A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF IMMIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT OF THE EAST INDIANS IN TRINIDAD (1845-1947)

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1. INTRODUCTION

About 1.1 million people of Indian origin now residing in the West Indies are mostly descendants of those immigrants who had been brought into the sugar plantation as indentured labourers since the middle of the 19th century. On one hand, they are at present playing their role as an important component of the respective Caribbean countries politically and economically as well as socially, and on the other, they are keeping a keen interest in their ancestral land, India, culturally and psychologically.

The history of immigrants from India and their posterity in this area, who had been called "East Indians" first by the Christian missionaries and later by the British colonial authorities as well as by ex-slaves of African origin, can be said to be in a sense the history of their obtaining identity in the multi-ethnic and plural society in the Caribbean. As V. S. Naipaul, a writer from the island of Trinidad, reasons,

After a generation or two, the East Indians were regarded as settled inhabitants of the West Indies and were thought of as West Indian East Indians. Then a national feeling grew up. There was a cry for integration, and the West Indian East Indians became East Indian West Indians.¹

There is no doubt that the process of their settlement in the utterly different environment of the West Indies was by no means easy one.
2. OPENING OF INDIAN IMMIGRATION INTO TRINIDAD

The British Empire was the first metropolitan country which abolished slavery in the colonies. It was in 1834. But this historic event should not be considered from the humanistic point of view only. Though there is no denying the long history of anti-slavery movement in Britain, we must also notice that the emancipation of the slaves "was basically the result of the fact that the slave system had lost its former importance, in the nineteenth century, to the metropolitan country" and "was a part of the general movement of the European industrial proletariat towards democracy." This is the argument of Dr. Eric Williams, who emphasizes that the system was destroyed by nothing other than capitalism of the nineteenth century and that the abolition of slavery was a logical outcome of economic development itself.

But with the abolition of slave system, the cosmopolitan government had to face a new problem. For the sugar producing colonies, dependent on slave labour and government protection, which had already been placed in the difficult position for securing cheap labour regularly after the end of slave trade in the whole of the British Empire in 1807, the situation became more serious with this abolition of the system itself. This resulted in the decrease of sugar production and the rise in price. The planters of Mauritius, the islands in the South Pacific like Fiji and the West Indian colonies like British Guiana and Trinidad protested to the British Parliament, which had to find another way to satisfy them. In the meantime, the colonies' efforts to introduce white colonists and emancipated black labourers were unsuccessful. After the continuous immigration of the Chinese to the Caribbean turned out to be difficult, the source of plantation labour was finally sought in British India.

The planters of Trinidad had already demanded immigration of the Indians as early as in 1814. Mauritius was the first to
introduce indentured Indian labourers to its sugar plantation. After this, in 1845, the Government of India enacted the laws and approved Indian immigration to British Guiana, Jamaica, Trinidad and other West Indian colonies. There were, however, some objections against this introduction of new immigrants even among the colonial authorities. In August 1845 James Bruce Elgin, the Governor of Jamaica, opposed the policy of immigration, thinking "a reliance on immigration exclusively, as the only practical and available remedy for the material difficulties of the Colony, to be a serious evil, and averse to its best interests." And George Francis Robert Harris, the Governor of Trinidad, in June 1848, warned of the moral results and emphasized that "the habits which they (immigrants) introduce are commonly pernicious, and morally and socially they tend to deteriorate, if left at liberty..."4 But the planters' demand for immigrant labour surpassed these protests and warnings. Thus, under the name of introduction of free labour, the indenture system was materialized. But, as Hugh Tinker puts it, it was actually "a new system of slavery, incorporating many of the repressive features of the old system." Under this system, "as a part of a world demand for raw materials, the Indians voyaged across the seas of the world to labour upon the plantation,"5 and India remained one of the main labour supplying countries to the sugar producing colonies in the West Indies until the abolition of the indenture system during the First World War period.

In the first stage of the indenture period, many of the emigrants from India were Adiwasi people such as the Santhals, the Mundas and the Oraons of Chota Nagpur area who were called at that time the Hill Coolies or the Dhangars. It is said that these Dhangars made up about half of the Indians who left India for emigration in the 1840s and 1850s.6 After the 1850s the recruiting areas slowly extended to the Ganga Plain areas and
especially north Bihar and the eastern part of North-Western Provinces (later renamed the United Provinces) became the main sources of indentured labourers emigrating to the West Indies. At the turn of the century most of the emigrants from Calcutta hailed from the United Provinces (UP) and in 1908 as many as 90% of them came from the villages of Faizabad, Basti, Gonda and other districts in UP only. In present-day Trinidad, asked about the native place of their parents, grand-parents or great-grand-parents, most of the descendants of Indian immigrants named these districts of India. For example, Faizabad, one of the main oil producing centres in the south of Trinidad, is, as its name suggests, a village settled and reclaimed by these Indian immigrants.

