern Provinces, one third of the population engaged in agricultural pursuits lived in villages of less than 500 population; out of 106,200 villages, 43,000 contained less than 200 population; the other two-thirds lived in villages of more than 500 with two-fifths of this number living in villages of 1,000 or more population.<sup>12</sup>

Another difference between the western and eastern villages was the location of the homesites. The easterner preferred to live near his field, whereas the westerner preferred to live in clustered settlements, primarily as a defensive measure.<sup>13</sup>

In the province of Oudh feudalization had occurred and existed

---

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 284.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 283-284.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 284.

at the time of emigration. Overlords (Rajputs, Thakurs, Zamindars) had brought a large body of landless tenants under their authority. By the latter part of the 19th century two-thirds of the land was held by three hundred landlords.<sup>14</sup>

When the British extended their political rule over the areas of former Moslem rule in India they adopted the theory of the Moslems that the sovereign was the absolute owner of all the land in the country.<sup>15</sup> It soon became apparent that this was more principle than practice and a great deal of dissatisfaction resulted. Nevertheless, the vocabulary of the land system persisted. The Zamindar is the landholder, (the word holder rather than owner has significance), Mauza is the cooperate village, and Mahal is the revenue unit.<sup>16</sup> The custom was that occupants could hold the land as long as they paid the land revenue. Originally the occupant paid the revenue directly to the government, but in some areas it evolved into a system whereby the occupant paid an overlord who in turn paid the government.<sup>17</sup>

The burden of the revenue many times placed landholders under the obligation of moneylenders who paid the taxes for an interest rate of twenty-five percent.<sup>18</sup> In Agra seventy-eight percent of the

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 296.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 297.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 343.

landholders were under obligation to moneylenders.<sup>19</sup> In Fatehaband it was eighty-nine percent.<sup>20</sup> This obligation to pay the revenue made the characteristics of the Mahal very important.

Each Mahal was supposed to contain a proper share of the more fertile and less fertile land, of wells or watering places, groves, grazing areas, and house plots. A trained assessor could recognize a fertile loam, or sterile sand, well watered sites and drought ridden sites, but the village resident had learned from boyhood to recognize which lands received the morning sun, which had unique features of fertility and position, and which land was plagued by wild animals or attracted the village cattle.<sup>21</sup> As a result, the villagers resisted imposed change by the assessors or constantly vied for the best holdings.

The tenure of the Mahals varied. In the Zamindari form the whole land was held in common and the profits went into a general fund from which the revenue was paid. The joint family was a common user of this system of tenure.

The more common system of tenure was the Pattidari in which each co-sharer of the land was responsible for the revenue of his particular portion of the Mahal. A head-man was usually responsible for collecting and paying the revenue. Variations of the Pattidari system

---

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 296.

were infinite and the constant cause of litigation.<sup>22</sup>

The population of the province of Uttar Pradesh in 1890, the middle period of the emigration to Trinidad, was about 48 million, of which 35 million depended on agriculture for their livelihood. Of these, 4 million were land owners, 35 million were tenant farmers, and nearly 6 million were landless agricultural laborers.<sup>23</sup>

Over the whole area the population density to cultivated land averaged 677 to the square mile.<sup>24</sup> The result was that each individual had to sustain himself on less than an acre of land. Here again there existed a difference between the East and West. In the Azamgarh district in the East the ratio was 1,244 population to the square mile of cultivated land, or one half acre to the person.<sup>25</sup> In the Meerut district to the West, each person had about an acre and a half.<sup>26</sup> Cultivated land constituted from 50 to 60 percent of the total land area.<sup>27</sup>

When the British came into control of the Indian sub-continent the landlords no longer needed to placate the tenants in order to

---

<sup>22</sup> Crooke gives an account of the tenure and revenue system, but for a more detailed account see B. H. Baden-Powell, The Indian Village Community (London: 1896).

<sup>23</sup> Crooke, The North-Western Provinces, 320.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

maintain their loyalty in the constant struggles between the feudal lords. The result was unbridled exploitation. The settlement officer of the district of Rohilkhand wrote:

The peasantry of Hasanpur in Moradabad are living virtually in a state of serfage. Generally speaking, as long as the tenant submits unconditionally to the will of the landlord, does not hanker after independence, does not seek to have his rent commuted into money, and cultivates his holding diligently, he may live in peace, keep his free grazing, use (but not sell) the timber on his waste, and cut as much thatch as he needs for his house and sheds. But the moment he seeks to assert his independence, dares to aspire to money rents, or to claim timber or thatch as his right, the landlord looks on him as renegade and seldom fails to crush him.<sup>28</sup>

Crooke also observed that almost up to the time of his writing that in northern Oudh people would become the bond slaves of their creditors for an advancement or loan;<sup>29</sup> sons would labor under the obligations of their father even though legally the servitude could not be enforced.

As a result of these conditions the British Government of India sought some sort of relief for the tenant. One attempted solution was to pass a Rent Code.<sup>30</sup> It provided for accepted methods of exacting rent. They were as follows: dividing the crop on a percentage basis; appraisal of the landlord's share and then paying on that basis; fixed rents on

---

<sup>28</sup>Gazetter, North-Western Provinces, ix (2), 191.

<sup>29</sup>Crooke, The North-Western Provinces, 350-351.

<sup>30</sup>The Rent Code was passed in 1859 and was periodically revised. Crooke discusses some tenants of the Code in Ibid., 345-348; see also Thomas R. Metclaf, "Struggle over Land Tenure in India, 1860-1868," Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1962), 299-301.



certain crops, usually sugar-cane or cotton; or the paying of pre-established cash rents.

The Code also provided for four classes of tenants. The first, "tenants at fixed rates" were located in the east, particularly in Bengal. Their rents could change anywhere the size of the holding changed. This right could be passed on to an heir or transferred to another party.

The next class was "occupancy tenants." Such tenants established their rights by continuous occupancy of twelve years either by themselves or their fathers. This class was obviously heritable since occupation time of the deceased father could be added onto that of the son's.

The third class was "ex-proprietary tenants." If a person had occupancy, but had lost it for one reason or the other, he could re-occupy the land and pay twenty-five percent less than the rent paid by "tenants-at-will" for lands of similar quality and size. Rents could be changed only by written agreement registered with the Settlement Office. Although this class was also hereditary ejection for cause was possible.

The last class was the "tenants-at-will" who were virtually unprotected. These tenants could be ejected if given notice before the crop season. Although this law aimed at fairness it proved difficult to enforce.

British officials considered the possibility that the urban areas of India could absorb the marginal rural dweller, but after a comparison

of the city in India with an industrial city of Europe, the hope was short-lived.

The cities of India before the coming of the European were little more than military garrisons, whose manufacturing and services were created for this end. When Europeans came, the cities added a commercial aspect, mainly of trading Indian goods for European. Industry, however, was not established.

One of the impediments of industry was the discouragement of British industrialists who wished to sell their manufactured goods in India. But in India itself manufacturing and handicrafts were rigidly controlled by guilds or occupational castes. The son followed the trade of the father and the entry of others was restricted.

The need for labor in other parts of the British Empire led some to believe that emigration from the subcontinent would provide some relief from rural population problems. However, Crooke made the following observations on this point:

The fact is that the Hindu has little of the migratory instinct, and all his prejudices tend to keep him at home. As a resident member of a tribe, caste or village, he occupies a definite social position, of which emigration is likely to deprive him. When he leaves his home, he loses the sympathy and support of his clansmen and neighbours; he misses the village council, which regulates his domestic affairs; the services of the family priest, which he considers essential to his salvation. Every village has its own local shrine, where the deities, in the main destructive, have been propitiated and controlled by the constant service of their votaries. Once the wanderer leaves the hamlet where he was born, he enters the domains of new and unknown deities, who, being strangers, are of necessity hostile to him, and may resent his intrusion by sending famine, disease, or death upon the luckless stranger. The emigrant, again, to a distant land, finds extreme difficulty in selecting suitable

husbands for his daughters. He must choose his sons-in-law within a narrow circle, and if he allows his daughter to reach womanhood unwed, he commits a grievous sin. Should he die in exile, he may fail to win the heaven of the gods, because no successor will make the due funeral oblations, and no trusted family priest be there to arrange the last journey of his spirit. So he may wander through the ages a starving, suffering, malignant ghost, because his obsequies have not been duly performed.<sup>31</sup>

In the 1891 census it was discovered that 89 percent of the people were still located in the district of their birth, and 98 percent of the residents had been born somewhere within the province in which they were then residing.<sup>32</sup> Even so, Smith observed: "The decline of the handicraft industry caused by the introduction of the machine-made cotton goods had caused unemployment both in Bengal and Madras... and famine had created temporary distress which encouraged thought of overseas work."<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 326.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 328.

<sup>33</sup>Vincent A. Smith, The Oxford History of India from the Earliest Times to the end of 1911 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1920), p. 702.

CHAPTER IV  
THE COMING OF THE EAST INDIAN

The idea of East Indian labor for the sugar colonies was nothing new; it had been considered and employed for some time before Trinidad planters decided to experiment with it. As early as 1814 Governor Ralph Woodford of Trinidad wrote to Secretary of State for the Colonies Earl Bathurst:

The cultivators of Hindostan are known to be peaceable and industrious. An extensive introduction of that class of people accustomed to live on the produce of their own labor only and totally withdrawn from African connections or feelings, would probably be the best experiment for the population of this Island..... the Planter would have the best means of satisfying himself of the advantages of free labourers over slaves. If sugar can be raised in the East Indies at so much less an expense than in the West, the best means would soon be in the power of the speculative planter..<sup>1</sup>

Sporadic interest in recruiting Indian labor for Mauritius and Reunion had occurred before emancipation, but after 1834 Mauritius sugar planters engaged in recruitment in earnest. Seven thousand emigrants left Calcutta for Mauritius between 1834 and 1837.<sup>2</sup> In 1838 John Gladstone

---

<sup>1</sup>Trinidad Duplicate Despatches, 1814, Woodford to Bathurst, 3 October 1814; Pub. No. 126 of the Trinidad Historical Society, 4.

<sup>2</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5192, "Report of the Committee on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates," 2. Hereafter cited as the "Sanderson Committee Report."

## TRINIDAD.

CONDITIONS OF SERVICE and TERMS of AGREEMENT which the RECRUITER is AUTHORISED to offer on behalf of the AGENT to intending EMIGRANTS.

1. *Period of Service.*—For male Emigrants five years from the date of allotment; for female Emigrants three years from the date of allotment.

2. *Nature of Labour.*—Work in connection with the cultivation of the soil or the manufacture of the produce on any plantation.

3. *Number of Days on which the Emigrant is required to Labour in each Week.*—Every day, excepting Sundays and authorised holidays.

4. *Number of Hours in each Day during which the Emigrant is required to Labour without Extra Remuneration.*—Nine, inclusive of half an hour for rest and refreshment.

5. *Monthly or Daily Wages or Task Work Rates.*—Able-bodied adults of and above 16 years of age, shall be paid 1s. 0½d., which is at present equivalent to 12 annas and 6 pie for each day's work. Adults not able-bodied, or minors of and above 10 years and under 16 years of age, shall be paid 8d., which is at present equivalent to 8 annas for each day's work, and when performing extra work shall be paid in proportion for every extra hour of work. Wages earned will be paid fortnightly. If the Emigrant be required to work by task instead of by time, the same wages shall be paid as to unindentured labourers on the same or other neighbouring plantations, or to indentured labourers on the neighbouring plantations, and such wages may be more, but shall not be less than the minimum wages payable for time work.

6. *Conditions as to Return Passage.*—The Emigrant on completing a continuous residence of 10 years in Trinidad, and holding or becoming entitled to a certificate of exemption from labour shall, with family, if any, should they not be under indenture, or, if under indenture, should commutation money have been paid to their employer, be provided with a return passage back to Calcutta on payment of one-half of the passage money in the case of men, and one-third in the case of women. Provided that every such Emigrant who is destitute or disabled shall, with dependents, be entitled to a free return passage. Persons who have previously proceeded to the Colony and returned to India shall be entitled to return passages. After completing a continuous residence of five years and holding or becoming entitled to a certificate of exemption from labour, the Emigrant may return to India at his own cost. Blankets and warm clothing are supplied gratis on leaving India but not for the return voyage.

7. *Other Conditions.*—Full rations will be provided for adults and minors by the employer for 12 calendar months following the date of allotment, according to the scale sanctioned by the Government of Trinidad, at a cost of 3d., which is at present equivalent to three annas each daily, and to each infant under 10 years of age one-third of a ration free of cost.

Suitable dwellings will be assigned to Emigrants free of rent, and such dwellings will be kept by the employer in good repair.

Hospital accommodation with medical attendance, comforts, &c., will be provided free of charge to all Emigrants under indenture and their families.

[Here follow the Conditions printed in the Native Languages.]

I agree to accept the person named on the Face of this Form as an Emigrant on the above conditions.

In my presence,

Recruiter for Trinidad.

Registering Officer at \_\_\_\_\_

Dated \_\_\_\_\_ 190 .

Government Emigration Agent for Trinidad.

Protector of Emigrants.

brought 406 indentured East Indian laborers to British Guiana.<sup>3</sup>

Reports of abusive treatment of Indian laborers resulted in suspension of all emigration from India, and a committee was appointed to investigate the whole problem. The committee report, submitted in 1840, determined that abuses had existed, but that they were of such a nature that proper safeguards could in the future prevent them.<sup>4</sup> The British East India Company was the Government of India, and it was prevailed upon by the Colonial Office to reconsider. It did so, and by its Act XXI of 1844 authorized indentured emigration from Calcutta to the West Indies. The next year, Act XXV allowed indentured emigration to the West Indies from Madras.

#### Recruitment

The Acts authorizing emigration provided that it be restricted to certain ports where a Protector of Emigrants would be assigned. Although Bombay and Madras received some attention, Calcutta finally emerged as the focal point of emigration.

Emigration from Bombay was restricted very early by the Government of India.<sup>5</sup> However, a continuous trickle of activity occurred at Madras because of the difficulty of securing enough recruits from

---

<sup>3</sup>C. Kondapi, Indians Overseas, 1838-1949 (London: 1951), 16.

<sup>4</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5192, "Sanderson Committee Report," 3.

<sup>5</sup>Colonial Office 318, Vol. 215, Murdoch and Rogers to Merivale, 12 May 1857.

Calcutta. Captain J. H. Wilson was assigned Emigration Agent for the West Indies at Madras, and his despatches reveal that he seemed plagued with problems from the beginning.

Wilson contended that emigration should be restricted to Calcutta and Bombay because the seasons were wrong at Madras.<sup>6</sup> In order to avoid the winter weather encountered in rounding the Cape of Good Hope, emigrant ships for the West Indies were restricted at first to sailing between October 1st and February 28th, but later the period was extended to August 1st to March 31st.<sup>7</sup> Although Wilson's position on the seasons was accepted, Madras remained a port of embarkation.

Trying to make the best of seemingly undesirable conditions, Wilson translated the wages and working conditions of the West Indies into native dialects and made agreements with agents to travel into the interior to secure recruits.<sup>8</sup> He complained that the recruiting agents continually tried to "bleed" him for procuring recruits, and that even "respectable" Indian businessmen were trying to exploit him.<sup>9</sup> One enterprising gentleman, a Mr. A. Chitty, collected together, without any authorization, a number of Indian emigrants for the West Indies and

---

<sup>6</sup> Colonial Office 318, Vol. 165, Macgregor to Stanley, 3 April 1845.

<sup>7</sup> Parliamentary Paper, 1873, XVIII, 768, "Act XXI of 1844, Act VI of 1869," 14, 45, 48; Colonial Office 318, Vol. 165, Elliott to Stephan, 26 September 1845.

<sup>8</sup> Colonial Office 318, Vol. 165, Wilson to Hope, 7 June 1845.

<sup>9</sup> Colonial Office 318, Vol. 165, Wilson to Hope, 13 January 1845.

then engaged a lawyer to inform Wilson of what he had done.<sup>10</sup> He became indignant when Wilson was less than pleased.

Problems with the quality of the recruiters, or "travelling agents" as they were sometimes called, remained throughout the indenture period. Mr. J. A. Broun, an official of the Indian Government giving evidence before the Sanderson Commission of 1910 stated:

My impression is that the recruiting staff is very bad; the recruiters are the worst kind of men they could possibly have. They are generally very low class men. As far as I understand they are paid by the results, by the number of immigrants that they get. The consequence is that they very often try to entice married women away from their husbands and try to get any body they can.<sup>11</sup>

Complaints of recruitment through fraud and coercion led to the passage of laws in 1845 with frequent revisions thereafter.

The Crown Colony Government of India Act XIII of 1864 was aimed at consolidating existing laws on recruitment. It spelled out detailed instructions for regulating the depots at which emigrants were housed until passage, and defined the regulative functions of the Protector.<sup>12</sup>

The Emigration Agent applied to the Protector of Emigrants for the number of recruiting licenses that the Agent determined necessary. Each recruiter had to pay 10 Rupees for a license. It was good for

---

<sup>10</sup> Colonial Office 318, Vol. 165, Wilson to Hope, 13 September 1845.

<sup>11</sup> Cited in Murali J. Kirpalani, Mitra G. Sinanan, S. M. Rameshwar, and L. F. Seukeran (eds.), Indian Centenary Review 1845-1945 (Port-of-Spain: n.d.) 31.

<sup>12</sup> Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5192, "Sanderson Committee Report," 4.



one year and was restricted to recruitment for one colony. The recruiter had to have his license countersigned by a district magistrate or the magistrate of a presidency town in the region within which the recruiter wished to operate.<sup>13</sup> Licenses could be revoked for due cause and certain infractions could lead to imprisonment. In 1898 twenty-seven recruiters had licenses cancelled for the following reasons: one was involved in a case of rape and murder; two had recruited Nepalese contrary to orders; one was found to have held two persons against their will who had not wanted to emigrate; two recruiters tried to send emigrants to the depot on the railroad without buying tickets; two recruiters had disposed of some immigrants contrary to the lawful procedure; one had tried to deceive the registering officer or magistrate; one recruiter had induced a woman to emigrate under false promises; one had filed a false charge; another had released a woman who had been registered, then re-admitted her into his depot and sent her to Calcutta without the knowledge of the Emigration Officer; one kept a mistress in his depot; one was charged of frequent misconduct by the Agent; and the remaining had their licenses cancelled as they were found to be of indifferent dispositions.<sup>14</sup>

The recruiters had to present each prospective emigrant before the magistrate of his district for determination of the emigrant's

---

<sup>13</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1865, XVIII, 5326, "Appendix No. 33," 107.

<sup>14</sup>Kirpalani and others, Indian Centenary Review, 31-33.

understanding and willingness to volunteer for overseas work.<sup>15</sup> If there was any indication that the emigrant had been the victim of misrepresentation or that he simply did not understand what he was agreeing to, the magistrate was to refuse to register him. If the magistrate was satisfied that all was proper, he registered the emigrant's name, the name of the emigrant's father, the emigrant's age, his village, the embarkation depot, and the terms of the indenture. The emigrant received a copy of the terms printed in English and his native language. The emigrants were then accompanied either by the recruiter or someone appointed by him to the embarkation depot.

Despite these safeguards abuses continued to occur. A kidnapping case involving some recruiters in Allahabad in 1871 resulted in widespread publicity, and brought the recruiting laws under inspection again. The Protector was directed to personally rule on the fitness of the recruiters and not to rely, as before, on the signature of the local magistrates.<sup>16</sup> However, in what appeared to be contradictory, if the recruiters resided in the interior, the Protector was to obtain references from the local magistrates.<sup>17</sup> In 1876 the provision was added that in order to obtain a license from the Protector of Emigrants it was necessary for the Emigration Agent to inclose a certificate of

---

<sup>15</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1865, XVIII, 5326, "Appendix No. 33," 107.

<sup>16</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1874, XLVII, 314, J. Geoghegan, "Report on Coolie Emigration from India," 60.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

good character of the recruiters involved.

By the 1850's each colony had its own depot in Calcutta, and it was licensed annually for a 10 Rupee fee. Each was inspected at least once a week by the Protector and Medical Inspector.