Some strong motivation must have been necessary for overseas emigration of those Indians, especially Hindus, to most of whom crossing the kala-pani was a taboo and meant the excommunication from their caste. The most decisive of the motives behind their overseas emigration can be said to be an economic one. To say nothing about famine period in the beginning of the 1840s and 1865-66, even during the normal season pressure on the land was used to be very great in certain localities of Bihar and UP and besides, there were the feudal land relations there which made for concentration of lands in the hands of a few landlords in every district. Especially lower strata of the peasantry in these areas where the British colonialists had implemented a new landlord system (Zamindari system) most strictly, became landless. In Bihar under the semislavery system called kamiuti, "the poor people sold their services, and sometimes those of their children in years to come, in order to obtain resources to meet their pressing needs." With the destruction of local handicraft industries under the British rule, many artisans were left unemployed. It can be easily imagined that these miserable people
Native Place and Destination of Indian Emigrants Overseas

SOURCES:
fell prey to the recruiting agents for overseas emigration who approached them with sweet words.

Prof. Jha suggests that the Great Indian Mutiny of 1857-59 also accelerated overseas emigration from these areas. The devastation of land after the long warfare, forcible collection of revenue arrears, famines, epidemics and hostile attitude of the British officials destroyed the peasantry life so badly that many tried to find every available opportunity to escape from the difficult position. Moreover, many ex-sepoys, largely high caste Hindus, of the Bengal native army which was disbanded, also came to Calcutta and applied themselves for overseas emigration by giving a fake information about their name, address and caste for fear that they would be suspected of association with the Mutiny. The highest number of the emigrants who sailed from Calcutta was 27,779 in the year of 1858 followed by 25,337 in 1859. Out of these, 1,374 persons emigrated to Trinidad in the year of 1858 and 3,288 in 1859 as against 608 in 1856.9

In the case of the West Indies, as Morton Klass points out,

Indian indentured laborers did not emigrate in kin or village groups, and rarely even in small family group. For the most part they were removed from their original socio-cultural system as individuals and carried as such to Trinidad, British Guiana and other territories what was for the immigrant as alien social structure and cultural inventory.10

These immigrants who reached the West Indian colonies were distributed to one of the estates by the colonial officials and the planters without any consideration of caste and other social factors which would otherwise prescribed their mutual relations. The number of female immigrants was extremely smaller than that of males, the ratio of both sexes being mostly one to three and sometimes one to four. This naturally made the marriage among the
Indian immigrants very difficult. Under these circumstances, the caste relationship or the meaning of caste itself had to become inevitably quite different from those in their homeland.

These Indian immigrants were introduced to the sugar colonies of the West Indies as indentured labourers and the term of indentureship was fixed initially at three years, which was extended to five years in all the colonies in 1862. Though the right of free return passage was to be granted to the immigrants after some fixed term, ordinarily ten years, the planters and the colonial government who sought to get stable and cheap labour continuously and thought the measure to be expensive and unnecessary made frequent proposals to abolish it. In Trinidad since 1851, the measure of granting an amount of ten pounds as an imperial gift was introduced to the indentured labourers who gave up the right of free repatriation and after 1869 the grant of money was replaced by that of five acres of land. This policy of granting the land called Crown land, though almost untrodden, was to bring in later years a great social and economic changes in the life of the Indian immigrants in Trinidad.

3. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF INDIAN IMMIGRANTS IN TRINIDAD

Working conditions in the sugar estates were extremely harsh and the Indian labourers complained often about the task system which was entirely new to them.11 This was very unfair to them "because if they failed to complete the assignment which was supposedly based on one day's labour, they forfeited any reward for that day's work."12 Housing and hygienic conditions in the estates were also so poor that the labourers always had to face many sorts of diseases such as malaria, dysentery, hook-worm, ankylostomiasis and so forth.
The most typical evidence of the colonial government's treatment of the Indian indentured labourers was the Ordinance of July 17, 1899. Under this Ordinance, the working day was fixed at nine hours and the legal daily wage at not less than 25 cents for an able-bodied adult labourer. Any indentured immigrant who refused or neglected to amend any work which was not accepted because it had been improperly done, was liable to a maximum penalty of $4.80 or 14 days imprisonment. Every indentured labourer who was found drunk in or about the plantation building, or who used abusive or insulting words or gestures to his employer or any person in authority was liable to a maximum penalty of $4.80 or 14 days imprisonment. Every indentured immigrant who hindered or molested any other immigrant in the performance of his work, or who persuaded or sought to persuade any other immigrant to refuse or absent himself or to desist from work, was liable to maximum penalty of $24 or two months imprisonment. Every indentured immigrant was bound to live in the estate to which he was initially indentured. Any immigrant who was found on a public highway or on any land or in any house not of the property of his employer, or in any ship within the waters of the island, could be stopped without a warrant, and if he failed to produce a certificate of industrial residence or of exemption from work or a ticket of leave, he could be arrested and detained at the nearest police station. Any indentured immigrant absent for three days without leave from the plantation was deemed a deserter, and the manager could apply to the Magistrate for a warrant for his apprehension. Any indentured male immigrant absent from work without lawful excuse for twelve days in any one month or in any two consecutive months was deemed a habitual idler and was liable to imprisonment for a maximum period of three months. Though the British and colonial governments called this "free labour," the system in its actual nature was, as Eric E. Williams puts it,
"slavery plus a constable" in the name of protection of the indentured immigrants. 13

Even in the twentieth century, about nine out of ten Indian births, whether Hindu or Muslim, were deemed illegitimate. This was because the colonial authorities did not accept marriages of the Indian immigrants, called "bamboo marriages" contemptuously, as lawful, since they were held according to their religious tradition, that is, in non-Christian way. It was only in 1938 in the case of Muslims and in 1946 in the case of Hindus that their traditional marriages were officially authorized as legitimate ones after their long agitations which sought to establish their own cultural tradition and identity.

In the educational field also, the figures given by the officials show the backwardness of Indian immigrants. Even as late as in 1939, the Royal Commission to the West Indies in its Memorandum of Evidence points out that illiteracy of Indian population in Trinidad was 77.2% as against 43.1% for the total population. It further says,

Literacy or partial literacy was 72.2% among the Christians of all races and only 17.4% among the non-Christians, who are, of course mainly East Indians. 14

It is obvious here that so-called literacy was concerned only with English, and not with Hindustani or any other Indian languages which was brought in by them to the colony. But as time passed, it seems that this Hindustani itself was gradually left unlearnt by the new generations of the Indian population. On the newspapers published by the immigrant Indians in the late 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, there can be found the apprehensions about Hindi or Urdu disappearing among the Indian
community and the demands for diffusing "our language" as well as English among Indian boys and girls.15

As mentioned above, after five years' indentured labour Indian immigrants were freed and given a certificate of "industrial residence" with which they could be employed anywhere and thereby their new life started in the island. Though some people returned to India after indentureship, the number of applicants for return journey gradually decreased. The ratio of those who returned to their homeland to the total Indian immigrants to Trinidad during the whole period of indenture system (1845-1917) was only 22.37%.16 Many immigrants whose term of indenture expired commuted their entitlement of free return passage for grants of money or Crown land. From 1869 to 1880, 2,643 Indians acquired 19,055 acres of land in Trinidad. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century the sales of Crown land to free Indians continued to increase steadily. Besides, many Indians rented additional land either from other Indian land-owners or from the estates to which they had previously belonged. On these lands the Indian land-holders started to grow crops for their own consumption and for the local markets. They pioneered the cultivation of paddy which they had brought from India to the colony. They went into cocoa as well as sugarcane from the 1880s.17 In 1871, 67.6% of the total Indian population in the island resided in the estates and 40% were still indentured, but in 1901 these figures went down to 21.6% and 8.5% respectively. Moreover, by 1901 the ratio of Trinidad-born Indians to the total Indian population of the island had become as high as 45%. It may well be said that by the early twentieth century many Indian immigrants had left their former estates and started forming their own community, living in the newly developed villages and scattered settlements as small land-holding cultivators.18 The present author has had some personal
experiences that the old villagers, when asked about the origin of their villages with names like Calcutta, Madras, Barrackpore, Faizabad and so on, mostly replied that they had heard of the starting of their villages being either in the 1880s or the beginning of the 1900s. According to *Annual Report of the Protector of Immigrants for 1916*, about 20% (97,962 acres) out of the total land alienated and cultivated in Trinidad (480,038 acres) was held by the Indian peasants at the end of the same year. Eric Williams admits,

(The Indian contribution to Trinidad society and her economy) was that, in the age-old battle which the planter had fought white farmer, who had prevented the emancipated Negro slave from becoming a small farmer, that same sugar planter had to compromise with the Indian indentured immigrant, and in the social sense the outstanding result of indentured Indian immigration was the emergence, for the first time in the history of Trinidad, of a class of small farmers.