The Trinidad Emigration Depot at Calcutta had lodging buildings for housing emigrants until embarkation, cooking sheds, toilets, a hospital, and a dispensary for outpatients.<sup>18</sup> A loading dock was added in 1876 for embarking passengers. The walls of the buildings were made of clay up to a certain height, then topped with bamboo lattice work for air circulation. The roofs were palm thatched with extended eaves which provided shade and formed a verandah around the buildings.<sup>19</sup>

If the depot was operating at capacity, it was disinfected daily. The toilets were cleaned with coal tar and carbolic acid.<sup>20</sup> Even with these precautions, the Indians in the depot were never free from fever, dysentary, and diarrhea.<sup>21</sup> Periodic epidemics occurred in

---

<sup>18</sup>The accommodations were required by the Government of India Indian Emigration Act, 33.

<sup>19</sup>Agent General of Immigrants Report, 1875. The Agent General of Immigrants Report (later known as the Protector of Immigrants Report) was prepared annually and was submitted as a paper laid before the Council subsequently printed as a Council Paper. It was regularly published in the Trinidad Royal Gazette and most generally published in the Port-of-Spain Gazette.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

the depots, but by the end of the nineteenth century the death rate was generally less than one percent.<sup>22</sup>

The depots tried to provide palatable and nutritious diets composed of familiar foods. Rice or flour with Dal, Ghee, mustard oil, vegetables, fish or meat (which indicates low castes were among the emigrants), salt, and curry was the usual fare.<sup>23</sup> Milk was provided for the children.<sup>24</sup> Ponds with a capacity of one million gallons were dug for catching rain water for cooking.<sup>25</sup> Drinking water was filtered.

When emigrants arrived at the depot, the Protector of Emigrants, the Emigration Agent, and the Medical Inspector had to be notified immediately. The Medical Inspector then examined each emigrant. The Agent and the Protector examined each emigrant within forty-eight hours to determine if the trip to the depot had been carried out properly and if the emigrant had willingly entered into the indenture contracts. If the Protector was satisfied with regard to these matters, he countersigned the emigrants' certificates.<sup>26</sup> If an emigrant was found to be physically unfit for indenture he was cared for and returned home at the Agent's expense. The Agent was not allowed to reject an emigrant

---

<sup>22</sup>C. Banks, Report on Emigration from the Port of Calcutta to British and Foreign Colonies, 1908 (Calcutta: 1909), Appendices, 11.

<sup>23</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1874, XLVII, 314, Geoghegan, "Report on Coolie Emigration from India," 53.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Agent General of Immigrants Report, 1875.

<sup>26</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1865, XVIII, 3296, "Appendix No. 33," 107.

without the permission of the Protector of Emigrants; to do so was considered a breach of contract.

After the medical examination, emigrants were directed to take a bath and put on clean clothing. Their belongings were carefully inspected, and any dirty laundry had to be thoroughly washed. Anything suspected of being contaminated, and cast-offs, were burned under the supervision of the Medical officer.<sup>27</sup>

After seven days in the depot, unless the Protector ruled otherwise, the emigrants could be embarked. Just prior to embarking, the Protector of Emigrants asked a series of questions in the emigrant's language:

1. Do you know to what country you are about to emigrate?
2. By what conveyance are you to be sent there?
3. How long will you be on board ship?
4. What sort of food are you to be supplied with during the voyage?
5. Are you aware that anyone who objects to eating rice and doll (sic) on board ship must not go, because uncooked food, such as gram and chooran is prohibited from being served out, except in stormy weather when it is impossible to cook?
6. Are you aware that there are no more than two cooking places on board ship, one for Hindoos, the other for Musselmen, and that you must eat all your food cooked in these cabooses; also, that anyone found with opium

---

<sup>27</sup>Indian Emigration Act, 40.

or gunja or other intoxicating drugs in his possession will be severely punished.<sup>28</sup>

After the Protector concluded with the statement: "I repeat, that no one wishes you to leave your homes, and that the door is open now and always for you to leave the depot whenever you like" each emigrant was required individually to state his willingness to go and that he had understood the proceedings.<sup>29</sup>

### The Voyage

In March of 1845 Thomas Caird announced in a despatch to the Home Office, "I have the honor to report... that I have despatched the Futtle Rozack to Trinidad."<sup>30</sup> Caird, the Emigration Agent for Mauritius in Calcutta, had had his responsibilities extended to collecting and sending emigrants to the West Indies;<sup>31</sup> and the Futtle Rozack was the first emigrant ship sent to Trinidad. On board were 187 males, 22

---

<sup>28</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1852, XVIII, 1499, "12th General Report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission, Appendix No. 53," 188.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Colonial Office 318, Vol. 165, Caird to Hope, 7 March 1845. The name of the ship is more generally spelled: Fatel Rozack; other variations are also seen.

<sup>31</sup>I. M. Cumpston, Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834-1854 (London: 1953), 77.

females, 16 boys, 6 girls, and 6 infants.<sup>32</sup> Passenger capacity was small as sailing ships were used prior to the turn of the century; however, the usual number was about 600 adults.

Crowding never seemed to be a source of complaint but figures indicate each passenger had little space on the voyage. Regulations in 1845 provided fifteen square feet of deck space for each adult (two children were generally considered one adult).<sup>33</sup> In 1864 space on the voyage was modified to read that each sleeping compartment would have one adult for every ten square feet of deck space topside, and every seventy-two cubic feet below deck.<sup>34</sup> The space requirements were changed again in 1869 to one adult in the sleeping compartments for each twelve square feet of topside deck space and eight square feet of topside deck space for each child below ten years of age; the cubic feet below deck requirement remained the same.<sup>35</sup>

A Surgeon Superintendent accompanied each shipload of emigrants and was responsible not only for their health but for general supervision

---

<sup>32</sup>Colonial Office 318, Vol. 165, Caird to Hope, 7 March 1845. Figures vary: the above are Caird's figures upon leaving Calcutta; Gertrude Carmichael says about 219 arrived, Trinidad and Tobago, 215; the Indian Centenary Review states that 225 arrived, but lists by name and age 213; Bowen and Montserin, Colony of Trinidad and Tobago Census Album lists 197 males (including one infant) and 28 females, 15.

<sup>33</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1847-1848, LV, 370, 4 June 1844, 7.

<sup>34</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1965, XVIII, 3526, "25th General Report of the Immigration Commission, Appendix No. 33," 116.

<sup>35</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1874, XLVII, 314, Geoghegan, "Report on Coolie Emigration from India," 49.

as well. He acted as liasion between the emigrants and the ship's captain.<sup>36</sup> Any requests or complaints made on behalf of the emigrants with the captain's response were to be recorded in the daily journal that the Surgeon Superintendent was required to keep.<sup>37</sup> The journal was also to include the dates when the decks were scrubbed, the ship fumigated, airing of bedding, when baths were taken and clothes washed, inspections of the emigrants, or reasons why they were not inspected.<sup>38</sup> Conduct and discipline were to be noted.<sup>39</sup> A daily weather record noting the latitude and longitude, and the crossing of the tropics was to be recorded.<sup>40</sup> At the end of the voyage a general summation was entered into the journal noting objections in general, rules that were impractical or that should be changed with recommendations.<sup>41</sup>

Fraternization of the crew, officers, and male passengers with female emigrants was forbidden; the Surgeon Superintendent appointed male married emigrants to serve as night watchmen to see that female emigrants did not visit the crew's quarters or the single male's compartment during the night on the pretense of going to the toilet.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Indian Emigration Act, 79.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 90-91.



Any kind of intoxicants, opium, ganja (marijuana) were prohibited; and the crew was forbidden to sell or supply the passengers with such items.

Male emigrants were assigned certain duties such as cleaning passenger compartments and airing the bedding. To facilitate these and other duties and routines, emigrants were divided into groups, generally around twenty five in number, and placed under the immediate supervision of a sirdar.<sup>43</sup>

A certain daily routine was established upon leaving port. Emigrants were required to rise before 7 a.m. and were to be in bed by 10 p.m. Singing, playing of drums and other recreating were to cease by 8 p.m.<sup>44</sup> The daily ration of water was issued each morning at 6 a.m. The morning meal was served at 9 a.m. and the afternoon meal by 4 p.m. Children below seven years of age were allowed an early morning bowl of flour or meal mixed with milk. Meals were taken on the open deck when possible.

The daily ration for the voyage was rice 20 ounces, Dal 4 ounces, Ghi 1 ounce, salt 1 ounce, tumeric 1 ounce, onions  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce, tobacco 2 ounces, chillies  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce, salt fish 2 pounds, ginger oil 2 ounces, black pepper  $1\frac{1}{2}$  drams, mustard seed  $\frac{1}{2}$  dram, garlic  $\frac{1}{2}$  dram,

---

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.; A sirdar is an Indian foreman of a work crew.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 92-93.

coriander seeds 2 drams, firewood  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound and one gallon of water.<sup>45</sup> Enough sheep and goats were put on board to supply six for every 100 men for the voyage. Fresh vegetables were served twice a week at the rate of  $\frac{1}{4}$  pound per man. On days when the weather was too rough to cook the following dry rations were provided: choorah or aval 2 pounds, biscuits 1 pound, bhut, gram, or cuddeley  $\frac{1}{4}$  pound, and sugar 2 ounces.

After each meal the decks were cleaned and the cooking utensils were thoroughly scrubbed.<sup>46</sup> A great deal of care was taken to see that any unused food was disposed of in order to prevent illness. Tests were conducted periodically on the drinking water, and on provisions for contamination or spoilage.

All of these precautions did not prevent one of the most severe problems of transport: high mortality. A rash of correspondence, investigations and recriminations occurred, but the death rate remained alarmingly high.

The True Briton in 1852 with 313 emigrants suffered 20 deaths; the Hyderabad in the same year with 316 emigrants had 27 deaths.<sup>47</sup> Stomach and bowel disturbances, Asiatic Cholera, and convulsive fits

---

<sup>45</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1874, XLVII, 314, Geoghegan "Report on Coolie Emigration from India," 25.

<sup>46</sup>Indians, because of religious conventions, ate with their fingers and either on "throw away" plates or brassware which they felt could be more thoroughly cleaned.

<sup>47</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1852-1853, LXVII, 939, "Part III, Enclosure No. 1 in No. 6," 122 and 134.

were listed as the causes of death.<sup>48</sup>

Those responsible for the transport of emigrants tried to shift the blame to circumstances beyond their control. The deaths on the True Briton occurred, it was said, because bad weather forced the ship to keep hatches closed, and prevented proper ventilation.<sup>49</sup> Many of the emigrants on the Hyderabad boarded in ill health even though the ship's surgeon had objected.<sup>50</sup> The general health of those recruited was never considered very good.<sup>51</sup>

The case of the True Briton's poor ventilation prompted the search for a remedy as the weather below the Cape of Good Hope was frequently bad. The Eliza Stewart used the ventilating system generally found on ships of the United States and only had three deaths on an emigrant voyage. This system consisted of funnel shaped tubes forward for collecting fresh air and escape tubes aft for releasing the air; the desired result was a continuous circulation of air even in foul weather.<sup>52</sup>

To encourage conscientious care on the part of the ship's captains the Colonial Secretary offered bonuses of one Rupee for each

---

Ibid.

Ibid., Enclosure No. 1 in No. 6, 134.

Ibid., Enclosure No. 2 in No. 6, 134.

Ibid.

Ibid., Enclosure No. 1 in No. 64, 137.

emigrant landed and ten Rupees if a ship made the voyage with no deaths.<sup>53</sup> Even so, negligence still occurred. A great deal of correspondence occurred in 1858 between the Colonial Office and Calcutta concerning misconduct on the part of Captain Peppercorn of the Bucephalus.<sup>54</sup> Geoghegan states that "some of the ship captains engaged in the traffic were, from brutality or apathy of character, little fitted for the charge of coolies."<sup>55</sup>

The deaths continued unabated. In 1856 and 1857 the Adelaide had 25 deaths among 304 passengers; the Sir George Seymour had 36 deaths out of 354 emigrants; the Eveline with 367 aboard had 72 deaths; the Crenville had 36 deaths out of 309 emigrants; and the Scindian had 60 deaths of the 288 emigrants aboard.<sup>56</sup>

The year 1858 was no better as an extract from the log of the Saladin indicates:

During the passage from Calcutta to Trinidad in addition to the above named men several of the crew had headache - looseness or other slight ailments occasionally, but were successfully healed by Dr Cameron and all the ship's company were in good health on Ship's arrival in Trinidad 1st June 1858 but we regret to have to remark that 50 coolies men women and children, died (although every

---

<sup>53</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1859, XVI, 2452, "Sessional, No. 40," 286.

<sup>54</sup>Colonial Office 318, Vol. 218 and 219, passim.

<sup>55</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1874, XLVII, 314, Geoghegan, "Report on Coolie Emigration from India," 25.

<sup>56</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1857-1859, XXIV, 2395, "18th General Report of the Emigration Commission, Appendix 17," 97; Colonial Office 318, Vol. 215, Murdoch and Rogers to Labouchere, 28 May 1857.

attention was paid to their diet cleanliness and comfort between Calcutta and Port-of-Spain Trinidad.<sup>57</sup>

When the Salsette arrived with 113 deaths an investigation was held in Port-of-Spain. The findings were in keeping with the medical knowledge of the era.<sup>58</sup> In light of today's medical knowledge, it is easy to speculate that the causes of mortality were as follows: contaminated water, food spoilage, lack of medicines to deal with tropical ailments, and lack of proper toilet facilities.

As time went on some of these causes were suspected and the following remedies were instituted: diets were revised, especially with regard to biscuits, since experience indicated that they were a cause of sickness;<sup>59</sup> water distilling apparatus was installed in the vessels;<sup>60</sup> more experienced and better qualified physicians were employed, particularly Australian physicians who were better acquainted with tropical ailments;<sup>61</sup> and toilets were ordered to be constructed in such a manner that elimination would flow directly into the sea.<sup>62</sup> The latter

---

<sup>57</sup>Colonial Office 318, Vol. 218, Farrer to Merivale, 21 September 1858.

<sup>58</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1859, XX, "Sessions 2-31, Part I, Enclosure in No. 32," 349-350.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1863, XV, 3199, "23rd General Report of the Emigration Commission," 44.

<sup>61</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1862, XXII, 3010, "22nd General Report of the Emigration Commission," 48.

<sup>62</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1874, XLVII, 314, Geoghegan, "Report on Coolie Emigration from India," 26.

precaution probably came as a result of the complaints that "Jungle Coolies" frequently relieved themselves in their blankets and clothing.<sup>63</sup>

With improved technology and medical practice the death rates decreased until they were averaging about two percent by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup>

#### Distribution

Provisions for receiving the first indentured Indians on the Fatel Rozack had not been made, but they did manage to be distributed among the Beausejour, Carolina, Ceder Hill, Diamond, Les Efforts, Mount Pleasant, Perseverance, Reconnaissance, and Williamsville Estates.<sup>65</sup>

It soon became apparent that someone was needed to look after the indentured Indian's affairs. Some of the Indians who came to Trinidad had been to Mauritius and could speak a little French,<sup>66</sup> but most could not speak English; moreover, some of their cultural traits

---

<sup>63</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1859, XX, "Sessions 2-31, Part I, Enclosure No. 32, 350.

<sup>64</sup>See Annual Reports of the Protector of Immigrants which were printed as Council Papers and are housed at Red House, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad.

<sup>65</sup>Trinidad Royal Gazette, VII, No. 22, 3 June 1846, 8.

<sup>66</sup>Many of the Trinidad planters were of French extraction and could speak French; most of the Creole Negroes could speak a French patois.

were unintelligible to the estate owners.<sup>67</sup> As a result Lord Harris requested a "Coolie Magistrate."<sup>68</sup>

Major James Fagan, a retired officer in the Bengal Military, accepted the appointment. His patronizing and heavy-handed tactics soon won him many enemies among the planters, and he was dismissed.<sup>69</sup> The office of Coolie Magistrate ended with its first holder.

In 1850 Dr. Henry Mitchell was appointed Superintendent of Immigrants.<sup>70</sup> The title was changed to Agent-General of Immigrants in 1854, and one of Dr. Mitchell's responsibilities was to distribute immigrants among the estates.<sup>71</sup>

When an indentured Indian ship arrived in Port-of-Spain, a medical officer appointed by the Governor went on board for inspection. Those needing care were sent to the Colonial Hospital or the Convalescent Depot until they were able to work.<sup>72</sup> The others were disembarked at the Five Islands Coolie Depot, a small group of islands not far from Port-of-Spain.

---

<sup>67</sup> Parliamentary Paper, 1846, XXVIII, 691-II, "Immigration of labourers into the West India Colonies," 144.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>69</sup> Port-of-Spain Gazette, 15 August 1848.

<sup>70</sup> Colonial Office 295, Vol. 171, Harris to Grey, 9 November 1850.

<sup>71</sup> Trinidad Royal Gazette, XVIII, No. 52, 27 December 1854, Ordinance No. 24 of 1854.

<sup>72</sup> Trinidad Royal Gazette, XXVIII, No. 31, 20 August 1862, Ordinance No. 16 of 1862.

Owners of estates made application for the number of indentured Indians they wanted each year. Notification for application was published in the Port-of-Spain Gazette and other periodicals. In order to qualify to receive an allotment of immigrants the estates had to meet certain qualifications. As experience was gained, requirements were added by ordinances.

By 1860 a planter who wanted indentured immigrants had to have a certificate from a medical doctor that sufficient and suitable housing existed on his estate for the number of Indians requested.<sup>73</sup> In 1866 the Agent-General had to be satisfied that the estate had available medical aid, and housing with proper drainage, fencing, and location.<sup>74</sup> Employers who did not provide a five-day work week were fined and received their allotment after all other applicants had been provided for.<sup>75</sup> Agent-Generals were not to allot indentured laborers to estates where the death rate exceeded one percent of the general mean death rate for the past five years, unless the estate could show due cause.<sup>76</sup> Ordinances were passed periodically for minimum wages to be met in

---

<sup>73</sup>Trinidad Royal Gazette, XXVI, No. 42, 17 October 1860.

<sup>74</sup>Trinidad Royal Gazette, XXXIII, No. 10, 7 March 1866.

<sup>75</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1862, XV, 3199, "23rd General Report of the Immigration Commission, Appendix No. 40," 148.

<sup>76</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1876, LI, 1622, "Ordinance IX of 1875," 85.



order to qualify for allotment of indentured laborers.<sup>77</sup>

Originally the Protector of Immigrants distributed immigrants only to estates, but by 1899 the Department of Public Service was allowed to make application for such labor. In fact, it became first in priority of allotment, followed by estates and those who applied for domestic servants. The Protector was also authorized to relieve any immigrant from serving indenture if the immigrant would pay the expenses of his recruiting, transportation to the depot, board and room in the depot until the ship left, and passage to Trinidad.<sup>78</sup>

The Protector made allotments to the estates at the rate of two indentures for every three acres;<sup>79</sup> and husbands, wives, and children under fifteen were not separated.<sup>80</sup> Eventually the sensitivity to such matters prompted the Agent-General, later Protector, to assign indentured laborers from the same village or Province to the same estate.<sup>81</sup>

Employers were notified of the day, hour, and place to appear to receive allotments. They paid their allotment fee and signed the

---

<sup>77</sup>Council Paper No. 64 of 1896 published with the Minutes of the Legislative Council; Parliamentary Paper, 1904, LIX, 1899, "Immigration Ordinance of 1899," 18.

<sup>78</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5192, "Sanderson Committee Report," 123.

<sup>79</sup>Trinidad Royal Gazette, XXVIII, No. 33, 20 August 1863, Ordinance No. 16 of 1862.

<sup>80</sup>Trinidad Royal Gazette, XIII, No. 52, 13 December 1854.

<sup>81</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5192, "Sanderson Committee Report," 27.

indenture contracts in the presence of an authorized agent.

Upon arriving at the estate the indentured laborers had the option of resting for two weeks or commencing work immediately. Rations were provided for them if they chose the rest period; and part of their salary was paid in rations if they chose to work because experience had shown that otherwise they would not eat properly.<sup>82</sup>

The original immigrants were not required to make contracts, and many of them left the estates and became vagrants. Immigration was temporarily suspended between 1848 and 1851 due to economic reverses in the West Indies, problems with vagrancy, and criticism of the system in general. When immigration resumed in 1851, the immigrants were required to make a contract for one year.<sup>83</sup> In fulfilling his five year indenture period the immigrant could move to a new estate at the end of each year. The five year indenture contract with the same estate was instituted in 1862.

---

<sup>82</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1859, XX, Session 312-31, Part I, No. 5, 304.

Figure 7

## EAST INDIANS ENTERING TRINIDAD

Year	Total	Year	Total
1845	225	1881	2,639
1846	2,412	1882	2,599
1847	2,042	1883	2,049
1848	626	1884	3,136
1849	-	1885	1,684
1850	-	1886	2,164
1851	176	1887	2,147
1852	1,322	1888	1,836
1853	1,980	1889	3,224
1854	673	1890	2,875
1855	290	1891	3,164
1856	608	1892	2,620
1857	1,374	1893	1,927
1858	2,017	1894	2,519
1859	3,288	1895	2,000
1860	2,160	1896	3,087
1861	2,541	1897	1,834
1862	1,587	1898	1,292
1863	1,793	1899	1,171
1864	947	1900	653
1865	2,711	1901	2,348
1866	473	1902	3,117
1867	3,266	1903	2,458
1868	1,365	1904	1,265
1869	3,328	1905	3,604
1870	1,890	1906-7*	2,417
1871	1,830	1907-8	1,860
1872	3,606	1908-9	2,445
1873	2,567	1909-10	2,511
1874	1,713	1910-11	3,286
1875	3,266	1911-12	3,181
1876	1,516	1912-13	2,419
1877	1,596	1913-14	1,189
1878	3,036	1914-15	443
1879	2,103	1915	624
1880	3,105	1916	-
		1917	396

\*Totals were immigration seasons rather than by the calendar year.

Sources: Comins, Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad (1893) 24;  
 James Henry Collens, Trinidad and Tobago Year Book (1903), 170 and 220;  
 C. D. Franklin, Trinidad and Tobago Year Book (1917), 159

## CHAPTER V

### THE INDIAN AT WORK

The organization of an estate was generally rather uniform throughout Trinidad. This was due partly to long standing custom and partly to requirements established by the Trinidad Government. Administration of an estate was either under a resident proprietor or a hired manager. Directly under the manager and in charge of different sections of the estate, or of a certain number of work gangs, were overseers. Each work gang had a driver (sirdar). Sometimes the larger estates had deputy managers whereas the smaller estates had no need for overseers.<sup>1</sup> Managers generally tended to be white or very nearly so, and many times they had worked their way up from overseer. The drivers were usually Indian, although occasionally creoles were employed as drivers.

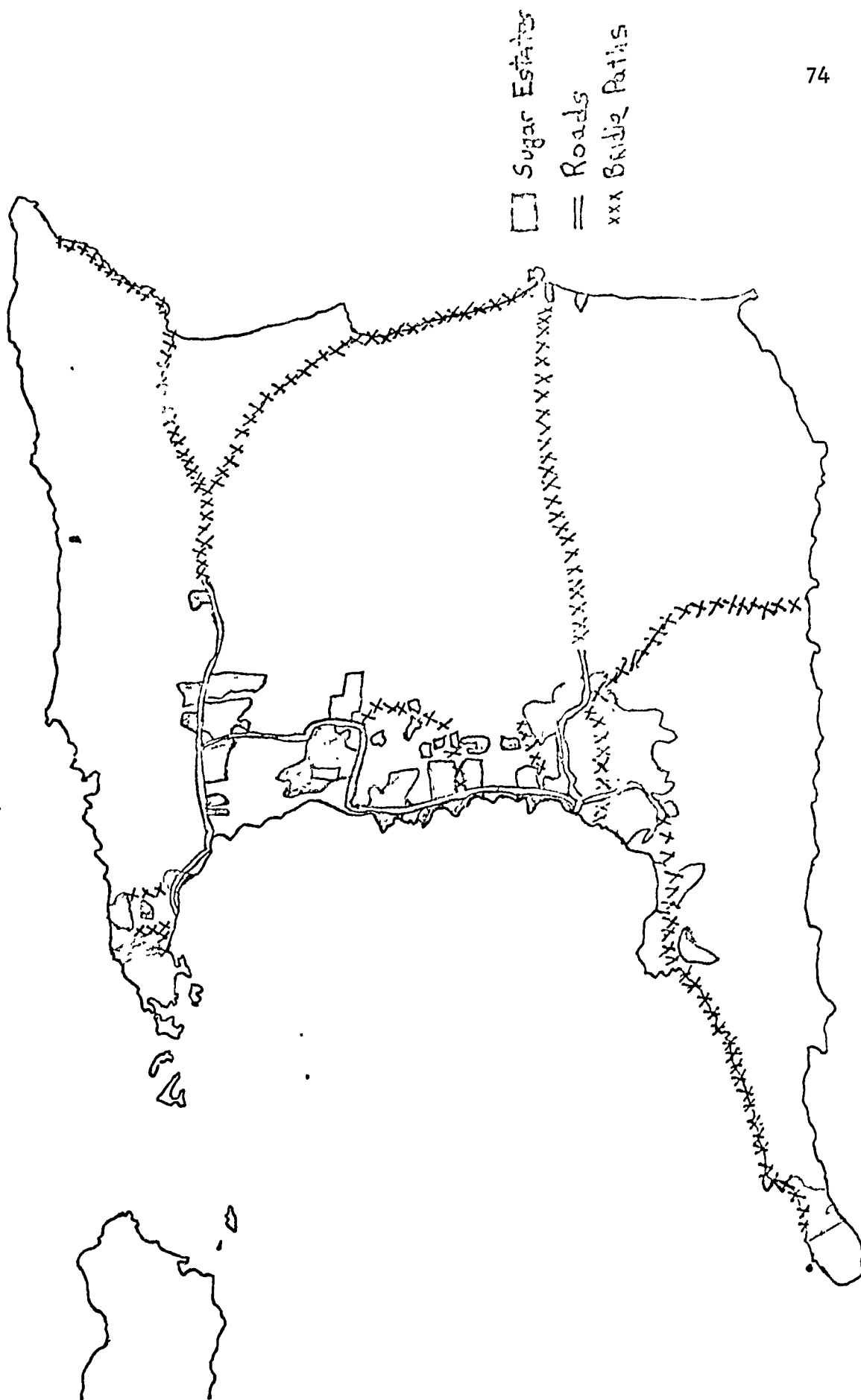
Regulations required that the Indian Indentures work a nine hour day except on Good Friday, Christmas, New Year's Day and Sundays.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>James McNeill and Chimman Lal, Report to the Government of India on the Conditions of Indian Immigrants in the Four British Colonies and Surinam, Part I: Trinidad and British Guiana, (India: 1915), 35.

<sup>2</sup>The working regulations for Indentured Immigrants appeared in the numerous Immigration Ordinances passed by the Legislature Council from time to time; the 1899 Immigration Ordinance consolidated these Ordinances and remained the core of legal requirements after that date.

Figure 8  
Trinidad Sugar Areas in the 1850's



But only those working on time (by the hour) worked a nine hour day; the task system was adopted almost universally for the Indian as it had been for the Negro before him.<sup>3</sup> The work day usually began about six in the morning and continued until about 10:30 a.m. when a lunch break was called. This was supposed to be a thirty minute break, but generally it extended to an hour. Those on task work usually finished about 2:00 p.m. Slower workers, or those who took frequent breaks during their task, sometimes worked until 4:00 p.m. Those who did time work usually quit about 4:30 in the afternoon.

The Indian Indenture and the estate management both preferred the task system. The planter knew the Indian would do more work in six or seven hours under task than he would in nine hours under time; on the other hand, the Indian knew he would be able to leave the fields two or three hours sooner in the day if he worked by the task.<sup>4</sup> Estate managers generally assigned tasks based on soil conditions. The size of the task had to vary because conditions varied frequently and arbitrary regulations were unworkable.<sup>5</sup> A rain shower or an unusually dry day could change field conditions radically.<sup>6</sup> For instance, if the

---

<sup>3</sup>It is remembered that "time" work was paid by the hour whereas "task" work was a flat fee for a specific amount of work.

<sup>4</sup>D. W. D. Comins, Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad, (Calcutta: 1893), 12.

<sup>5</sup>The Protector of Immigrants in 1910 established the task at two rods of ground to be worked, but this proved unworkable.

<sup>6</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXXVII, 5193, "Sanderson Committee Report," 17.

soil was wet it clung to the digging forks and slowed the work.<sup>7</sup> After the size of a task was established, the manager would check the time required to complete it so that he could make adjustments if needed. Some managers were more skilled at assigning tasks than others, but those who were inexperienced usually relied on overseers to help in establishing the size of a task.<sup>8</sup>

Forking and weeding were both frequent types of work assigned by the task. Women and weaker men were assigned to weeding and stronger men were assigned the more difficult job of forking. Those who were skilled at constructing drains could earn better pay by selecting these tasks. Heading, that is carrying cut cane to railway cars or to other means of conveyance, was one of the more difficult tasks. Trenching was heavy work also and was many times assigned to Negro Creoles.<sup>9</sup> As many assignments in mill work as possible were arranged by the task. Cane cutting lent itself well to the task system also. Other jobs on the estate were: stockkeepers (those who cared for the stock used on the estate),<sup>10</sup> carpenters, blacksmiths, grooms (keepers of the horses), and watchmen (a night job). These jobs were either assigned to skilled

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 408.

<sup>8</sup> McNeill and Lal, Report to the Government of India, 16-17.

<sup>9</sup> Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5193, "Sandersom Committee Report," 139.

<sup>10</sup> The East Indian had a reputation for being excellent stock-keepers, probably due to the Hindu reverence for the cow.

labor or to those unable to do field work.<sup>11</sup>

The work routine was slightly different on the cocoa estates. Actually, the cocoa estates employed very few Indentured Indians until after the 1870's. It was at this time that some sugar companies were building sugar factories that would be supported by large land holdings. Some of the proprietors sold their sugar estates to these companies, went into the cocoa business, and employed Indians in their new venture. The cocoa estates during the early part of the indenture period could not afford the allotments of Indians that were given out. Nor could they afford to meet the requirements of housing and medical facilities that were necessary to be eligible for receiving Indentured Indians. But toward the end of the nineteenth century when the demand for cocoa had increased, the cocoa estates were in better position to employ Indians.

Most of the cocoa was grown in mountain valleys along the Southern edge of the Northern Range or in the Montserrat Hills (Central Range). Cocoa was grown under the shade of the Madre del Cacao (bois immortelle) and the Indians' main duties were pruning, picking for drying in the sun, and sacking for transport to the harbors for overseas shipment. Most of the work was done on time or day work.<sup>12</sup>

In an apparent effort to avoid the "company store" situation

---

<sup>11</sup>McNeill and Lal, Report to the Government of India, 16.

<sup>12</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5194, "Appendix to the Sanderson Committee Report," 116.



so familiar in areas where the plantation existed, the requirement was made in 1855 that Indian Indentures were to be paid, in cash, every two weeks, or at least monthly.<sup>13</sup> The provision was ignored by many, and the practice of making advances on salary or by paying by "good" was the established procedure by the end of the nineteenth century. The "good" was a paper for so much credit in the estate owned store or at an approved shop nearby.<sup>14</sup> Even so the practice of staying continually in debt to the Company store did not seem to be widespread.<sup>15</sup>

The amount of wages paid fluctuated with the rise and fall of sugar and cocoa prices. In the early 1850's wages of 30 to 40 cents per day were average.<sup>16</sup> By the end of the 1850's 20 cents was the minimum paid per task; an Indenture and his wife could earn close to 50 cents per day.<sup>17</sup> In order to gain as much labor as possible from each individual, easy tasks were assigned and inferior work was overlooked. In this way Indentures were tempted to complete more than one task per day. An added inducement was to pay 25 cents per task if six or more tasks were completed in one week. As more immigrants arrived

---

<sup>13</sup> Trinidad Royal Gazette, XIX, No. 19, 9 May 1855.

<sup>14</sup> Comins, Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad, 13-14.

<sup>15</sup> The Indian did seem to frequently become indebted to his countrymen who loaned money on interest.

<sup>16</sup> Parliamentary Paper, 1852-1853, LXVII, 936, Part III.

<sup>17</sup> Parliamentary Paper, 1859, XX, Sessions 2-31, Part I, No. 5, 303.

and as profits declined, these inducements were abandoned on some estates. Sometimes only four tasks per week were allotted even though an 1875 Ordinance required that at least five tasks per week be assigned.<sup>18</sup> When Comins visited Trinidad in 1891 he recorded the wages paid for different tasks.<sup>19</sup> Although Comins' chart does not indicate it, he stated that mill work paid as much as 50, 60, and 70 cents per day.<sup>20</sup>

In 1897 it became necessary to pass an Ordinance that a worker earn at least 80 cents per week.<sup>21</sup> The consolidating Ordinance of 1899 stated in a somewhat confusing manner that thirty percent of the adult male Indians had to earn a daily wage for one year of 36 cents. If the Indian presented himself for work he was to be paid a full day's wages regardless of whether there was work for him to do. Moreover, the task assigned could last no longer than seven hours of normal exertion. No less than 25 cents per day could be paid per task for able bodied males, and handicapped males could earn no less than 16 cents per day. Regardless of the law, the sugar crisis of the latter nineteenth century resulted in an overall decline in task work in Trinidad. One

---

<sup>18</sup>Comins, "Diary" in Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad, 32.

<sup>19</sup>See Figure 9: Comins "Diary" in Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad, 3.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>21</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1900, LVII, 383, 29.

Figure 9

---

Records of the Woodbrook Estate

---

## I. Those who received less than 25 cents per day

Ram Jan - Manuring, 15¢; not capable of full task.  
 Rookminia - won't work.  
 Fekoo - Stock keeping, 15¢; hand crushed.  
 Bhugminia - 15¢; old and feeble.

## II. Payment for various tasks

Drivers . . . . .	35¢ per day
Carters . . . . .	30¢ to 35¢ per day
Watchmen . . . . .	30¢ per day
Weeding . . . . .	25¢ per day
Stock keepers . . . . .	25¢ per day
Planting cane . . . . .	25¢ per 450 holes
Supplying . . . . .	25¢ per day
Banking chiefly by contract and free	
coolies . . . . .	\$6.50 per acre
Forking, flat . . . . .	40¢ for 6,000 to 7,000 feet
Forking, burying trash . . . . .	40¢ per 4,000 feet
Forking, furrows . . . . .	40¢ for 4,000 feet
Ploughing various . . . . .	40¢ for 4,000 feet
Manuring (pen) . . . . .	10¢ for 100 holes
Manuring (foreign), small children . . . . .	10¢ to 15¢ per day
Cane-cutters, chiefly free . . . . .	25¢ for 20 to 55 rods
Cane-carriers at mill . . . . .	25¢ to 30¢ per day
Mill workers . . . . .	30¢ per day
Fuel carriers . . . . .	30¢ per day
Stokers . . . . .	35¢ per day

---

From Comins, "Diary" in Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad, 3.

task at 25 cents per task was a general day's work.<sup>22</sup>

In the early part of the twentieth century men were earning between \$1.00 and \$1.20 per week. Women earned anywhere from one half to two-thirds of this amount. During the busy season a six-day week could be worked whereas other parts of the year could offer at the most a four-day week. Sometimes the estates management were generous during the off season in order to gain the Indian's willingness to exert himself during the busy season.<sup>23</sup>

Even with these wages, the frugal Indian could save money. Expenses totaled about 85 cents per week. The remainder of the wage could be saved; that is, if the wife worked also. Her expenses tended to equal her wages. Some skilled labor, however, could afford to allow the wife to remain at home.<sup>24</sup>

When considering wages it should be remembered that housing and medical care were free. In giving evidence to the Sanderson committee Robert Warner stated that 40 cents was paid to a free laborer for a task as an equivalent to a 25 cent task to an indentured laborer.<sup>25</sup>

Three years after the arrival of the first Indians in Trinidad many of the planters and managers appeared to be pleased with the work

---

<sup>22</sup>McNeill and Lal, Report to the Government of India, 20-21.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>25</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5193, "Sanderson Committee Report," 278.

the Indians were performing.<sup>26</sup> The manager of Ceder Hill and Forest Hill Estates, Mr. MacKenzie, had over one hundred Indians working under his supervision; and he found the Indians to be "industrious, cheerful, contented, docile, obedient." A colored manager of Windsor Park Estate thought that the Indians were better workers than Negro Creoles. The proprietor of Union Hall Estate in South Naprima, Horatio Huggins, felt the Indians were "less easily offended, devoid of the savage, unruly disposition of the African." In cases where Indentured Indians left the estates on which they were employed, most proprietors concluded that it resulted from bad management or ill treatment.<sup>27</sup>

Governor Harris had been compelled to remove Indentured Indians from Clydesdale Cottage Estate in South Naparima because the proprietor was known for "hitting and kicking" the Indians.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, some proprietors and managers were well known for their success in dealing with Indentured Indians. R. S. Darling, part-owner of the Lothians Estate in Savanna Grande, was almost a legend in this respect, and was remembered and talked of even after his death in 1860. On the Philippine Estate, two Indentured Indians had continued to live and work on the estate for over twenty years.<sup>29</sup> Robert Warner spoke of a neighboring

---

<sup>26</sup>Trinidad Royal Gazette, IX, No. 2, 22 March 1848.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Colonial Office 295, Vol. 153, Harris to Grey, 5 October 1846.

<sup>29</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1884-1885, LIII, 4366, "Correspondence respecting the recent Coolie Disturbances," 64.

cocoa estate before the Sanderson committee:

and I was quite struck by the happy relations that seemed to exist between them and the man to whom the place belongs and his wife, who takes a great interest in them, and helps the women in their troubles, and all that. I have always thought of that as a typical place where they are absolutely happy, and where there is sympathy existing between them and their employers.<sup>30</sup>

Good relations between the manager and the Indentured workers were recognized as desirable by many of the owners of estates; some even designated a time and a place for regularly scheduled complaint sessions.<sup>31</sup> The official outlet for complaints was the district Inspector of Immigrants. Under the authority of an 1865 Ordinance the island was divided into districts and an Inspector of Immigrants was assigned to each district.<sup>32</sup> The Inspector was to reside in his district and leave only with the permission of the Agent-General of Immigrants. Each estate in his district was to be inspected at least once every six weeks. Written accounts of each visit were to be kept. On each visit the Inspector was to check the estate hospital, record books, wages and rations; he was to go into the fields and observe the laborers at work, and to allow time for workers to come to him to make any complaints they might have. Inspectors were also to be in their offices every Monday to hear complaints. All complaints were to be looked into no

---

<sup>30</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5193, "Sanderson Committee Report," 278.

<sup>31</sup>McNeill and Lal, Report to the Government of India, 36.

<sup>32</sup>Trinidad Royal Gazette, XXII, No. 21, 24 May 1865.

matter how trivial. The records of the Inspectors' visits including strikes or any other labor disturbances on the estates, deaths from accidents or suicides and the like were to be forwarded to the Protector of Immigrants Office.

The Inspectors were not to accept any hospitality from the planters. This was to insure their objectivity. Henry Huggins, who had served as a stipendiary magistrate in Trinidad for twenty five years, was asked by a member of the Sanderson Committee: "There is no suspicion in the minds of the Indians, for instance, that they (the Inspectors) are personal friends of the planters, and that therefore they would not get justice?"<sup>33</sup> Such suspicions had existed in British Guiana,<sup>34</sup> but Huggins answered that they did not exist in Trinidad.<sup>35</sup>

If the Inspectors were not suspect the courts seem to have been. When James Farmer, an overseer on the Densley Estate, had brought several Indentured Indians before the court for breaches of contract, one man was reported by the Port of Spain Gazette to have stated: "of course he was guilty, because he was a 'bound man,' evidently meaning that he expected to have no chance as against the prosecuting authorities." The article went on to state: "His position, however, and his rights were

---

<sup>33</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5193, "Sanderson Committee Report," 316.

<sup>34</sup>See E. Jenkins, The Coolie, His Rights and Wrongs (New York and London: 1871) and Dwarka Nath, A History of the Indians in British Guiana (London: 1950).