4. OPPOSITION TO INDIAN IMMIGRATION AND INDENTURE SYSTEM

The voices of protest against the introduction of indentured labour from outside had been raised from sections of Trinidad society since the 1870s. The strongest of such protests was concerned with the huge expenditure from the tax and some people felt apprehensive of the moral deterioration among the white Creoles which, they said, would be resulted from the heretical culture "the worthless and unhygienic fellows" brought in. The black ex-slaves of the African origin (also called black Creoles) tended to look down on the "Coolies" — a derogatory term for Indian immigrants — as their inferiors because they disdained rigorous labour in the estates as work symbolic of an inferior status. In the late nineteenth century their hostile attitude against the indenture system as well as against the Indians was accelerated by the fact that low standard of wages for indentured
labour kept wages of the black Creoles also low, that the Indians made inroads into the jobs which had previously been occupied largely by the Creoles, and that the Indian population exceeded one-third of the total population of Trinidad. At the turn of the century competition for jobs between Indian and Creole communities became more conspicuous and the latter began to think that the former depressed wages and increased unemployment. In 1909 Trinidad Workingmen's Association, established in 1897 as the spokesman for black skilled workers, argued that while the Indian immigration was not objectionable for them up to the 1870s, its continuation after that period had damaged the interests of the Creole workers. 23

In India also there were a variety of arguments over indenture system on the part of bureaucrats, politicians and scholars. In 1877 Allan Octavian Hume, Secretary of Department of Agriculture, Revenue and Commerce, Government of India, which was in charge of Indian emigration, referred to a harmful effect to be resulted from government support for emigration overseas. To Hume, later called "Father of the Indian National Congress," a more positive emigration policy would produce "the utmost suspicion..... especially on the minds of uneducated classes" which would create unrest. 24

In 1893 Mahadev Govind Ranade, a notable Indian judge and economist, encouraged overseas emigration from India. While emphasizing the importance of balanced development of agriculture, industry and commerce for improving Indian national economy, Ranade recommended as an immediate measure the policy of emigrating an abundance of poor population of agricultural India. After examining the situation of immigrants in the British, French and Dutch colonies, he concluded that in spite of some disadvantages,
there can be no doubt that the system of protected emigration has, on the whole, been very beneficial and that it will, in course of time, leads to further developments in the interest of the Indian settlers in those colonies at least where.... the Indians already represent a considerable proportion of the population.  

In this speech he advised emigrants to settle down in the colonies by obtaining land or in another way and further expected that Indian-made cloth could get a better market among these settled Indians and Indian teachers, medical doctors, lawyers, artisans and even priests of different sects could have there "a most favourite field of their operations."

In the same year, 1893, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi left for Natal of South Africa. It was after he got involved in the agitations for improving a social and political status of the Indian immigrant labourers there that public opinion in India started to reconsider the situations of their fellow countrymen overseas and to seek the improvement in their status by appealing to the British Government and the Government of India. It must, however, be noted that in that case "they constantly emphasized the difference between their own civilization and the primitive barbarity of the African." From 1894 onward the Indian National Congress adopted the resolution which "appeals to Her Majesty's Government and the Government of India to guard the interests of Indian settlers" in almost all its annual sessions. In its Lahore session of 1909, the Congress begged "to press upon the Government of India the necessity of prohibiting the recruitment of indentured Indian labour for any portion of the South African Union."

And it was only in its Calcutta session of 1911, the year of the Delhi Coronation Durbar, that it resolved to demand the system of indentured labour to be abolished completely. The same resolution was adopted from next year onward.
Facing the Indian opinion on the problem of indentured labour, the British Government appointed the Sanderson Committee in 1909 to investigate the situations of the emigrants from India to the Crown colonies and protectorates. The Committee was composed of British members only and 31 persons out of 83 who gave evidence before it were high-ranking officials or ex-officials, 11 being clerks in charge of immigration and other 31 non-officials represented the interests of the planters. All the evidences were given in favour of continuance of indenture system and some witnesses even demanded its expansion. Report of the Committee, while pointing out certain drawbacks of the system, concluded that indentured immigration in general had been beneficial and in the cases of Trinidad and British Guiana indentured labour from India was still necessary. 31 In 1913 the Government of India also sent an investigating team consisting of James McNeill and Chinman Lal to Fiji and the Caribbean. After finishing their investigation, they endorsed continuance of the system by saying that "a careful study of the facts elicited during our inquiry will result in the conclusion that its advantages have far outweighed its disadvantages."32