<sup>35</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5193, 316.

very fully explained to him, as well as the various ways in which he might act on certain emergencies so as to have all questions between himself and his employers properly enquired into."<sup>36</sup> The Indian may have had a point since a case brought before the court by an Inspector of Immigrants charging an overseer and a driver with beating an indentured worker had been heard earlier in the year and had been dismissed for lack of evidence.<sup>37</sup>

Peter Abel, the administrator of Usine Ste (sic) Madeleine was tried in 1897 for striking an Indian worker and was fined sixty pounds.<sup>38</sup> This trial was a direct confrontation between the Protector of Immigrants, William Coombs and Peter Abel. It attracted a great deal of attention and editorial comment in Trinidad. Even so, the Protector of Immigrants did not exercise his prerogative of denying Indentured Indians to Abel. He said he realized how difficult it was to get Indians to work and he knew how exasperated administrators could get in trying to make Indians work.<sup>39</sup>

Most complaints by the Indians dealt with tasks and wages. Occasionally the Indians complained that they were allowed no more than one task per day, but most generally the complaint was that the tasks

---

<sup>36</sup>Port of Spain Gazette, 16 December 1895.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 27 March 1895.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 8 July 1897.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.



assigned were too large to complete in a day's work. George Fitzpatrick, an East Indian lawyer from Trinidad with a European name, testified to the Sanderson Committee that some tasks took two days and the Indian was then paid for only one task.<sup>40</sup> More galling to the Indian than taking two days to finish a task was to have an overseer or manager give an unfinished task to another to complete, and thus deprive the original worker of the full wage.<sup>41</sup> According to the law, if a particular job was going to require more than the ordinary amount of labor, the indentured was to be consulted beforehand and a wage rate settled upon.<sup>42</sup> When complaints were made about the excessive size of a task the local Inspector of Immigrants was suppose to go into the field and measure the size of the assigned task and then witness the number of hours it took to complete this task.<sup>43</sup>

Sometimes it was not the size of the task that was the issue but the fact that the worker was required to do the same task more than once, as was the case on the Orange Grove Estate in 1891.<sup>44</sup> The Inspector measured the task and found it to be of reasonable size. However, in the course of his investigation he discovered that the

---

<sup>40</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5193, "Sanderson Committee Report," 390.

<sup>41</sup>Comins, Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad, 9.

<sup>42</sup>McNeill and Lal, Report to the Government of India, 16.

<sup>43</sup>Trinidad Royal Gazette, XXII, No. 21, 24 May 1865; Parliamentary Paper, XXVII, 5193, 408.

<sup>44</sup>Port of Spain Gazette, 11 December 1891.

complaint was not size, but that the management had compelled the workers to do the task over because it has been poorly done the first time. Earlier in the century such complaints were unheard of, but in the 1890's the sugar industry was at such a low ebb that managers had become more demanding in the quality of work performed. Fitzpatrick felt that there was a general lack of sympathy on the part of Immigration authorities for complaints made by Indentured Indians in such cases.<sup>45</sup> The Protector of Immigrants, William Coombs, stated in 1909 that he thought most of the complaints laid before him were "frivolous."<sup>46</sup>

A more serious aspect of complaints was that threats and physical abuse of some sort had occurred. One of the earlier incidents of this sort occurred in 1847 on the Carolina Estate during an argument between the proprietor and some Indian Indentures over wages. One of the Indians grabbed the reins of the proprietor's horse, and the rider lashed at the Indian with his riding crop. Possibly the Indian was unaware of the affront he had committed by grabbing the reins of a horse ridden by an "English Gentleman," but being whipped must have seemed to the Indian a severe response.<sup>47</sup> At any rate a general fight broke out in which the creole laborers who were present took the side of the

---

<sup>45</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5193, "Sanderson Committee Report," 385.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 408.

<sup>47</sup>Colonial Office 295, Vol. 158, Harris to Grey, 7 December 1847.

proprietor. No one was seriously injured in this incident but later altercations did not always end as well. The frequency of such incidents increased later in the century and they were generally due to controversy over wages and work assignments.

Disturbances of a major proportion involving a great many workers such as strikes seemed to have peaked in the 1880's.<sup>48</sup> In 1882, 1883, and 1884 strikes occurred on estates owned by the Colonial Company in Naparima, on the El Socorro Estate just east of Port-of-Spain, and on Laurel Hill Estate further to the east in the Tacarigua district. These were serious enough to bring in the police.<sup>49</sup>

On the Golconda Estate of the Colonial Company, a strike occurred in 1890, over the excessive size of tasks. The size of tasks was reduced but the strikers asked to be put on time work. Grumbling continued until some of the "ringleaders" were transferred to other estates.<sup>50</sup> Comins observed while he was visiting Trinidad that less labor trouble occurred on estates with resident proprietors.<sup>51</sup>

In 1891 a trial, involving the beating of an overseer by laborers, brought to light some of the discontent among the Indian workers.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1884-1885, LIII, 4366, "The Recent Coolie Disturbances in Trinidad."

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., Comins, Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad, 42.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Port of Spain Gazette, 16 October 1891.

Hilton Christian, the overseer on the Caparo Estate and the son of the proprietor, had told an Indian worker that his task was unsatisfactory and that he was to commence doing it over, then, while talking with other workers, he was attacked by workers with sticks. He had been reducing the wages of the workers for some time because, as he said, they had been doing inferior work. When the case came to trial the Indian's defense lawyer said that the Indian's grievance was not the amount of his wages but the fact that Hilton Christian's father had taken an Indian woman as his mistress. The workers said they did not want their women dishonored. Whether the woman excuse was a "red herring" and the wage cut was the real issue is difficult to determine. Very likely both were the cause of the incident.

In 1893 Indentured Indians on the Buen Intenta Estate threatened the life of the manager, and a magistrate and Inspector with several constables "proceeded to Princes Town by the one o'clock train."<sup>53</sup> On the 7th of September the Port of Spain Gazette ran an article under the title "A Coolie Rising Feared," in which it was stated that a contingent of constables had gone to Princes Town in case the Buen Intenta Estate laborers reacted violently to the judgement that the magistrate was to pass against the Indians accused of a breach of indenture.<sup>54</sup>

Such cases continued on into the twentieth century. On one

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 4 September 1893.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 7 September 1893.

estate a European overseer shot two workers of a gang who attacked him.<sup>55</sup> On another estate a European overseer and an Indian driver were beaten to death by Indian laborers.<sup>56</sup> In 1914 a group of workers left the La Reunion Estate and went into Port-of-Spain to complain to the Protector of Immigrants of ill treatment. Although there was some evidence that their contentions were true, they lost any chance of official support when they broke into the manager's house upon returning to the estate.<sup>57</sup>

Absconding, or absenteeism of different sorts, was a continual problem during the indenture period. The law read that an Indentured Indian could not leave the estate without a written pass, so absenteeism was an easily committed offense.<sup>58</sup> If an indenture was apprehended in a couple of days after leaving an estate it was termed vagrancy; if he returned voluntarily to the estate it was considered unlawful absence.<sup>59</sup> The more serious offense was desertion or permanent absenteeism.

A frequent cause of unlawful absence arose from the indentures leaving the estate to go to Port-of-Spain to complain to the Protector of Immigrants. By law, the manager was suppose to grant a pass to any

---

<sup>55</sup>McNeill and Lal, Report to the Government of India, 37.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Inspector of Immigrants Report, 28 February 1914.

<sup>58</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5193, "Sanderson Committee Report," 389.

<sup>59</sup>McNeill and Lal, Report to the Government of India, 26.

Indenture that wished to go to the Protector's Office to make a complaint, but it does not take much imagination to realize that a worker would be reluctant to ask a manager for a pass to go make a complaint against him. If the Protector decided the Indentured Indian had no grounds for complaint, he notified the manager who could then prosecute the Indian for unlawful absence.<sup>60</sup>

The law concerning absences by women was relaxed a great deal in 1869. If she was away from work due to pregnancy or sickness she was to be excused. If she did, however, absent herself unlawfully from work, she was to be penalized for "lost days" rather than fined or imprisoned.<sup>61</sup>

There was yet another frequent cause of unlawful absences among Indentures. By the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many of the Indentures were able to become landowners. Societies of Indians were organized in which land was purchased in the name of one of the individuals. In this way they were able to have their own rice land. During the rice planting season, June, July and August, lists of absconding Indentured Indians appearing in the Trinidad Royal Gazette were longer than usual. These absences were, of course, a breach of indenture but McNeill and Lal indicated that they seldom resulted in the lengthening of the indenture contract.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5193, 294.

<sup>61</sup>Ordinance No. 26 of 1869.

<sup>62</sup>McNeill and Lal, Report to the Government of India, 33.

Outright desertion was a different matter. A favorite destination of those who wished to leave an estate permanently was Venezuela.<sup>63</sup> The number absconding to Venezuela increased to the point that a law was passed in 1878 providing a severe penalty for anyone recruiting indentured laborers for foreign destinations.<sup>64</sup> The law was ineffectual, however, as laborers continued to migrate to Venezuela well into the twentieth century. British authorities attributed this sort of absconding "not to the immigrants being dissatisfied, or ill-treated upon the estates, but to the golden vision of El Dorado that lies only a few hours journey across the narrow gulf dividing Trinidad from the Spanish Main."<sup>65</sup>

Occasionally indentured laborers were enticed away from estates by free Indians who has served their indenture and had become small farmers in remote areas of the island. Also there were free Indians who were willing to hide their countrymen in their huts if they desired to abscond. A system of lookouts was constantly alert to signal the approach of constables searching for absentees.<sup>66</sup> Secret organizations existed that would furnish certificates of Industrial Residence (indicating the completion of an indenture contract) for a price.<sup>67</sup> These

---

<sup>63</sup>Agent-General of Immigrants Report of 1869.

<sup>64</sup>Ordinance No. 21 of 1878.

<sup>65</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1906, LXXV, 2684, No. 504, 11.

<sup>66</sup>Agent-General of Immigrants Report of 1863.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

certificates were borrowed, stolen, or bought. Sometimes an Indenture arranged to buy a certificate, and then borrowed the money from these secret organizations. These required the Indian to give them the certificate as collateral until the debt was paid off. Then the organization would hire out the certificate to some newly-arrived Indentured Indian and thus derive double-duty from one certificate.<sup>68</sup>

Everyone in the Colony was authorized to return Indentured Indians who were illegally away from the estates. During the 1860's mileage money of twelve cents per mile was paid for transporting an Indenture to the estate or a police station.<sup>69</sup> The charge was deducted from the Indentures' wages by the estate.<sup>70</sup> This law was dropped in 1870.

A great deal of work time was lost because of absenteeism. The Usine Ste (sic) Madeleine lost one out of every six working days from absenteeism.<sup>71</sup> Estates were allowed to handle the less serious cases of absenteeism as lost days. Lost days could be paid back to the employer at the rate of 60 cents per day or the Indenture could suffer imprisonment up to sixty days,<sup>72</sup> but prison time counted as lost days also.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Trinidad Royal Gazette, XXVIII, No. 22, 28 May 1860.

<sup>70</sup>Ordinance No. 16 of 1862.

<sup>71</sup>Williams, Trinidad and Tobago, 109.

<sup>72</sup>Trinidad Royal Gazette, XXVIII, No. 33, 20 August 1862.

<sup>73</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1876, LI, 1622, 85.



As another alternative that seems to have been used more in the early period of indenture, the lost days could be added to the indenture time as Charles Kingsley noted:

Moreover - for all men are not perfect, even in Trinidad - the coolie required protection, in certain cases, against a covetous and short-sighted employer who might fancy it to be his interest to let the man idle during his first year, while weak, and so save up an arrear of "lost days" to be added at the end of the five years, when he was a strong skilled laborer.<sup>74</sup>

Rollcall was held each morning on the estates and the number of absentees was tallied. The Indentured Indians objected to the fact that the planter had the authority to keep the record of lost days and the Indian had little or no recourse. By 1912 some of this estate authority was lost, and the manager was fined if he did not report absences within fifteen days after the absence of an indenture was first noticed.<sup>75</sup>

Actually, the planters preferred not to resort to the courts in breach of indenture cases if it could be avoided, particularly during crop time. It was very time consuming and resulted in work loss. But there were occasions when trials or at least the threat of a trial was necessary. If a worker was convicted but let off with a reprimand, it generally meant the breach was serious enough that it could not be overlooked by the management of an estate.<sup>76</sup> If a case was dismissed

---

<sup>74</sup>Charles Kingsley, At Last (New York: 1871), 141-142.

<sup>75</sup>McNeill and Lal, Report to the Government of India, 27.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 26.

or withdrawn it usually meant that the Indentured Indian and the management had come to an agreement before the trial; first offenders were let-off lightly also.<sup>77</sup> There was some question among the authorities as to the advisability of placing those guilty of civil offenses in prison among those who were guilty of criminal offenses.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, the threat of prison for the breach of indenture existed.

It appears that estates that were managed with, for want of a better term, "good judgement," had less labor difficulty than the others. The free Indians of Trinidad told McNeill and Lal that if managers would control their overseers and drivers better, less trouble resulting in court cases would occur.<sup>79</sup> Comins reported in 1891 that consistently less trouble seemed to occur on those estates that appeared to be more closely supervised by the proprietor.<sup>80</sup> Governor Harris, as was noted, made the observation early in the indenture period that the key to harmonious labor relations was good management.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXXVII, 5193, "Sanderson Committee Report," 390.

<sup>79</sup> McNeill and Lal, Report to the Government of India, 27.

<sup>80</sup> Comins, Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad, 42.

<sup>81</sup> Colonial Office 295, Vol. 163, Harris to Grey, 1 July 1848.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE OPTION TO RETURN

When Lord Stanley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, notified the Governor of Trinidad, Sir Henry MacLeod in 1844 of his assent to immigration from India, he made it very clear that return passage to India would have to be provided.<sup>1</sup> The planters were compelled to accept this provision for the added reason that recruiters in India could not sign up emigrants to Trinidad without being able to offer this inducement; nevertheless the estate owners complained that five years were too short a period for the expense involved in bringing the Indians to Trinidad.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies in London, Lord Earl Grey, was sympathetic to their cause and sent out an ordinance designed to focus on this problem. The Crown Colony government of Trinidad incorporated the proviso into Ordinance No. 9 of 1847, "For Encouraging Immigration into the Colony of Trinidad, and the Industry of Immigrants." The provision that the Indian simply had to spend five calendar years in Trinidad regardless of whether he worked or not was replaced by the concept of "industrial residence." The five years had to be made up of work, not merely residence. If the Indian was not employed on an

---

<sup>1</sup>Colonial Office 296, Vol. 16, Stanley to MacLeod, 31 July 1844.

Figure 10.. Release from Indenture Certificate

TOBAGO

## CERTIFICATE OF EXEMPTION FROM LABOUR

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the undermentioned Indian Immigrant has completed  
 ..... Term of Service under Indenture on Plantation  
 ..... *Perseverance (Chaguanas)*  
 Name of Immigrant *Ahmad* ..... No. *1212*  
 Sex *Male* ..... Age on Arrival *20* Years Height ..... feet ..... inches  
 Number, Ship and Year of Arrival *435 Ganges 1917*  
 Date of Indenture *22nd April*  
 Bodily Marks *Scar on right*  
 Number of Certificate *28*  
 Date of Issue *27th April 1917*  
 Dated this *27th* day of *April* 19*17*

G.P. T. O

*Reference*  
 Protector of Im

estate the service time did not count toward his five-year-return-passage right. He either made up the time in employment or he paid a monthly tax toward the cost of his passage.

Although the industrial residence provision was well received by the planters they still sought additional means of extending the period of labor of Indians in Trinidad. Governor Harris asked the Colonial Land and Emigration Office in London for authorization to offer the Indians a "bounty" to re-indenture for an additional five years.<sup>2</sup> The request was forwarded to Lord Grey<sup>3</sup> who responded that he thought there were too many objections to adopting such a provision.<sup>4</sup>

Governor Harris replied immediately asking Lord Grey to concede to the following resolution that had in the meantime been passed by the Trinidad Legislative Council:

The Honourable Mr. Darling moved, 'That his Excellency the Governor be authorized to issue and pay from the colonial treasury the sum of 50 dollars to every able-bodied Coolie of good character, who shall be willing, in consideration of such sum, to remain in the colony for a further term of five years from the date of such engagement as a new immigrant, under the provisions of the Immigration Ordinance'.

---

<sup>2</sup>Trinidad Despatch No. 78, Harris to Colonial Land and Emigration Office, 11 October 1850.

<sup>3</sup>Enclosure in Colonial Office Despatch No. 27, Wood and Rogers to Merivale, 30 November 1850.

<sup>4</sup>Colonial Office Despatch No. 27, Grey to Harris, 30 November 1850.

Seconded by the Honourable Mr. Rennie, and carried."<sup>5</sup>

Lord Grey assented to the request:

As you consider it so desirable, and as the Legislative Council have passed a resolution to the same affect, I will not object to the proposal that you should offer a bonus of 50 dollars to every able-bodied Cooly of good character who may be willing, in consideration of that payment, to remain in the colony for an additional term of five years.<sup>6</sup>

In August of 1851 Grey requested the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners to send a "Notice to Coolies about to emigrate to the West Indies" to Caird for publication in India. This Notice embodied the "bounty" provision.<sup>7</sup> Ordinance No. 11 of 1851 made the "bounty" provision lawful in Trinidad.

This Ordinance was repealed, however, by Ordinance No. 24 of 1854 which stated that no immigrant would be provided with return passage until he had completed a five year industrial residence and ten years in Trinidad. Moreover, they would have to contribute seven pounds five schillings and ten pence sterling or thirty five Trinidad dollars to the return passage. The Trinidad Legislative Council was even able to induce the Government of India to accept the provision that return

---

<sup>5</sup>Enclosure in Trinidad Despatch No. 34, Harris to Grey, 26 December 1850.

<sup>6</sup>Colonial Office Despatch No. 31, Grey to Harris, 25 February 1851.

<sup>7</sup>Colonial Office Despatch No. 43, Grey to Officer Administering the Government, 14 August 1851.

passage had to be claimed within eighteen months after it became due.<sup>8</sup>

The planters in Trinidad were so carried away by this ten years residence requirement that they tried to extend the five years industrial residence to ten years industrial residence.<sup>9</sup>

The contribution of thirty five dollars toward return passage was reasserted in Ordinance No. 16 of 1862; but the Colonial Office, this time, ruled against the required payment. Ordinance No. 3 of 1865 guaranteed return passage at public expense.

The Trinidad planters were unable to reverse this ruling until the 1890's. The Government of India reluctantly assented to the indentured Indians being required to contribute toward return passage; they made it clear, however, that total abolition of return passage was undesirable because the opportunity to return should be held open for those who truly wished to return. The contribution stipulation would be sufficient to deter those who merely wished to make a "holiday" trip back to India and then re-indenture.<sup>11</sup> The Government of India was no doubt influenced to consent to such an agreement by the fact that Trinidad was suffering a depression from the drop in sugar prices. The added burden of return passage could act as a deterrent to introducing new laborers into Trinidad.

---

<sup>8</sup> Parliamentary Paper, 1859, XVI, 2452, "Session 1, No. 14, Gray to Elliot, 15 November 1854, 278.

<sup>9</sup> Parliamentary Paper, 1859, XX, "Sessions 2-31, Part I, No. 7, Keate to Labouchere, 6 August 1857, 307-308.

<sup>10</sup> Council Paper No. 172 of 1893, 3-5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Ordinance No. 18 of 1894 stated that those engaged as indentured laborers after the 8th of June 1894 would at the end of ten years service be entitled to return passage on the payment of one-fourth of the fare on the part of males and one-sixth in the case of females. Ordinance No. 16 of 1898 raised the payment to one-half and one-third respectively for all immigrants arriving after the 5th of August 1898.

Destitute and disabled Indians were intitled to free passage. It was suspected that all who qualified did so by subterfuge. Sometimes "beggars" appeared as "the best dressed of the party" after the ship left port.<sup>12</sup> One indentured Indian who had appeared "dumb" was suddenly able to speak again when his passage was assured.<sup>13</sup> Another who had feigned poverty paid the Captain seventy dollars fare for a creole negress whom he had taken along as a "companion" to his Hindu wife.<sup>14</sup> No doubt these earlier episodes were repeated in later years.

Dependents of indentured immigrants were allowed passage in the 1894 Ordinance, but after this date the Ordinances added the vague provision that children under the age of twelve years of age could be refused passage if it seemed in the best interest of the child to remain in Trinidad. The purpose of this provision is difficult to

---

<sup>12</sup>Trinidad Royal Gazette, XIV, No. 8, 21 February 1872, Agent-General of Immigrants Report.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1859, XX, "Session 2-31, Part I, Enclosure in No. 12," 322.



comprehend. In the 1850's the Government of Trinidad had charged for the passage of children born in Trinidad in an apparent attempt to discourage return passage, but the Colonial Office refunded this charge to the immigrants and billed the Trinidad Government for the expense.<sup>15</sup> Whether there was any continuity in aim between these two efforts is difficult to say.

In 1902 the Government managed to relieve itself of the financial burden of return passage. An immigration repatriation fund was established by Ordinance No. 2 of 1902. One-half of the cost of passage would be paid from the fund established from assessed fees from the planters, and one-half by the immigrant.

In 1898 an article appeared in a Port-of-Spain newspaper that described the preparation for returning immigrants:

On Friday a Gazette reporter casually turned into the Immigration Department to shelter from a shower of rain which had overtaken him, and coming across one of the courteous officials of this branch of the Public Service, Mr. Samuels, he was shown how things are done preparatory to the departure of a coolie ship for India with return immigrants. Mr. Samuels explained to us that as it had fallen to his lot now for several years to look after the clothing for return immigrants, he could confidently say that even beginning the work of preparation in July for a ship leaving in September, it was not an uncommon thing to find a press of work up to a few days before the sailing of the ship.

Reporter: How do you account for that?

Mr. Samuels: We do not always have the exact number of immigrants who are returning until late. It is on the whole a work of approximation when we begin.

---

<sup>15</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1859, XXI, 2452, "Session 1, sub-enclosure 2 in No. 5," 268.

Reporter: When does the next return ship leave, and how many immigrants do you expect will be leaving?

Mr. Samuels: The next ship leaves, it is expected, in September next; and I anticipate that we shall have between six and seven hundred souls to deal with. You see all these goods which you see here are sent in bulk to us by the Crown Agents. They have first to be verified as regards quantity and this involves no materially pressing labour so far as the ready made clothing is concerned, but when we deal with the measuring and allotting the cotton supply there the trouble and worry come in.

Reporter: But surely you don't do all this yourself?

Mr. Samuels: No. I am allowed two men, but they sometimes give me more trouble than if I had none.

Reporter: How do you allot these goods, and are they paid for by the return immigrants?

Mr. Samuels: Oh! Yes they are paid for and I shall show you how they are allotted.

Mr. Samuels here called an East Indian and having spoken a few words to him in a dialect which had it been Greek or Latin we should have understood, but which was as Sanscrit to us, we soon found spread on the floor of the room in which we were, a rather uncommonly good cotton blanket, then followed twenty five yards of good quality cotton (Horocks Long Cloth) 1 pair of thick pants, 1 pair of drawers, a tin pan, and a tin drinking vessel.

Mr. Samuels: I must tell you that this kit if I may so call it is for the use of the male immigrants on board ship, until when they near the cap when to this kit the following items are added; - 2 woolen blankets, one pair of Bamboo trousers, one Bamboo shirt and three yards of flannel.

Reporter: This seems a most maternal care of people who take away all they can from the Colony. And pray how much do they pay for all these comforts?

Mr. Samuels: I can't exactly say at this moment, but I think the men pay \$6.50, the women \$5.00, and the children \$3.00 each for their Kits. But you can get accurate information from inside by seeing Mr. Stone.

Reporter: Then you provide for women and children as well?

Mr. Samuels: Oh; dear yes. The women are provided with thirty yards of cotton, one cotton blanket, one Jacket or Bodice, a tin pan and a tin drinking vessel. They get when near the Cape, two woolen blankets, and three yards of flannel. The children get one cotton blanket, fifteen yards of cotton and a tin pan and drinking vessel; and when near the Cape two yards of flannel.

The goods are certainly of good quality and we are sure far superior to what the majority of these people would provide for themselves under other circumstances. Our reporter thanked Mr. Samuels for his courtesy and retired. With a knowledge which he must confess he did not before possess.<sup>16</sup>

#### Land in Lieu of Return Passage

One of the schemes for discouraging the return to India was to grant land to the worker in lieu of free return passage scheme. As early as 1847 Governor Harris provided in an Ordinance that any immigrant who desired "to commute his right to a free passage for the value in land of the cost of such passage," could do so.<sup>17</sup>

The scheme seems not to have been popular. Although the provision was carried forward into new Ordinances concerning Indian immigrants it was not used to any extent until 1869.<sup>18</sup> The Indians appeared reluctant to give up the right to return passage even though they planned to remain in Trinidad. They squatted in the same fashion as the Negro Creoles or they used their savings to purchase land or businesses.<sup>19</sup>

In May of 1869 a notice appeared in the Royal Gazette to the

---

<sup>16</sup>Port-of-Spain Gazette, 24 July 1898.

<sup>17</sup>Ordinance No. 3 of 1847.

<sup>18</sup>See Table 11.

<sup>19</sup>Five East Indian San Fernando shopkeepers bought the Corial Estate for \$18,000, hired a manager, and applied for an allotment of indentured workers: Colonial Office 295, Vol. 267, Rennie to Kimberley, 14 April 1873.

affect that anyone who wished to commute his return passage for ten acres of Crown Land could do so, and step by step instructions were given on how the Indian could avail himself of this offer.<sup>20</sup> Twelve workers officially received ten acres each in lieu of return passage the first year.<sup>21</sup> Governor Arthur Gordon settled them at Couva and Point a Pierre as this was near the place where they had served their indenture.<sup>22</sup>

These assignments set a pattern for Indian settlement in general. The Indian preferred to settle in the flatlands where he could establish his rice paddies and later his sugar-cane farms.<sup>23</sup> Peones from the mainland and Negro Creoles were interested in land for cocoa and subsistence plots.

The main period of active land receipt by the Indians extended from 1869 to 1880. In May of 1870 the residence time in the colony for the receipt of land was changed from ten years to seven. In February of 1873 the worker was given the option of receiving ten acres or five acres and five pounds. Six years later, in February of 1879, the Indian immigrant could receive five acres of land if he selected the

---

<sup>20</sup>Trinidad Royal Gazette, 26 May 1869.

<sup>21</sup>Protector of Immigrants Report, 1896.

<sup>22</sup>Colonial Office 295, Vol. 247, Gordon to Granville, 22 May 1869.

<sup>23</sup>By 1896 there were six thousand acres of irrigated rice in Trinidad: C. V. Shephard, "Agricultural Labour in Trinidad, Part IV," Tropical Agriculture, Vol. XII, April 1935, 87.

land himself, or he could receive ten acres of land if he allowed the Government to select the land.

Of the 141,615 Indians introduced between 1845 and 1917 only 2,643 accepted land in lieu of return passage. In 1904 the Governor of Trinidad appointed a committee to investigate the reasons for the paltry participation and to make recommendations as to the feasibility of re-instituting the plan. Two memorandums of note were submitted on the problem.<sup>24</sup> One was by the Reverend John Morton, a Canadian Presbyterian missionary who had lived among the Indians since 1868 and had witnessed the settlement projects at first hand. The other was submitted by H. C. Stone, who as the Assistant Protector of Immigrants had been sympathetic to the Indian's problems.

Reverend Morton identified the Indian settlements with which he was familiar: Calcutta, Lengua, Barrackpore Cucurite, Roussillac Pepara, Fyzabad, Couva, Coromandel, Malabar Mausica, Madras, Chandernagore, Chin Chin, Caratal, Guaracara, Coolie Town, Caurita, Demson, Cunaripo, Cocorite, Coolie block (Patna) Simla, Philippine, and Caracas. He stated that the settlements had been useful in some cases, that they had been a failure as a whole; and he enumerated more reasons for this judgment.

He emphasized first the inexperience of the Indians when he wrote, "They had never had land of their own before; they had no experience in dealing with woodland." Then Morton observed that the

---

<sup>24</sup>Council Paper No. 13 of 1906.

Indians had cut down the forest and burned over the land. Their first crops were abundant, but double cropping and injury to the soil from burning soon wore the land out. He pointed out that British settlers in Eastern Canada and in New Zealand were having the same results with the same procedure, and that the Chinese were experiencing a similar outcome in the Malay Peninsula. This observation was probably an effort to illustrate that failure due to this method of agriculture was not peculiar to the Indian. Those critical of Indian labor had a tendency to ascribe any failure to Indian shortcomings.

In the second cause, Morton blamed the Government for its lack of interest in the success or failure of the settlement scheme: "The people were left in their inexperience to fail, and then blamed."

A third cause of failure was the assumption that making the settlement wholly Indian would insure its success when the actual fact was that the Indians were unable to learn from each other. Whatever agricultural experience they might have had in India was ten years behind them.

Morton stated that a fourth cause for failure was the fact that the land chosen for settlements "was available only because no man would buy it." Whitelands village had been located on pure sand; Chandernagar was established in a swamp; Chin Chin was located West of a lagoon. As further evidence, Morton pointed out that settlements established by those who bought Crown Land had been successful because the conditions had been more suitable.

Morton concluded by stating that the Indian leaders lost confidence in the settlement projects and "turned their tribal opinion against it."

H. C. Stone related that there were many "abuses," and he pointed out three that he thought were the main causes of the failure of the settlement scheme. He began by saying that in 1872 the Government had levied taxes on the settlement. The Indians complained that they had been told that no taxes would be due for the first three years after they received their land. Then the Governor decided to remit the taxes; but according to Stone, "the mischief had already been done," and the Indians' distrust resulted in a lack of interest in further developing their lands.

Secondly, according to Stone, the Government allotted Crown land to the Indians that had been previously burnt over by squatters. This was serious enough, but the land was laid out in blocks with no roads. This resulted in the Indians having to pass through one another's land; and the outcome was stealing, quarrels, and attacks on each other with cutlasses. The majority, Stone says, abandoned their holdings and they were sold for taxes.

The most odious error occurred, however, when private land was allotted to the Indians by mistake. The owner had to bring action against the Government for 50 pounds per acre. The Government settled, but by this time all the grantees but one had sold their land at cost.

Stone pointed out that he had been recommending that settlement projects needed better supervision, and quoted from his annual report

of 1895:

This system is a good one, but to work it properly it must be put under the control of some responsible person acquainted with the Indian character. He should also be able to instruct and advise the grantees how to cultivate their allotments and encourage them to plant substantial crops instead of rice and corn, etc., which has always been the case with the majority of the grantees - unless this is done, I am afraid that it will be more injurious than beneficial to the Immigration System to allow an Immigrant to commute his Return Passage for land.

The committee recommended that the land in lieu of return passage idea be abandoned.

Of the more than one hundred and forty thousand East Indians who came to Trinidad only a little more than forty thousand returned to India. ~~The~~ The number returning to India decreased steadily toward the end of the century. By 1902 only one in five persons completing indenture chose to return to India.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1902, LXV, 788-789, 20.



Figure 11

Computation of Return Passages for Free Land Grants  
and Money: Statement of Benefits Received  
by Indian Immigrants during Indenture  
Labor System 1845-1917

Year	Men 10 acres	Men 5 acres & 5 pds	Men 5 pds	Men 5 acres	Women 5 pds	Total
1869	12					12
1870	22					22
1871	140					140
1872	162					162
1873	335	18			96	449
1874	85	394			133	612
1875	84	413			223	720
1876	68	247			110	425
1877	74	119			68	261
1878	96	183			77	356
1879	87	86	108	14	74	369
1880	3		172	1	146	322
1881			220		182	402
1882			209		191	400
1883			216		184	400
1884			104		96	200
1887			100		100	200
1888			100		100	200
1889			107		93	200
1890			1			
	1,168	1,460	1,337	15	1,873	5,852

Source: Records of Protector of Emigrants Office

## CHAPTER VII

### SOME PROBLEMS

#### The Woman and the Family

Wife murder became a constant source of trouble among Hindu indentured workers. Incidents such as the following were vividly reported in the local newspapers:

Two men dead and a woman seriously, perhaps fatally, injured. A murder, a suicide, and a woman maimed for life, perhaps her life taken - such is the record of the day at St. Augustin Estate, St. Joseph, on Saturday last. The faithlessness of a wife and the passionate jealousy of the husband are the causes leading up to the terrible affair for which the principals have suffered such an awful penalty. The story is the old, old one that has been the cause of so many tragedies since man first learned to deal harshly with his fellow man. Jageshar, a coolie man on the estate had a wife whom he loved. She in an evil hour met Ojir, another East Indian, upon whom she lavished that affection for which her husband yearned. The climax to all the acts of the domestic drama occurred when least expected and was witnessed by scarcely anyone. In that climax the injured husband retrieved his honour by ending the earthly career of his rival following the crime by attempting the life of his wife and taking his own.

Jageshar, the murderer, was a free coolie who was a labourer on the estate and lived with an indentured woman also working there. Amongst the other labourers was Ojir between whom Weeghama, the woman above referred to, their sprang a friendship and affection which Jageshar resented. He did not like the idea of Weeghama frequenting the room of Ojir and of her being so constantly his companion. At first he took only mild measures and tried to persuade the woman to leave the locality and take up life with him elsewhere. Persuasion was of no avail and threats were resorted to but still the woman declined to move. She protested that there was no cause for the jealousy of Jageshar. Time however revealed the truth to the

husband who discovered that Weeghana had been unfaithful and untruthful, having loved Ojir "not wisely but too well." On Saturday morning about 8 o'clock he told her of his discovery and said he would chop her for it. He was true to his word and that night performed the deed. He must have made preparation for the act for the cutlass with which the murder was committed has an edge like a razor. Truly it must have been "sharpened."

The coolies lived in a barracks with a front gallery. The occupant of one of the rooms was Delewah in front of whose door a hammock was swung. About 8 o'clock on Saturday night Weeghana paid a visit to Delewah in whose doorway she rested herself. In the hammock was Ojir lying on one side in a reclining posture with his head resting on his hands. The only other person in sight was a woman who was cooking in front of her doorway. It was to this peaceful scene that Jageshar came carrying his keen edged cutlass hidden beneath a kerchief. His approach was as unnoticed as that of death itself and he succeeded in getting behind Ojir, who knew nothing of his danger. Without a warning cry but working like a cowardly assassin from behind Jageshar whirled high his knife and with one powerful stroke severed the head of Ojir from his shoulders. A bare portion of the skin only connected the head and the trunk. Death came so suddenly that Ojir had no time to cry out nor even to move from his position and the head after being severed rested in his upturned palms as it had in sleep. Turning from the hammock to the doorway Jageshar faced The Faithless Weeghana whose every effort was to make her escape but she could not do so. Twice she was stabbed in the back both wounds dividing the shoulder blades and penetrating the cavity of the lungs. One of the ribs was completely divided and by another wound the third finger of the left hand was completely severed at the knuckle and another finger was badly cut. But it was on the head that the most ghastly work was done. One blow of the cutlass cut off a large piece of the scalp and took a portion of the skull while another wound of the same kind went still deeper. To illustrate the character of the cuts it may be said that the head reminded those who saw it of a coconut which had been cut by one blow, taking off a piece of the husk and leaving bare the inner nut. Under the attack the woman fell and Jageshar believing she was dead turned and fled into the bush where the horror of his position must have come to him for he cut his throat and when found shortly after by the search party that had started out upon the alarm being given, was dying with his death-dealing cutlass near his side. He was at once taken to the hospital but expired a few minutes after his arrival there. Weeghana who had

also been taken to the hospital, believing she was dying made a statement to the magistrate Mr. I. M. Power. Amongst other things she said she felt no pain whatever from her wounds.

Upon her outcry when attacked by the murderer a man ran to aid her and found her in a pool of blood. In the semi-darkness of the locality he saw that there was somebody in the hammock and seizing hold of Ojir, shook him shouting "up man; there is somebody cut here." Finding no response he looked again and then discovered that the man whom he was trying to arouse was a headless corpse. The affair created the most intense excitement in the locality and so great was the noise that it was believed that there had been a general uprising of the coolies on the estate.

Jageshar was a large man of immense strength, as indeed he must have been to render the blow which took the life of Ojir. The last named was a smaller man. The woman who the doctors say has no necessarily fatal wounds, yet who is most seriously injured, is delicate looking and appears far from being strong..... Disasters come not singly.

The murder is the third within a brief time, the other two being, one at Mayaro and one at Cedros.<sup>1</sup>

While wife murder was reported as "most revolting" in the Colony newspapers the Indian on the other hand was unable to comprehend the British attitude toward his act. A young Indian described by Charles Kingsley "as pretty, gentle, graceful a lad of two and twenty as one need see" replied when confronted with his deed, "I kill my own wife. Why not? I kill no other man's wife."<sup>2</sup> The prison authorities became almost fatalistic in their acceptance of the wife murder:

So long as there shall be in the Colony a large body of Asiatics who live as a race distinct from the rest of the labouring classes, keeping their own style of dress and observing their own peculiar traditions, it is useless to expect that the mere risk of death upon the scaffold will prevent their holding in Trinidad

---

<sup>1</sup>Port of Spain Gazette, 11 June 1895.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Kingsley, At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies. (New York: 1871), 272.

the same views with regard to their womankind that exist in the country from which they come.<sup>3</sup>

For the most part family structure in India is based on Hindu traditions.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the majority of the Indians indentured were Hindus. Therefore, it would be well to consider the Hindu family structure followed by a brief description of the Muslim Indian family traditions.

The impetus for family structure and practice came jointly from Hindu scripture and the practical dictates of the Indian style of living. The ancient Indian writings are not clear as to the extent to which the Hindu family was patriarchal. It is generally agreed, however, that the father in the ancient Hindu family did not possess "such wide power and authority as were enjoyed by the Roman father." Members of the family considered the father to be kind and "easily accessible" by other members of the family.<sup>5</sup>

Control and disposition of family property should help identify the extent to which the ancient Hindu family was patriarchal; however, the writings are not clear on this point either. Some authorities claim the father had absolute power to dispose of the family property at will while others cite ancient writings that indicate the father was

---

<sup>3</sup>Council Paper No. 47, Prison Report for 1885.

<sup>4</sup>Dr. Kapadia, Professor of Sociology and chairman of the Department of Sociology at the University of Bombay has written Marriage and Family in India, (Bombay: 1966) which is a synthesis of historical research, field studies and MA and PhD dissertations. This work will serve as the core of the following remarks.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 217.

bound to certain conditions of disposal. These conditions are another point of controversy as some indicate that primogeniture prevailed while others contend that the father was compelled to divide his property among his sons. Although division of property was allowed, charging the oldest son with maintaining the family property for the food of the family was also common. Sometimes this occurred even before the death of the father. Disinheritance of a son was also practiced but the stipulations were rather clear: Idiots, outcastes, the incurably ill, the irreligious could be excluded from inheritance.<sup>6</sup>

Daughters generally became members of families in other villages and were generally not included in inheritance. An exception did occur, however, when no sons were forthcoming. In such a case the inheritance went to the first male child of the daughter.<sup>7</sup> The wife inherited family wealth in the absence of other heirs. The uterine brothers and uterine sisters equally divided the property of the mother when she died.<sup>8</sup> Contact with the matrilineal Dravidians of Southern India may have liberalized female inheritance to a degree.<sup>9</sup>

This ambiguous tradition indicates that the patriarchal pattern and a trend toward individual families persisted side by side throughout Indian history. Nevertheless, the joint family remained

---

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 218-224.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 224.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 228.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 236.

the predominate structure among the Hindus. Evidence of this fact is revealed in the dependent and independent status recognized by Hindu custom. The wives, sons, and slaves have traditionally been recognized as dependents. The father, the mother (which seems ambiguous) and the oldest son have been recognized as independent. At the age of sixteen a male became independent only if his parents were dead; he never acquired independence until they were dead. Any business transacted by a son without authorization from his father was considered invalid.<sup>10</sup>

The woman in the Vedic Age (2000-1000 B.C.), a classic age in India, appears to have enjoyed a status that she was not to enjoy again in Indian history. The Vedic scriptures give her an equality that she later lost: "a man continues to be half as long as he remains a bachelor, but after marrying a wife he becomes complete; the Creator (Brahma) having divided his own body in two became male by one half and female by the other half; so divided, a man and woman become a perfect person only when united again in wedlock." Women were educated in Vedic India and were admonished to marry a learned young man. The husband was not to take a second wife as long as dharma (religious duty) and praja (progeny) were fulfilled by the first marriage.<sup>11</sup>

In the Manusmṛti we find the woman being deprived of her traditional status.<sup>12</sup> The female was not allowed to participate in the

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 224-225.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 250-251.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 252. The Manusmṛti are Hindu writings of the period 200 B.C. to A.D. 100.

sacraments of the Vedic religion as she had previously and thus lost her equal status before the gods. The writings of Manu now projected the ideal wife as negating her own personality and worshipping her husband as a god even when he displays undesirable qualities. In addition, Manu attributed sexual lust to the woman and characterized her as the temptress. "If she be chaste," the writings go on, "it is because she has not found the proper man, place, or opportunity." The book of Manu rationalized the ideal of life long fidelity of women to their husbands because of their "sexual impulses" and places them under the surveillance of the father in childhood, their husband after marriage, and their sons on the death of their husband.<sup>13</sup>

After the Muslim invasion of India in the eleven hundreds A.D. there was some reciprocal influence of cultural traits, but not to any great extent. The pre-Islamic Arab society considered the group and not the individual as the basic unit of society. The group inherited property. The family was patrilineal and kinship was recognized on the father's side. The marriage contract was based on the payment of a bride price. Thus the wife was considered as having been bought and was therefore a kind of chattel. She was even lent to guests as a mark of hospitality.<sup>14</sup>

After the introduction of Islam, adultery was not allowed and was even considered grounds for divorce; fidelity of the wife to the

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 252-254.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 38.



husband was expected ideally as well as in reality as Muhammad aimed at family stability in his teachings. Polygmy was allowed but monogamy was favored. The well known seclusion of women became the practice. Islam also vested some property rights in the woman. Very definite inheritance laws were introduced although the male portion was greater than the daughters or wives. Even so "man stands superior to women in that God had preferred the one over the other."<sup>15</sup>

These traditions explain the attitude of the husband, but they do not explain why the wife was prone to "wander" after she arrived in Trinidad and provoke her husband into violence. In seeking a cause for the numerous wife murders one of the first to be suspected was the paucity of Indian women in Trinidad. Planters were reluctant to accept women as indentures because they obviously could not work as hard as men. But, because of caste restrictions the Indian males with few exceptions would not mate with creole women.