Charles Hardinge in the first year of his viceroyalty (1911) was not so eager about "microscopic effect" of an annual indenture emigration of about 18,000 people from a land of more than 300 million. 33 However, he gradually had to take notice of this problem in the face of pressure of the agitations under Gandhi's leadership in South Africa, the reports and recommendations of C. F. Andrews, a British clergyman and Gandhi's most reliable co-worker, and the annual Congress resolutions demanding the abolition of the indenture system. In the end, he informed of his desire to abolish the system in the dispatch to the British Government dated October 15, 1915. In March next year when Madan Mohan Malaviya in the Indian Central Legislative Council moved a
resolution that "this Council recommends to the Governor-General in Council that early steps be taken for the abolition of the system of Indian indentured labour," the Governor-General accepted it at once. Though there is no doubt that one of the main reasons for the decision lay in the apprehension on the side of the colonial authorities that the indenture question was the flashpoint of Indian politics at the time of the First World War, the decision itself was, in a sense, a historic one which meant the end of the 70-year-old "new system of slavery." The Government of India announced the prohibition of recruiting any more indentured labourer under the war-time Defence of India Act in February 1917.

It seems very significant that while Indian immigrants in Trinidad repeatedly demanded the abolition of severe rules provided in the immigration law and the general improvement of their working conditions, there was very few cases of their launching the agitation for abolishing the indenture system itself. George Fitzpatrick, a Trinidad-born Indian barrister, who gave evidence before the afore-mentioned Sanderson Committee, replied very clearly that there was no objection to the continuance of Indian immigration to the West Indian colony, when he was asked about Indian public opinion in Trinidad. One of the reasons for the absence of such agitation was probably the miserable economic conditions in India in which they had once been placed and which had driven them to emigration. Another reason may be found in the fact that organizations of Indian immigrants, one being the East Indian National Association and another the East Indian National Congress, became by and large interested in the political reforms proposed by the colonial government which would give an important meaning to the numerical strength of ethnic communities in Trinidad, Indian and African. Some Indians went further to say that the abolition of indenture system.
was an example of race discrimination against Indian population in the colony. 37

During the years of 1930-31 when under the Great Depression economic conditions enormously deteriorated and unemployment increased because of reduction of sugar price in the world market, many Indians in Trinidad tried to go back to India. While the East Indian National Congress launched a campaign demanding free repatriation of Indian immigrants from the colonial government, East Indian Weekly, a mouthpiece of local Indian community, giving some examples of pauperised situation of repatriated fellow countrymen, maintained its position that more Crown land should be granted to the Indian immigrants. 38 Finally in 1931 and 1932, the colonial government accepted the last of mass repatriations of ex-indentured labourers by the steamship Ganges. Only "paupers" were taken free and everyone else had to pay a small fare. The scene of arrival of the Ganges at Calcutta has been reproduced vividly by V. S. Naipaul.

They saw this second coming of the Ganges as their last chance to go home, to be released from Trinidad. Many more wanted to go than could be taken on. A thousand left; a quarter were officially "paupers." Seven weeks later the Ganges reached Calcutta. And there, to the terror of the passengers, the Ganges was stormed by hundreds of derelicts, previously repatriated, who wanted now to be taken back to the other place. India for the people had been a dream of home, a dream of continuity after the illusion of Trinidad. All the India they had found was the area around the Calcutta docks. 39

5. LEADERSHIP IN INDIAN COMMUNITY

What the planters and government authorities of the colony expected of Indian indentured labourers was said to be their diligence and docility. Actually, however, the myth of Indian docility seems to have lost its reliability at the early stage of
indenture system. Since as early as the middle of the nineteenth century Indian labourers in the estates were seen to protest against wage reduction, holiday cut and the planter's interference with their everyday matters.