The Government of India being more sensitive to the situation insisted on certain ratios between men and women. The ratio was set at one female to three males in 1857-1858. The next year the Government in hopes of setting a ratio based on experience in recruiting decided the ratio was to be based on past figures. The number of men recruited was not to exceed three times the number of female emigrants in the 1856-1857 season; by 1858-1859 the number of males was not to

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 203, 209, 211-212.

exceed twice the number of females in the 1857-1858 season.<sup>16</sup>

In 1860 the Government of India Act XLVI fixed the ratio at a set number again of 25 women for every 100 men.<sup>17</sup> Madras did not seem to have the same difficulty in making the quota and suggested in 1865 that it should be 35 women to 100 men but Calcutta would not agree. The Emigration Board in India suggested the ratio should be 50 women to 100 men.<sup>18</sup> In January of 1868 it was fixed at this ratio and Calcutta immediately objected on the grounds that the quota would lead to the recruitment of prostitutes and other low class women. As a result, the ratio was reduced to 33 to 100 by the Government of India, but the Colonial Office in London raised it again to 40 females to 100 males.<sup>19</sup> These set quotas continued to result in criticism of the type of women who were recruited plus reoccurring kidnappings.<sup>20</sup> Comins reported that there was just "no class of respectable single women among the coolie population in India."<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1858, XVI, 2452, Session 1, No. 26, 282.

<sup>17</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1874, XLVII, 314, J. Geoghegan, "Report on Coolie Emigration from India," 35.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>V. Richards, Annual Report on Emigration from the Port of Calcutta to British and Foreign Colonies for 1877-1878 (Calcutta: 1878), 12-13; D. W. D. Comins, "Note on the Abolition of Return Passages to East Indian Immigrants from the Colonies of Trinidad and British Guiana," in Notes on Indian Immigration, 1878-1893 (Calcutta: 1893), 73.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 72.

On the pretext that mortality was greater among female emigrants on the voyage to Trinidad, the ratio was reduced in 1878-1879 from 40 to 25 women to 100 men. A seeming paradox occurred as a result; family groups were turned back in favor of single men.<sup>22</sup> Finally provision was made to allow any excess number of females embarked on one vessel to apply toward the ratio on later vessels.<sup>23</sup>

When Comins visited Trinidad in 1891 he observed that "Many managers have talked to me about the small proportion of women, and no doubt the paucity of women causes many inconveniences in management, and there are many jealousies and quarrels."<sup>24</sup> Henry Mitchell in his annual report of 1859 on immigration stated, "The well balanced proportion between the sexes of the Indian children, 1,612 males to 1,434 females, augers favorably for their social future."<sup>25</sup>

Not everyone attributed the phenomenon of wife murder and the general unstableness of marital life among the Indians to the paucity of women. In 1888 Lechmere Guppy, an Englishman who had resided in Trinidad forty years, and who was serving as mayor of San Fernando submitted a memorandum to the Royal Franchise Commission:

---

<sup>22</sup>Trinidad Royal Gazette, LVIII, No. 53, "Protector of Immigrants Report, 1878-1879.

<sup>23</sup>Indian Emigration Act, 45.

<sup>24</sup>Comins, Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad (Calcutta: 1893), 72.

<sup>25</sup>Report of the Agent General of Immigrants for the Year 1859.

As first in the list of evils which afflict the Colony, I look upon the system of housing the Indian Immigrants in barracks. It was not introduced until after Major Fagan had been dismissed and the subjugation of the coolie to five years' indenture to a master imposed upon him by the Government had become complete. At the outset barracks were only built for the Indians who came unaccompanied by women, and free labourers were lodged as before in separate cottages. The first in Naparima was erected at Palmyra Estate, and I think that one was the first in the Island: but as the estates got fully supplied with coolies the cheapness of the barrack caused it to be adopted universally. The barrack is a long wooden building eleven or twelve feet wide, containing perhaps eight or ten small rooms divided from each other by wooden partitions not reaching to the roof. The roof is of galvanised iron, without any ceiling; and the heat of the sun by day and the cold by night take full effect upon the occupants. By standing on a box the occupant of one room can look over the partition into the adjoining one, and can easily climb over. A family has a single room in which to bring up their boys and girls if they have children. All noises and talking and smells pass through the open space from one end of the barrack to the other. There are no places for cooking, no latrines. The men and women, boys and girls, go together into the canes or bush when nature requires. Comfort, privacy and decency are impossible under such conditions. A number of these barracks are grouped together close to the dwelling house of the overseers, in order that they may with the least trouble put them out to work before daylight in crop time, which they do by entering their room and, if necessary, pulling them off their beds where they are lying with their wives. If a man is sick he is not allowed to be nursed by his wife, he must perforce go to the hospital far away, leaving his wife, perhaps without the means of subsistence, in such a room as I have described, to her own devices, amid the temptations surrounding her. With all this, can any one wonder at the frequent wife-murders and general demoralization amongst the Indian immigrants? In fact the barrack life is one approaching to promiscuous intercourse. And the evil is not confined to the coolies. No descent black labourer can take his wife to live amongst such surroundings..... The absentee proprietor is not there to witness the scandals. The overseers will tell you, as I have often been told by them, that they are put there to make sugar

and not to look after the morals of coolies.<sup>26</sup>

The barracks in general were a topic of discussion before the Sanderson Committee; and when asked about it the Protector of Immigrants, William Coombs, related that he had the tops of the partitions between the rooms latticed in order to prevent anyone from getting over from one room to another.<sup>27</sup>

Whatever the cause of the wife murders, the authorities were forced to deal with the problem. Transfer from one estate to another became an accepted practice in preventing violence after a woman changed partners.<sup>28</sup> The requests came either from the parties involved or an Inspector of Immigrants. The owners of estates many times had mixed feelings about transfers. Occasionally no estate owner was willing to accept an indentured worker who was having domestic problems. When this occurred, the worker was obliged to remain at the Immigration depot until some estate owner could be induced to indenture him.<sup>29</sup>

In 1881 an attempt was made to place Hindu and Moslem marriages on a legal basis in order to induce Indians to take legal rather than overt action against a marriage partner.<sup>30</sup> A petition was

---

<sup>26</sup> Cited in Williams, Trinidad and Tobago, 105-106.

<sup>27</sup> Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5193, "Sanderson Committee Report," 293.

<sup>28</sup> The Inspector of Immigrants Reports contained such requests.

<sup>29</sup> McNeill and Chimman Lal, Report to the Government of India, 33.

<sup>30</sup> Christian East Indians followed the same marriage laws as other British Christian subjects.

introduced to the Trinidad Legislative Council requesting an Ordinance for the registration of Indian marriages.<sup>31</sup> The petition was signed by 274 Indians and witnessed by three Canadian Missionaries, Morton, Grant, and Christie. The aim of the petitioners was to enable the Indians to seek legal redress against unfaithful spouses and "their partner in guilt."<sup>32</sup> The petition was accepted, and Ordinance No. 6 of 1881 provided that marriages had to be registered within six months after the ceremony. Those married before the enactment of the law had one year in which to register their marriage.

The law remained a dead letter. The Indians just did not bother to register their marriage. One well-to-do Indian related to the author, in a rather amused fashion, that according to law, he was an illegitimate child because of his parents Hindu wedding. One wonders what happened to the Indians who signed and entered the petition? Why did they not support the Ordinance after it was enacted? Evidently their only support was their signature and the real source of the idea originated somewhere else!

The 1881 Ordinance was incorporated into the 1899 Immigration Ordinance with certain additions. If an Indian immigrant threatened his wife, or the woman with whom he was cohabitating with violence, he could be jailed for one month. If obvious jealousy portended the

---

<sup>31</sup>Minutes of the Legislative Council of 28 January 1881.

<sup>32</sup>Council Paper No. 6 of 1881.

chance of bodily injury, the couple could be separated. If an Indian enticed someone's wife away he was liable to a fine of 20 pounds or six months imprisonment. A wife was no longer obligated to live with a husband convicted of aggravated assault. Moreover, the husband had to pay weekly alimony. Custody of the children and alimony was waived, however, if the wife was found guilty of uncondoned adultery. The Governor in 1895 commuted a death sentence to life at hard labor when it was brought to his attention that the husband had killed his wife as he had caught her in the act of adultery.<sup>33</sup>

Sometimes the obligations of the indenture contract interfered with marital life. Because of the requirement that indentured persons had to live on the estate to which they were indentured, if a husband's indenture ended before that of his wife, temporary separation sometimes occurred. If two people from separate estates decided to marry, or cohabituate, one or the other had to ask for a transfer.<sup>34</sup>

#### Health

Mortality and sickness on the estates were a constant concern in Trinidad: first because of the practical reason that both were

---

<sup>33</sup>Port of Spain Gazette, 28 April 1894.

<sup>34</sup>For descriptions of the East Indian family as it has emerged in the twentieth century see Morton Klass, East Indians in Trinidad (New York: 1961); Arthur and Juanita Niehoff, East Indians in the West Indies, Milwaukee Public Museum Publication Anthropology No. 6 (Milwaukee: 1960); Morris Freilich, Cultural Diversity Among Trinidad Peasants, PhD dissertation, Columbia University (Ann Arbor: 1960); Barton Schwartz, "Patterns of East Indian Family Organization in Trinidad," Caribbean Studies, Vol. 5, No. 1965, 23-36.

costly and reduced the efficiency of the estates; and secondly because of the ever watchful Anti-Slavery Society in England.

The mortality rates of the earlier years did not seem to be alarmingly high; possibly because of the lack of standards on calculating mortality rates. Then too, the high mortality on the voyage to Trinidad may have left only the healthy to be indentured. Whatever the reason, mortality appeared to range rather consistently below two percent.<sup>35</sup>

The Immigration Report for 1861, however, indicated that the number of deaths on estates was beginning to concern the Protector of Immigrants, Henry Mitchell. He blamed the deaths on the belief that immigrants from Madras were chronically unhealthy and that more of the Calcutta immigrants had been arriving in poor health.<sup>36</sup> Whether this explanation was an attempt to shift the blame or was sincerely believed is difficult to ascertain. In 1867 the death rate was 2.8 percent.<sup>37</sup> Since the largest number of deaths were among relatively new arrivals the Protector looked for factors connected with this occurrence. Again he found fault with the state of health among the arrivals from India. In this report he pointed out that the period when the immigrants arrived was the unhealthy season, and that the unclimatized immigrants

---

<sup>35</sup>Agent General of Immigrants Report, 1859.

<sup>36</sup>Trinidad Royal Gazette, XXVIII, No. 22, 28 May 1862.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., XXXV, No. 10, 6 March 1867.



were more subject to fevers and skin ulcers on the legs.<sup>38</sup> The requirement that food be given as part of the wages of new arrivals resulted from this criticism and consequently reduced the death rate of these groups by half.<sup>39</sup>

A pattern of mortality was beginning to emerge by the 1870's. Some estates had consistently high death rates whereas others did not. Some examples of estates with high death rates were Felicity, with 8.19 percent; Maracas Bay with 11.1; Perseverance with 8.2; Woodford Lodge, 6.4; St. Clair, 8.4; and Trafalgar with 10.2 percent.<sup>40</sup> Some estates with low death rates were Lothians with 1.0 percent, Glen Roy and Palmyra both having 1.5 percent, and Fairfield with 1.4 percent.<sup>41</sup> Those estates having high death rates were threatened with the possibility of being denied immigrants. The 1899 Immigration Ordinance stated that if an estate had a death rate six percent over the returns for all of Trinidad for a period less than three years or of one percent over the general mean death rate over a five year period, the estate was to be denied immigrants.

Causes of high death rates and general sickness were difficult to ascertain with the medical knowledge available at the time. The chronological reports reflect this lack of knowledge and become more

---

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Agent General of Immigrants Report, 1869.

<sup>40</sup>Council Paper No. 64 of 1876.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

sophisticated as more knowledge was gained. Dysentary and ulceration of the lower extremities were frequently listed in earlier reports.<sup>42</sup> Yellow fever, typhoid, malignant and comatose fevers were reported as causes by 1869.<sup>43</sup> In the 1870's anemia, debility and exhaustion were most frequently listed. By the 1880's malaria had become the number one killer and cause of illness.<sup>44</sup> Leprosy had also become a problem. By the early 1900's ankylostmiasis, a form of hookworm, had become second to malaria. Near the close of the indenture system diseases treated in the Colonial hospitals were 3,176 cases of malaria, 1,613 cases of ankylostmiasis, 1,018 cases of skin diseases, and 836 cases of digestive diseases.<sup>45</sup>

Ganja smoking and excessive rum drinking were treated as health as well as moral concerns. There was little success in stopping rum drinking, but an Ordinance passed in 1885 taxing ganja production at \$100 an acre put a damper on production for many years. Some smuggling of ganja occurred by East Indians who had absconded to Venezuela early in the indenture period.<sup>46</sup> Most officials were convinced that ganja

---

<sup>42</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1852-53, LXVII, 936, Part III, Enclosure in No. 66 of "Report of Superintendent of Immigrants," 42.

<sup>43</sup>Agent General of Immigrants Report, 1869.

<sup>44</sup>Protector of Immigrants Report, 1880-1881 (Council Paper, No. 4 of 1881).

<sup>45</sup>Protector of Immigrants Report, 1915 (Council Paper, No. 132 of 1916).

<sup>46</sup>Comins, Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad, 43.

smoking led to insanity and contributed to wife murders and other crimes among the East Indians.<sup>47</sup> They made a concerted effort to stamp out ganja production and smoking, but the author was told by many that it was still rather widespread in Trinidad.

To the Trinidad Government the logical way to control health matters on the estates was with hospitals and proper medical facilities. Planters were not always convinced that this was correct, so legal coercion and some compromise were occasionally employed. The Indians themselves were not always persuaded of the necessity of some of the Trinidad health measures.

When the Indians first came to Trinidad many of the estate owners were prone to dismiss workers who became ill. As a result the Trinidad Ordinance No. 34 of 1854 states that indentured laborers who became ill would receive whatever allowances they needed to maintain themselves during the illness. In 1857 it became necessary for a physician to certify that adequate medical and living accommodations were available before an estate was allowed to receive indentured immigrants.<sup>48</sup> Ordinance No. 16 of 1862 made it possible for the local Justice of the Peace to hospitalize any indentured worker whom he deemed needed such treatment. The estate owner was required to pay twenty four cents per day to the hospital plus a health allowance to

---

<sup>47</sup>Council Paper No. 32 of 1884 and Council Paper No. 29 of 1885.

<sup>48</sup>Trinidad Royal Gazette, XXIII, No. 22, 3 June 1857.

the patient.

The first step toward estate hospitals occurred in the consolidating Ordinance of 1865. An employer who owned several estates, or a group of employers could build a private hospital for the use of estate workers. The hospital had to meet certain specifications, including the employment of a physician.<sup>49</sup> In 1866 the Estate Hospital Ordinance was passed making it a requirement for an estate to maintain a hospital or be subject to the loss of indentured workers to other estates. A discription of the hospital was to be furnished to the Governor of Trinidad.<sup>50</sup> The hospital was to be visited at least twice a week or be subject to fine. The Agent General of Immigrants was also to make periodic visits. A record of treatment was to be kept<sup>51</sup> and a quarterly report on the hospital was to be submitted by each estate. In order to apply the pressure of public opinion, Ordinance No. 3 of 1867 provided for the publication in the Royal Gazette of estates which had certified hospitals, and of those estates which had lost their certification.

In 1872 the following regulations for estates employing indentured workers were given wide dissemination:

---

<sup>49</sup> Ordinance No. 3 of 1865.

<sup>50</sup> See Figure 12.

<sup>51</sup> See Figure 13.

**Certified Hospitals:**

1. Every hospital shall be separate and detached from all other buildings, and shall be at all times properly drained, and the drains shall be at all times kept open and clean. Penalty, 21 pounds.
2. No certified hospital shall be at any time used for any other purpose. Penalty, 5 pounds.
3. Every hospital shall be provided with such accommodations for cooking as shall satisfy the Inspecting Officer; also such accommodation for the removal of the night-soil as shall be deemed satisfactory by the Inspecting Officer. Penalty, 2 pounds.
4. A sufficient supply of pure and drinkable water for the use of the patients shall be kept within such reasonable distance of the hospital as the Inspecting Officer may approve or direct. Penalty, 2 pounds.
5. Every hospital used for indentured immigrants shall (if not already painted), be whitewashed once at least in every year and a note of the time of the same being so whitewashed shall be entered by the employer in the Case Book kept at such hospital. Penalty, 2 pounds.
6. In every hospital every bedstead, if of wood or iron, shall be provided with a bed and a stuffed pillow of sacking or ticking, and a blanket; if the bedstead be a canvas stretcher, with a pillow of the kind above mentioned, and a blanket. All such blankets shall be inspected from time to time, and shall at all times be kept clean. Penalty, 4 pounds.
7. Every bed to be provided with a tin plate, mug, and basin. Penalty, 1 pound.
8. A clean hospital dress shall be supplied to each patient on admission, such dress to consist of a pair of loose drawers and a shirt, to be renewed from time to time as may be directed by the medical attendant, and shall be used by such patient whilst an inmate of the hospital. Penalty, 2 pounds.
9. No immigrant shall be allowed to wear his own clothes. Penalty, 2 pounds.

10. The clothes taken from a patient on admission shall be washed and returned to him when he is discharged from hospital cured. Penalty, 1 pound.

11. Patients, while in hospital shall be provided by the employer free of charge or stoppages, with cooked food in quantities named in such of the dietary tables hereunto annexed as the medical visitor may order - or with such special diet as the medical visitor may order, under penalty of one pound per day for every patient on which any such patient is not so supplied. Penalty, 1 pound.

12. A sufficient supply of such medicine, nourishment, and medical comforts as may be ordered by the medical attendant shall be kept at or near each hospital. Penalty, 4 pounds.

13. The employer shall cause the medicines ordered by the medical visitor to be given to each patient. Penalty, 4 pounds.

14. All food required to be provided for immigrants by the Immigration Ordinance or by these regulations shall be served to them by measure. Penalty, 4 pounds.

15. When a medical visitor alters the diet of a patient from that mentioned in the annexed dietary scale, he shall note the same in the Case Book, stating what he has specially ordered instead. Penalty, 5 pounds.

16. Medical visitor shall report to the Agent General within one week every case in which he shall find that any of the preceding hospital regulations have not been complied with, or the patients have not received the diet or medicines ordered for them. Penalty, 5 pounds.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup>Guppy's Almanak, (1874), 47-49.

Figure 12

Trinidad

I \_\_\_\_\_ Agent General (or as the case may be) of Immigrants do hereby certify that on the requisition of Owner (or Person in charge) of the Plantation \_\_\_\_\_ in the Ward of \_\_\_\_\_ I have inspected a Building on the said Plantation intended to be used as a Hospital and that the said Building is well ventilated and otherwise fit to be used as a Hospital, and that the dimensions of the said Building are as follows:

Length \_\_\_\_\_ feet

Breadth \_\_\_\_\_ feet

Height from floor to Plate \_\_\_\_\_ feet

Height from floor to Ridge \_\_\_\_\_ feet

and that the internal contents of the said Building are \_\_\_\_\_ cubic feet, and that the said Building is capable of accommodating \_\_\_\_\_ Patients.

Given under my hand this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 186 \_\_\_\_.

Figure 13

Case Book of the Hospital of the Plantation

Date of Visit	Date of Admission	Name	Sex	Age	Disease	Diet	Treatment
---------------	-------------------	------	-----	-----	---------	------	-----------

---

<sup>54</sup>Port of Spain Gazette, 4 July 1866.



In 1883 the provision was added that a full time nurse was to be available at each estate hospital.<sup>55</sup>

The cocoa industry was becoming important during the latter nineteenth century and made a commotion because they were not being allotted indentured Indians.<sup>56</sup> The Trinidad Government, possibly as a result, relaxed the requirement for estates to have hospitals by Ordinance No. 3 of 1887. If the estate could satisfy the Governor that a Government hospital was near by, the requirement to have an estate hospital could be waived.

Dr. Comins, who would of course have a more than ordinary interest, made several observations concerning estate hospitals. He was critical of the fact that visits of "government medical officers" were much too infrequent. Patients came and went without having been checked by the government physician.<sup>57</sup> Also alarming to Dr. Comins was the fact that medicines were being mixed and dispensed by estate's personnel. He recommended that previously prepared doses only be given out in this fashion.<sup>58</sup> James McNeill and Chimmon Lal discovered on their inspection tour in 1915 that neither of Dr. Comins' suggestions

---

<sup>55</sup> Council Paper No. 31 of 1883.

<sup>56</sup> Minutes of the Council and letters to the editor concerning this topic were published with editorial comment in the Port of Spain Gazette, 7 December 1886, 31 December 1887, 18 January 1888.

<sup>57</sup> Comins, Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad, 49.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

had been instituted.<sup>59</sup>

Dr. Comins also noted a wide disparity in the estate hospitals. The hospital on Aranguez Estate was adequate enough to serve a provincial town.<sup>60</sup> The hospital on Rivers Estate in Diego Martin had a leaky roof, seven torn stretchers, two torn and dirty mattresses and two old suits of hospital clothing. The patients were treated as outpatients.<sup>61</sup>

Although the 1899 Immigration Ordinance appeared to tighten up the regulations concerning estate hospitals, McNeill and Lal's observations leads one to believe that there was some disparity between principle and practice. Both Norman Lamont and Dr. Henry Clare suggested to the Sanderson Committee that central government operated hospitals would be preferable to estate hospitals.<sup>62</sup> In spite of what appeared to many as shortcomings in medical facilities Trinidad was able to reduce its death rate from 3.73 percent in 1875 to 1.35 percent in 1915.

---

<sup>59</sup>McNeill and Lal, Report to the Government of India, 15.

<sup>60</sup>Comins, "Dairy" in Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad, 4.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>62</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5193, "Sanderson Committee Report," 306 and 330.

### Religion

To cross the kala pani (black water) was considered an act of defilement to the Hindus. This may explain why the Indian clung so tenaciously, in name at least, to Hinduism. Hindu temples were built on estates as early as the 1860's. The prayer flags of the Hindus fly today in the yards of Indian homes. The Muslims, likewise, continued to practice their religion. Temples, mosques and shrines can be seen today throughout Trinidad. The Christian missionaries were never very successful in proselyting although many devoted years to working among the East Indians.<sup>63</sup>

It is a curious phenomenon that the Indians of Trinidad, the great majority of whom were Hindus, adopted as their religious festival the Hosein, a festival practiced by a sect within the Muslim religion. The festival was one of the more visible manifestations of the Indian's religion and was reported regularly in the newspapers. No doubt it was because the Hosein in the early days led to violent outbreaks among the Indians.

Each year the Shi'ite sect of the Muslims commemorate the murder of Hosein, the grandson of Muhammad by constructing a colorful replica of his tomb (a taziya) and carrying it in procession. Why the Hindus were attracted to this festival is still not clear. Possibly because it was Indian and in a nationalistic spirit they joined their Muslim

---

<sup>63</sup>See S. E. Morton, John Morton of Trinidad (Toronto: 1916) and Kenneth James Grant, My Missionary Memories (Halifax: 1923).

brethern in celebration. Or it could have been a competitive spirit with the carnival, a supposedly Christian activity of the creoles. Indians competed among themselves in the construction of taziyas.

Kenneth Grant indicates that the Hosein started in the 1850's.<sup>64</sup> Disturbances started immediately. In 1859 a riot broke out in St. Joseph and the parades in Port-of-Spain were so unruly that there was fear of violence.<sup>65</sup> In 1865 a riot between the Woodford Lodge Estate and the Endeavour Estate over who would march first with the taziya resulted in the death of a Chinese.<sup>66</sup> The Creole and Chinese workers had gone to the aid of their fellow estate laborers and seemingly received the worst end of the affair. Riots occurred again in the 1870's. In 1885 the degree of violence in the Hosein riots resulted in a formal investigation.<sup>67</sup> Unruliness of the Hosein was taken as so matter-of-fact that in 1895 the Port of Spain Gazette reported as newsworthy that the "festival came off quietly yesterday in the Eastern districts."<sup>68</sup>

Other religious ceremonies were noted in the newspapers from time to time. In 1849 a goat was sacrificed, a puja generally performed by the lower castes.<sup>69</sup> Again in 1854 a goat wearing garland of red

---

<sup>64</sup> Grant, My Missionary Memories, 69.

<sup>65</sup> Port-of-Spain Gazette, 13 July 1859.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 14 June 1865.

<sup>67</sup> Parliamentary Paper, 1884-1885, LIII, 4366, "The Recent Coolie Disturbances in Trinidad,"

<sup>68</sup> Port of Spain Gazette, 6 July 1895.

<sup>69</sup> The Trinidadian, 21 November 1849.

flowers standing in a circle of pans of rice and bottles of rum and molasses was beheaded to the sound of drums.<sup>70</sup> Another ceremony that intrigued the non-Indians on the island was "walking through the fire." In 1891 the Port of Spain Gazette reported that two thousand persons had witnessed the ceremony, many having ridden from town (Port-of-Spain) "in cabs and carriages."<sup>71</sup> These ceremonies and festivals were sources of criticisms for those opposed to immigration.

### Integration

East Indians in Trinidad today feel that the Creoles of Negro descent resented the Indians because they had upset a desirable labor situation in which the Creoles had the advantage. Charles Kingsley stated essentially this point when he observed "the negro... hates the Coolie as a hard-working interloper."<sup>72</sup> Sewell noted "It has been, again, stated that the introduction of East Indian Coolies into West Indian islands has excited a dangerous jealousy in the minds of the Creole population."<sup>73</sup> James Stark wrote "there is a strong opposition by the colored and Negro part of the community against its continuance (Indian immigration)..... They fear the Indian on account of his great

---

<sup>70</sup>Port of Spain Gazette, 13 January 1855.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 25 August 1891.

<sup>72</sup>Kingsley, At Last, 148.

<sup>73</sup>Sewell, Ordeal of Free Labor, 131.

industry and frugality."<sup>74</sup> Melville and Frances Herskovits observed, "From the first, the Negroes showed no liking for these new arrivals (Indians), and this feeling was reciprocated."<sup>75</sup>

The one vote that was cast year in and year out against Indian immigration was cast by a Negro lawyer, Prudhomme David, a Nominated member of the Crown Colony Legislative Council. In one of his opposing speeches he stated: "the cry of scarcity (of labor) rested upon only this foundation - that the planters by means of this artificial means of drawing their labour supply from India had grown so much accustomed to paying a low rate of wage, that the real fact of the matter was not that there was a scarcity of labour but that they could not get that labour on account of the insufficiency of the remuneration they had grown accustomed to pay."<sup>76</sup>

The Trinidad newspapers carried on editorial battles with each other concerning East Indian immigration, and residents of Trinidad did so through letters to the editor. In May of 1851 the Port of Spain Gazette carried the following:

The universal characteristics of the Hindoos are  
habitual disregard of truth, pride, tyranny, theft,  
falsehood, deceit, conjugal infidelity, filial

---

<sup>74</sup>James Stark, Guidebook and History of Trinidad (Port-of-Spain: 1892), 75.

<sup>75</sup>Melville and Frances Herskovits, Trinidad Village, (New York: 1947), 19.

<sup>76</sup>Hansard, Speech delivered before the Legislative Council 7 November 1904.

disobedience, ingratitude (the Hindoos have no word expressive of thanks), a litigious spirit, perjury, treachery, covetousness, gaming, servility, hatred, revenge, cruelty, private murder, the destruction of illegitimate children..<sup>77</sup>

Later in the year the Trinidad Free Press and the Port of Spain Gazette fought it out over the Legislative Council's vote to bring more East Indian Indentures to Trinidad. The Free Press lamented that the Legislative Council was determined to convert "the Emerald Isle of the West into a den for the naked Heathens of the East."<sup>78</sup> The Free Press referred to the Indians as "Ignorant Pagans" - "naked Heathens" - "people of vicious brutal, and superstitious habits," and accused Indians of making their "disgusting meals off the flesh of dead animals."<sup>79</sup> The Port of Spain Gazette replied to this as well as other claims with tongue-in-cheek humor: "the only race of people we know of who eat the flesh of living animals are the Abyssinians, who, according to Bruce, cut a steak of the rump off a cow, and then turn the rest of the animal out to graze."<sup>80</sup> The real crux of the Free Press argument came when it asserted that Africans and other laborers are "no longer to be found in the cane fields" because the local government has driven them from the fields by introducing the East Indians who will

---

<sup>77</sup> Port of Spain Gazette, 6 May 1851.

<sup>78</sup> Trinidad Free Press, 9 December 1851.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Port of Spain Gazette, 19 December 1851.

work at any price, even at "twenty cents per day or less," because they are "half naked, deeply degraded, and herb-eating."<sup>81</sup>

These continual polemics concerning the East Indian finally elicited the following letter to the editor of the Port of Spain Gazette:

Sahib,

Yours' high caste newspaper - I high caste Coolie. I write you letter. Put it in your paper. - I pay what you ask. Sahib, shopkeeper here on estate, take low caste newspaper, call it Palladium. Some time, labor done, I sits down in shop; I hear shopkeeper read that paper; always speak against Coolie. Coolie eat grass - eat dead cow, dead cat, dog, any thing bad and nasty. I ask shopkeeper - that man ever come to Naparima? He said "No, never-never go out of Port of Spain." So I say, he see only lazy, low caste Coolies there - very bad people indeed, but no plenty - perhaps one hundred. Coolies here in Trinidad, six thousand fine people, sir; work well upon estates; make plenty of sugar. Naparima planters say, "No Coolie, no sugar - no sugar - all people get money go other country - leave Trinidad to ignorant negro." So you see Coolie very useful. Now, sir, this low caste paper tell lie. Town Coolie low caste fellow, tell lie. Town Coolie low caste fellow, very dirty, very lazy; but country Coolie - Naparima Coolie - very clean, house clean, cloths clean, wife clean, children clean, wash every day, eat good food, nice fowl, nice goat, plenty nice rice. Plenty Coolie live so - two thousand, three thousand, five thousand. When they say, Coolie bad man - Coolie dirty, Coolie eat nastiness, carrion dead cat, dog, every thing nasty. Suppose I see two, three, say an hundred black or colored men - dirty fellows, great blackguards, tell lie, steal, do all bad thing - then I go about I say negro people and colored people all dirty fellows, great blackguards, tell lie, steal - what that man say? Say that not true; if one bad, all not bad. He get very much vexed; take me to the court, or watch me in the road, take stick, lick me.

Sir, I beg this man come see me at Naparima; ask for

---

<sup>81</sup>Trinidad Free Press, 9 December 1851.



Sirdar Jaumeer Jendar. But perhaps I find him dirty - don't have clean shirt, wear cloth breeches, don't wash at all, don't smell agreeable - then I make him take bath, put him on good clothes, quite clean, make him look respectable. Then his friends atonished when they see him. Then I call for him Coolie barber; barber cut his hair, shave him clean, make him look like gentleman; then I give him good to eat, good to drink; then he say "Coolie good fellow, better than negro, better very much; work better, live better, and put by money." Then when he go I give him letter to my friend Capt Allen, Treasure. He show him plenty thousand dollars in bank - Coolie put there. I put \$700 myself. Cholera come, Coolie got money in bank, can buy plenty food; - poor negro with no food, no money; he work too little sir, and all go for rum - rum too much. Then he put in his paper "Governor send for plenty more Coolie. Coolie for ever. Nothing for Trinidad like plenty Coolie."

Salam, Sahib  
Jaumeer Jendar<sup>82</sup>

South Naparims Western Ward  
1st August 1854

Indians become the class that Negroes could discriminate against. Indians did the jobs that slaves had previously done. Indians had to have passes to leave the estate and were thus restricted in their movements. Indians who finished their indenture time had to carry exemption paper. "Slave, where is your free paper?" was a taunt the Negroes used against the Indians.<sup>83</sup> The common term for workers in the Orient: "Coolie" soon became a term of derision. On the other hand, the Indians were quick to pick up the term "nigger." The Indians were

---

<sup>82</sup>Port of Spain Gazette, 16 August 1854.

<sup>83</sup>Colonial Office 295, Vol. 267, Rennie to Kimberley, 14 April 1873, Mitchell's enclosure.

soon to receive the characterization as deceitful, a criticism very generally used against a servile class; the following article is a case in point:

A Coolie is the hero and the Assistant Protector of Immigrants, a Ward constable of Maraval, and the Warden too, are the victims of rather a good story which is being told. On Sunday last a coolie man called upon Mr. Stone, Assistant Protector of Immigrants and though apparently bathed in tears and choked with sobs managed to tell a rather pitiful story. He said that he was recently out of gaol (prison) and had no money. His wife, the apple of his eye, had just died and he could not secure a "box" to bury her in. He said he had walked all the way from Laventelle. The Assistant Protector was softened in his heart and gave the afflicted one a shilling and also furnished him with a note to the Warden. The Warden handed the man on to a Ward constable who provided the box and a porter to carry it. He then began to think that perhaps the death was one which enquiry into was needed so he took a cab and went to find the body. He searched Laventille but could not find the woman and therefore he started to return. On his way he met the coolie and the porter with the "box" and explained that he had been unable to find the body. "Come with me" said the Coolie, "its away back in the woods" so the Constable turned back and walked and walked and walked. Finally the woods became so thick that the coffin stuck and could be carried no further and while an effort was being made to extricate it the coolie disappeared. Here was a predicament. To leave the coffin was only to surrender it to the coolie; to secure porters to carry it back was impossible and to carry it themselves was very undesirable. The last named course however was of necessity adopted and it is unnecessary to state that the constable with the coffin returned a sadder but a wiser man. The next Coolie who applies for a coffin will have to furnish clear proofs of his bona fides or take the consequences.<sup>84</sup>

With lack of sexual competition between the Creole and the Indian, or any other discernable kind of competition, the seemingly

---

<sup>84</sup>Port of Spain Gazette, 16 February 1895.

obvious one of job competition remained. From what has already been said, one is led to believe that economics was the real reason for bad relations between Negro and Indian labor. However, Peter Abel in giving evidence before the Sanderson Committee in 1909 stated that the working class Negroes were not against the Indians, just agitators and politicians.<sup>85</sup> Abel had been an administrator of estates in British Guiana for over fourteen years and at the time of the Sanderson Committee investigation had been an administrator in Trinidad for twenty six years.

The arguments concerning the immigrants waxed and waned throughout the indenture period. In the early period of indenture it was said that the expression "That's right massa, get plenty of coolies to grow canes for aw wee to grind in the crop season," represented the attitude of Negro Creoles toward Indian labor.<sup>86</sup> The point, of course, was that Negroes did not want to do field labor, but rather the more prestigious jobs of grinding and mill work. If the Indians did not come to grow the cane then the sugar estates would be forced to shut down and the mill work would no longer be available. So there was no economic competition, but rather the two groups complimented each other in sugar production. Whether this point of view was contrived on the part of the sugar estate owners or not is debatable, but it is held to

---

<sup>85</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5193, "Sanderson Committee Report," 416.

<sup>86</sup>Port of Spain Gazette, 19 December 1851.

be the more accurate view of relations between the two groups of laborers.<sup>87</sup>

Personal observations on the author's part seem to reveal that a great many cliches and stereotypes were formed in the early days when the two races came together. They have been passed on from one generation to the next but in everyday activities they are ignored. Only under stress do they seem to surface. When independence of Trinidad appeared to be near, the Negro Creoles and the East Indians began to openly dwell on all these inherited attitudes. The Indian fearing the political preponderance of the Negro remembered the stories of the overbearing Creole constable and the Negro thought of the West Indies as being the domain of the Negro and the Indians were after all late-comers and coolies at that.

---

<sup>87</sup> See for example Donald Wood, Trinidad in Transition (London: 1968), 136-137.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

The SS Ganges, the last East Indian immigrant ship to Trinidad, arrived on the 22nd of April 1917. On board were 247 males, 115 females, 12 boys, 10 girls, and 10 infants.<sup>1</sup> What caused the indenture system to finally come to an end? From an economic standpoint, the decline of the sugar industry in the last decade of the nineteenth century probably signalled the beginning of the end. But how do we explain the fact that Trinidad planters of both sugar and cocoa came together in a meeting in 1894 and published a memorial that for the good of the colony the number of indentures from India should be substantially increased.<sup>2</sup> Cocoa, to be sure, was on the upswing, but sugar was in the throes of a depression. World overproduction and competition from Cuban cane sugar and the beet sugar industry had driven the selling price below the cost of producing sugar in Trinidad. Why, then, were the planters of Trinidad calling for more laborers from India? In a conversation in Trinidad with a very astute young creole girl, the author was told that she thought that indenture labor had been needed when it first came to Trinidad but by the 1880's the need no longer existed; but the

---

<sup>1</sup>N. P. Bowen and B. G. Montwerin (eds.), Colony of Trinidad and Tobago Census Album (Port of Spain: 1948), 15.

<sup>2</sup>Port of Spain Gazette, 24 January 1894.

inertia of the system kept it going long after its need had expired. This seems to be an accurate analysis as the planters used much the same arguments for bringing indentured labor to the island in the 1890's as they had earlier in the century. In 1851 it was argued:

In the crop (during harvest time), Coolie labor is still more indispensable for the manufacture. They indifferently take any kind of work offered them; and whilst the creoles choose their own employment and the African, once set about one kind of work, will not move to another; the Coolie may be shifted about to stop the gaps occasioned by the reckless and independent habits of the creoles. The manager is informed in the morning that one of his best carters is absent - at a fete or a wake, or a dance, or a christening, from not one of which diversions would he stop away if he knew the direct consequence would be to consign the entire estate, and every one on it, but himself and his own family, to immediate perdition. His frolic he must enjoy, and were not the patient, all-enduring Coolie ready and willing to become his locum tenens - a berth the African indignantly disdains - the whole work of the estate for the day would have to come to a stand-still. This gap has been hardly stopped, then another is discovered - the fire-man is absent - he has been at a "wake" some miles distant, and has not returned. Again a coolie, and none but a coolie, can be found to stop the gap - and thus at times, but for half a dozen coolies, who can be put to any work required, the number of working days of our estates would be dwindled down to one-half, or more likely the estate would be altogether deserted by the other laborers, who are willing to work in their respective departments - though they will take no other - and who lose their days labor by the absence of one or two persons whose department cannot be filled up - if there be a want of coolies.<sup>3</sup>

Speaking of the creoles in 1893 G. T. Fenwick, a member of the Council stated:

It is a very mistaken notion on their part to think that agricultural labour was in any way degrading, but that

---

<sup>3</sup>Port of Spain Gazette, 19 December 1851.

idea had spread and was spreading, and everyday we saw fewer and fewer of the creoles of the Colony pursuing agricultural work..... Times without number coming down the public road in the morning you would meet a dozen or so, and ask why they were not working - 'cannot get work!' 'It is impossible, I can give you work. Go and weed.' 'Don't weed, Sir.' 'Well, there is forking work to do, I can give you forking either by contract or by the day's work.' 'We don't fork.' 'Well there is drilling work to be done.' 'Don't drill.' 'Well what do you do?' 'I dig dirt;' another says 'I do draining,' another says 'I do cutlassing.' 'I have not cutlassing or draining work to do, but drilling, weeding or whatever other work there may be but he does not do that work.'<sup>4</sup>

Maybe the planters looked upon this late nineteenth century depression in much the same light as the crisis at the end of apprenticeship in 1838. The Indentured Indian had prevented the demise of the sugar industry then and would do so now. Charles Leotaud said as much in an 1893 Council debate on Indian immigration:

We had a visit about two years ago from a very eminent man who had travelled in the East Indies and been to Mauritius and Bourbon; he came here commissioned by the French Government - it was Docteur Lacaze - he was introduced to the present Administration, and with a letter of introduction he visited all our institutions; he remained for a fortnight in the Colony, and when he was about to leave he said, 'Mr. Leotaud, I can only congratulate you on the prosperity of Trinidad,' and he said 'we have not got very far to go to find out the cause of that prosperity and the difference when compared to other West Indian Islands that I have visited,' and he spoke of Guadeloupe and Martinique, He said, 'There is no doubt that they are pushing and fighting, but I cannot compare either Guadeloupe or Martinique with the island of Trinidad.' And then he (Mr. Leotaud) put the question 'Have you got the reason, do you know why?' He said, 'Certainly, I had only to cast my eyes around me when I found that the main cause of the

---

<sup>4</sup>Council Minutes, 21 August 1893; Port of Spain Gazette, 23 August 1893.

prosperous position of your island is your coolie immigration.' (hear, hear).<sup>5</sup>

There were voices speaking out against the indenture system however. The West Indian Commission of 1897, in making recommendations for overcoming the depression, suggested that the sugar industry be converted into a system of small proprietors who would sell their cane to the sugar factories. The cane farmer, as the small proprietor is called in Trinidad, was securing a foothold in the sugar industry and the Commissioners were optimistic about the future of this type of production. The cane farmer eventually controlled fifty percent of the sugar acreage and about forty percent of the production.<sup>6</sup>

The Trinidad Workingmen's Association, composed of Negro creoles, went on record as being opposed to Indian immigration. The obvious reason was job competition.

The cost of immigration was paid by a tax on sugar exports from Trinidad. Later a tax was imposed on cocoa exports also as cocoa estates began to accept more Indentures for labor. When the cost of immigration surpassed the collected taxes, the excess was paid from the general revenue. Some opposed this on the grounds that the whole colony was paying for something that went only to the planters. The planters countered this criticism by the argument that the sugar industry benefited the whole colony.

---

<sup>5</sup>Council Minutes, 23 August 1893; Port of Spain Gazette, 24 August 1893.

<sup>6</sup>Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Working of the Sugar Industry in Trinidad (Port-of-Spain: 1948), 22.



There were three individuals in Trinidad who were unceasing in their opposition to the importation of East Indians for labor. One was the previously referred to Negro lawyer on the Legislative Council, Prudhomme David. It was his contention that enough free labor existed in Trinidad if the planters would just pay for it. Another opponent was Henry Alcazar, the Mayor of Port-of-Spain. He argued that the system of indenture was little better than slavery.<sup>7</sup> Indenture had a demoralizing affect on the employer as well as on the worker, Alcazar contended.

Their third opponent was Lechmere Guppy. He served as Mayor of San Fernando and as a member of the Council, and opposed indenture immigration on the grounds that the sugar industry should not have been saved, but that the cocoa industry should have been the backbone of the island's industries. Guppy said:

The fertile soil and favourable climatic conditions of Trinidad have saved her throughout the unceasing deprecations and mis-government which she has undergone at the hands of her 'saviour' (the sugar interests). Montserrat is proof of this. Without any capital beyond the earnings of their daily labour, not only without any assistance from authority, but in disregard of the Proclamations and denunciations of Governors and Attorneys-General and Magistrates, the squatter-pioneers carried their axes beyond the domain of the sugar planters into the trackless forest, and there, not only raising from the soil their daily subsistence but patiently and laboriously stringing for their future wealth, by planting cocoa trees, for the fruit of which they had to await many years, they laid the

---

<sup>7</sup>West Indian Royal Commission of 1897; Williams, Trinidad and Tobago, 112-113; Port of Spain Gazette, 8 August 1895.

foundations of one of the most beautiful, most productive and most valuable Districts of the Island.<sup>8</sup>

Opposition to the indenture system mounted at the turn of the century in England and India. Members of Parliament stated before the Sanderson Committee that the indenture system was very close to slavery in nature and that it should be stopped.<sup>9</sup> The First World War interfered with the transport of Indians to the colonies to such an extent that the Secretary of State wrote the Governor of Trinidad in 1914 that recruiting would have to be stopped temporarily.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, Indians wanted emigration as a system for recruiting labor to be stopped permanently. In 1916 Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya put a resolution before the Indian Legislative Assembly which would abolish the indenture system.<sup>11</sup> Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy of India, accepted the resolution stating that the Indian people felt that indenture was a system degrading those who engaged in it and that indenture would be stopped.<sup>12</sup> In 1917 the Secretary of State informed the Governor of Trinidad that the indenture system was at an end.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>Testimony before the Royal Commission of 1888 - quoted in Williams, Trinidad and Tobago, 114.

<sup>9</sup>Parliamentary Paper, 1910, XXVII, 5193, "Sanderson Committee Report," 41.

<sup>10</sup>Trinidad Dispatch No. 390, 13 November 1914.

<sup>11</sup>Kirpalani and others, Indian Centenary Review, 51.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Trinidad Dispatch No. 263, 30 August 1917.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

#### Public Documents

Agent-General of Immigrants Report.

Banks, C., Report on Emigration from the Port of Calcutta to British and Foreign Colonies, 1908 (Calcutta: 1909).

Comins, D. W. D., Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad (Calcutta: 1893).

Colonial Office 295, Vols. 120-271.

Colonial Office 318, Vols. 165-216.

Dispatches, Secret, Confidential and Regular, to and from the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Documents Collected and Published by the Historical Society of Trinidad and Tobago.

Franklin, C. D., The Trinidad and Tobago Year Book, 1917 (Port of Spain: 1917).

Geoghegan, J., Report on Coolie Emigration from India (Calcutta: 1874).

Imperial Gazetteer of India.

Inspector of Immigrants Report.

Legislative Council Papers of Trinidad and Tobago.

McNeill, James and Chimman Lal, Report to the Government of India on the Conditions of Indian Immigrants in the Four British Colonies and Surinam. Part I: Trinidad and British Guiana (Printed in India: 1915).

Parliamentary Papers: Reports, Minutes of Evidence of Select Committees, Correspondence, and Returns, 1813-1910.

Protector of Immigrants Reports.

Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Cane-farming Industry of Trinidad (Port of Spain, Government Printers, 1960).

Richards, V., Annual Report on Emigration from the Port of Calcutta to British and Foreign Colonies for 1877-1878 (Calcutta: 1878).

Ship's Registers (In Warden's Office, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad).

Trinidad Duplicate Dispatches, Vol. 14, 1835-1846.

Trinidad and Tobago Hansard.

#### Newspapers

Port of Spain Gazette

The Trinidadian

Trinidad Palladium

Trinidad Royal Gazette

#### Books

Baden-Powell, B. H., The Indian Village Community, (London: 1896).

Battacharya, Jogendra Nath, Hindu Castes and Sects (Calcutta: 1896).

Bronkhurst, H. V. P., Among Hindus and Creoles of British Guiana (London: 1888).

Bronkhurst, H. V. P., British Guiana and Its Labouring Population (London: 1883).

Burnley, William H., Observations on the Present Condition of the Island of Trinidad, and the actual state of the experiment of Negro Emancipation (London: 1842).

Clarke, Robert, Sierra Leone: A Description of the Manners and Customs of the Liberated Africans (London: 1843).

Collens, J. H., A Guide to Trinidad, A Handbook for the use of Tourists and Visitors, (London: 1886).

Crooke, William, The North-Western Provinces of India (London: 1897).

Crooke, William, Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces, 3 vols. (Calcutta: 1896).

- Denman, Joseph. West India Interest, African Emigration and Slave Trade (London: 1848).
- Des Voeux, G. William. My Colonial Service in British Guiana, St. Lucia, Trinidad, Fiji, Australia, Newfoundland, and Hong Kong with Interludes. 2 Vols. (London: 1903).
- DeVerteuil, L. A. A. Trinidad: It's Geography, Natural Resources, Administration, Present Condition and Prospects, 2nd edition (London: 1884).
- Dubois, J. A. Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies (trans. and Ed. H. K. Beauchamp) 3rd edition (London: 1906).
- Gamble, W. H. Trinidad: Historical and Descriptive: Being a Narrative of Nine Years' Residence in the Island (London: 1866).
- Grant, K. J. My Missionary Memories, (Halifax, Nova Scotia: 1923).
- Kingsley, Charles. At Last, A Christmas in the West Indies (London: 1872).
- Lavaysse, Jean Francois Dauxion. A Statistical, Commercial, and Political Description of Venezuela, Trinidad, Margarita and Tobago (London: 1820).
- Leighton, Wilson. The British Squadron on the Coast of Africa (London: 1851).
- Matson, Henry. Remarks on the Slave Trade and African Squadron (London: 1848).
- Morton, Sarah E. John Morton of Trinidad (Toronto: 1916).
- Nesfield, John C. Brief Views of the Caste System of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh (Allahabad: 1885).
- Peck, Nathaniel, and Thomas S. Price. Report of Messrs. Peck and Price who were appointed at a Meeting of the Free Colored People of Baltimore, held on the 25th November 1839, Delegates to British Guiana and the Island of Trinidad for the Purpose of ascertaining the Advantages to be derived by Colored People migrating to these Places (Baltimore: 1840).
- Philip, J. B. A Free Mulatto of the Island (London: 1824).
- Risley, H. H. Tribes and Castes of Bengal, 2 Vols. (Calcutta, 1892).

- Salmon, S. C. Capital and Labour in the West Indies (London: 1883).
- Sewell, William G. The Ordeal of Free Labor in The British West Indies (London and New York: 1862).
- Stark, James. Guidebook and History of Trinidad (Port of Spain: 1892).
- Swinton, J. Journal of a Voyage with Coolie Emigrants from Calcutta to Trinidad (London: 1859).
- Trollope, Anthony. The West Indies and the Spanish Main (London: 1859).

### Secondary Sources

#### Articles

- Augelli, John P. and Harry W. Taylor. "Race and Population Patterns in Trinidad," Annals of the Association of American Geographers. Vol. 50, No. 2, 1960, 123-138.
- Augelli, John P. "The Rimland-Mainland Concept of Culture Areas in Middle America," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, LII (1962), 119-129.
- Beard, J. S. "The Savanna Vegetation of Northern Tropical America," Ecological Monographs, Vol. XXIII, No. 2, 1953.
- Braithwaite, Lloyd. "Social Stratification in Trinidad: A Preliminary Analysis," Social and Economic Studies, Vol. II, Nos. 2 and 3, 1953, 5-175.
- Crowley, Daniel. "Plural and Differential Acculturation in Trinidad," American Anthropologist, Vol. 59, No. 5, 1957.
- Davids, Leo. "The East Indian Family Overseas," Social and Economic Studies. Vol. 12, No. 3, 1964, 383-396.
- Erickson, Edgar L. "The Intorduction of East Indian Coolies into the British West Indies," The Journal of Modern History, Vol. VI, No. 2, 1934, 127-146.
- Harewood, Jack. "Population Growth in Trinidad and Tobago in the Twentieth Century," Social and Economic Studies, Vol. XII, No. 1 (1963), 1-26.
- Hill, Arthur. "Emigration from India," Timehri, Vol. 6, 1919, 43-52.

- James, Preston. "Changes in the Geography of Trinidad," Scottish Geographical Magazine, Vol. 73, (1957), 158-166.
- Jayawardena, C. "Religious Belief and Social Change: Aspects of the Development of Hinduism in British Guiana," Comparative Studies in Society and History, January 1966, 211-240.
- Lamont, Norman. "Life of a West Indian Planter 100 years ago - A Lecture Delivered to the Trinidad Historical Society at Port of Spain on the 30th January 1936," in Gleanings (Port of Spain: 1946).
- Marshall, R. C. "The Physiography and Vegetation of Trinidad," Forestry Memoirs, XVII, 1934.
- Metcalf, Thomas R. "Struggle over Land Tenure in India, 1860-1868," Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1962), 299-301.
- Niehoff, Arthur. "The Survival of Hindu Institutions in an Alien Environment," Eastern Anthropologist, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1958, 171-187.
- Pearse, Andrew. "Carnival in Nineteenth-Century Trinidad," Caribbean Quarterly, Vol. IV, Nos. 3 and 4, March and June, 1956.
- Polak, Frank W. "Indian Labour Emigration Within the Empire," Asiatic Review, Vol. 14 (1918), 140-168.
- Roberts, G. W. and Lloyd Braithwaite, "Mating among East Indians and Non-Indian Women in Trinidad," Social and Economic Studies, Vol. II, No. 3, (1962), 203-240.
- Schwartz, B. M. "Caste and Endogmy in Trinidad," Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, Vol. 20, No. 1, (1964), 58-66.
- Schwartz, B. M. "Patterns of East Indian Family Organization in Trinidad," Caribbean Studies, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1965, 23-36.
- Shephard, C. V., "Agricultural Labour in Trinidad. Part IV," Tropical Agriculture, Vol. XII, No. 4, April 1936.
- Smith, Raymond, and C. Jayawardena. "Hindu Marriage Customs in British Guiana," Social and Economic Studies, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1958, 178-194.
- Smith, Raymond and C. Jayawardena. "Marriage and the Family Amongst East Indians in British Guiana," Social and Economic Studies, Vol. VIII, No. 4, 1959, 321-376.

- Smith, Raymond. "Some Social Characteristics of Indian Immigrants to British Guiana," Population Studies, Vol. XIII, No. 1, 1959.
- Wagley, Charles. "Plantation-America: A Cultural Sphere," in Caribbean Studies, A Symposium edited by Vera Rubin (Seattle: 2nd ed., 1960), 3-13.
- Waibel, Leo. "The Tropical Plantation System," Scientific Monthly, Vol. Lii (1941), 156-160.
- Wolf, Eric and Sidney Mintz, "Haciendas and Plantations in Middle America and the Antilles," Social and Economic Studies, Vol. VI, No. 3, (1957), 380-412.

### Books

- Angel, W. H. The Clipper Ship "Sheila," Angel Master (London: 1922).
- Augier, F. R. and Shirley C. Gordon. Sources of West Indian History (London: 1962).
- Basham, A. L. The Wonder That Was India (New York, 1954).
- Beachey, R. W. The British West Indies Sugar Industry in the Late 19th Century (Oxford, 1957).
- Bowen, N. P. and B. G. Montwerin (eds.), Colony of Trinidad and Tobago Census Album (Port of Spain: 1948).
- Calogeras, Joao Pandia. A History of Brazil (New York: 1963).
- Carmichael, Gertrude. The History of the West Indian Islands of Trinidad and Tobago (London: 1961).
- Collens, James H. Trinidad and Tobago Year Book (Port of Spain, Government Printing Office: 1893).
- Corwin, Arthur F. Spain and the Abolition of Slavery in Cuba 1817-1886 (Austin and London: 1967).
- Coupland, Reginald. The Empire in These Days (London: 1935).
- Cumpston, I. M. Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834-1854 (London: 1953).
- Deerr, N. A History of Sugar (London: 1950).
- Fraser, Lionel M. History of Trinidad, 2 vols. (Port of Spain: 1896).



- Freilich, Morriss. Cultural Diversity Among Trinidadians, dissertation, Columbia University 1960, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
- Freyre, Gilberto. The Masters and the Slaves (New York: 1963).
- Fyfe, Christopher. A History of Sierra Leone (London: 1962).
- Gangulee, N. Indians in the Empire Overseas (London: 1962).
- Herskovits, M. J. and F. S. Herskovits. Trinidad and Tobago (New York: 1947).
- Hitchins, F. H. The Colonial Land and Emigration in the West Indies (Philadelphia: 1931).
- Jenkins, E. The Coolie, His Rights and Wrongs (New York: 1871).
- Kapadia, K. M. Marriage and Family in India, (Bombay: 1962).
- Kirpalani, Murali J., Mitra G. Sinanan, S. M. Ramchandani, and Seukeran (eds.) Indian Centenary Review, 1962 (London: 1962). Spain: n.d.).
- Klass, Morton. East Indians in Trinidad: A Study of their Social and Economic Life (New York: 1961).
- Kondapi, C. Indians Overseas, 1838-1949 (London: 1962).
- Lamont, Norman. Burnley of Orange Grove (Port of Spain: 1962).
- Lamont, Norman. Problems of Trinidad (Port of Spain: 1962).
- Lloyd, Christopher. The Navy and the Slave-Trade (London: 1962).
- Mathieson, William L. British Slavery and Its Abolition (London: 1926).
- Nath, Dwarka. A History of Indians in British Guiana (London: 1962).
- Niehoff, Arthur and Juanita. East Indians in the West Indies (Public Museum Publications in Anthropology 1960).
- Ottley, C. R. An Account of Life in Spanish Trinidad (New York: 1955).
- Parry, J. H. and P. M. Sherlock. A Short History of Trinidad (New York: 1957).

- Prabhu, Pandharinath. Hindu Social Organization: A Study in Socio-Psychological and Ideological Foundations (Bombay: 1963).
- Ragatz, L. J. The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean (Washington, D.C.: 1928).
- Rubin, Vera (ed.), Caribbean Studies: A Symposium, (Seattle: 1960).
- Rubin, Vera (ed.). Social and Cultural Pluralism in the Caribbean, The New York Academy of Sciences, Vol. LXXXIII, Art. 5, 761-916.
- Sampath, H. An Outline of the Social History of the Indians in Trinidad. Unpublished Master's thesis, Columbia University, New York.
- Schwartz, Barton M. The Dissolution of Caste in Trinidad, PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1963, University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
- Smith, M. G. The Plural Society in the British West Indies, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1965).
- Smith, Raymond. British Guiana. (London: 1962).
- Smith, Vincent A. The Oxford History of India from the Earliest Times to the End of 1911 (Oxford: 1920).
- Sundaram, Lanka. Indians Overseas (Madras: 1933).
- West, Robert C. and John P. Augelli. Middle America: Its Lands and Peoples (Englewood Cliffs: 1966).
- Wickham, H. A. Rough Notes of a Journey through the Wilderness from Trinidad to Para, Brazil. (London: 1872).
- Williams, Eric. Capitalism and Slavery (London: 1964).
- Williams, Eric. History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago (New York: 1962).
- Wood, Donald. Trinidad in Transition (London: 1968).


## VITA

The author was born in Fort Sill, Oklahoma on the 24th of November 1933. He graduated from Chula Vista High School in June of 1951. After being discharged from the United States Navy in 1956 he completed a Bachelor of Science degree at California State Polytechnic College at San Luis Obispo. After extensive travel in Brazil, he completed another Bachelor's degree at Henderson State College, Arkadelphia, Arkansas. He worked toward a Master's degree at Louisiana State University while teaching and completed the degree in 1967. He is presently a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy in Latin American Studies at Louisiana State University.

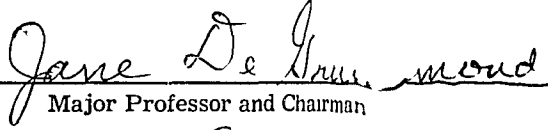
## EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT


Candidate: John Allen Perry

Major Field: Latin American Studies


Title of Thesis: A History of the East Indian Indentured Plantation Work.   
in Trinidad: 1845-1917


Approved:


  
Major Professor and Chairman


  
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE: 

  
\_\_\_\_\_

  
\_\_\_\_\_

  
\_\_\_\_\_

  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date of Examination:

\_\_\_\_\_

May 13, 1969

\_\_\_\_\_