These protestations sometimes turned to riots. The largest and most serious of them was the so-called "Coolie Disturbances" of 1884 which resulted from labourers' dissatisfaction with the repressive attitude of the colonial government toward the celebration of the Moharrum. The Moharrum had been celebrated in Trinidad since the 1850s under the name of Hosein, Hosey or Hosea. Originally this was a solemn ceremony of Shiite Muslims associated with the memory of Husain's martyrdom and so no occasion for festivity and joy, but here in Trinidad, it was a gay and noisy festival in which Indian labourers of each sugar estate marched in procession carrying their own hand-made taziah (a small replica of Husain's tomb). Non-Shiai Muslims, Hindus and some of black Creoles also joined it.\(^{40}\) Usually, as was the case with the Carnival of the Creoles, the Moharrum was used to be attended with more or less disturbances as a result of the quarrels and clashes among the estate labourers over the course and order of the procession. In July 1884, the colonial government issued an ordinance to regulate the procession strictly. In September, thirty-one Indian labourers of the Philippine Estate in Naparima District, under joint signature, submitted a petition for relaxation of regulation on their religious functions. It will be interesting to know that this petition was led by a driver (head of a group of estate labourers) named Sookoo, a Hindu, and out of the signatories twenty-one were Hindus and remaining ten were Muslims.\(^{41}\) Although the petition was rejected, about 12,000 Indian labourers started the festival here and there at the end of October. A party of 2,000 to 3,000 labourers moved and tried to enter San Fernando City neglecting the restraint of the police
stationed by the government, who opened fire at the procession and killed thirteen and wounded about a hundred persons. 42

The colonial authorities in the report on the "Coolie Disturbances" justified the regulation and police firing, but at the same time had to admit that behind the activities of the Indian labourers there was prevalent discontent with the excessive task work system. Moreover, the report pointed out that "after a residence of some time in Trinidad the coolie ..... becomes a man of a more independent spirit than he was when in India" and "there is little doubt that Indian immigrants looked upon the procession as a sort of means of demonstrating their power." 43 In this way, they often behaved against the expectations of the planters and government officials and this report also warned that since "Hindus and Mohammedans alike joined" in the common activities, they became gradually "unmanageable" for the rulers. 44

The strike at the Harmony Hall Estate in 1903 was, according to the Protector of Immigrants, one of the longest and best engineered strikes in Trinidad. Sixty-four labourers who marched to complain to the immigrant officer on working conditions were sentenced to seven days imprisonment and the leader, Daulat Singh was forcibly repatriated to India. 45 Though most of the protests and strikes by Indian indentured labourers were more or less of spontaneous and defensive nature without any significant degree of planning or coordination, it must also be noticed that there gradually appeared a type of leaders who played an important role in the estate work as a driver etc. and enjoyed the confidence of fellow indentured labourers. As Dr. Haraksingh of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, suggests, among village elite emerging in the late nineteenth century were to be found many ex-drivers. 46

As mentioned in the former chapter, the system of granting Crown land to free Indians instead of free return passage to India
continued from 1869 till 1880 and during the period of 1880-1900 purchasing of land by Indian immigrants also increased. Especially since 1884 Indian labourers eschewed re-indenture because of the drop of real wages and many of them left the estate. Thus, the Indian immigrants moved to the newly developed villages in the central and southern parts of Trinidad and started living on the small-scale agriculture there. Notwithstanding this, until about 1917 when indenture system was abolished, the majority of Indians were still poor small land-holders dependent at the same time on wages earned through agricultural labour in some way or other.

Since about 1870 the missionary activities of various denominations came into the Indian community of Trinidad also. As the Christian missionaries played a decisive role in the penetration of education among the black Creoles of African origin, so these missionaries like the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Canadian Presbyterian Church attached a great importance to educational activities among Indian children. Though education was given mostly in English, Canadian Mission (Presbyterian) imported bibles, books and tracts in Hindi in as early as 1870 and established the first Hindi printing press at Tunapuna in 1901. It was the Canadian Presbyterian missionaries who started using the term "East Indian" in place of "Coolie" as they were the first to recognize that the latter one was offensive to the Indian immigrants. Many Indians kept away from Christian churches for fear of being converted to Christianity but this can not nullify the contribution of the missionaries to the educational development in the Indian community. By 1921, 11.8% of Indian population in the island had accepted Christian faith of some denomination or other.

We must take notice of the fact that the early organizations representing Indian interests were founded by those who had
received education under the influence of these Christian missionaries. The first one was the East Indian National Association (EINA) established at Princes Town in the south in 1898 to protest against the ordinance of the year before for regulating social status of Indian labourers free from indentureship. The central figure of the Association was George Fitzpatrick, Christian and son of an Indian immigrant, who had been admitted at the Gray's Inn and called to the bar. In 1897 some interested Indians demanded communal representative for the Indian community in the Legislative Council of Trinidad in a memorandum submitted to the Royal Committee on the West Indies. The EINA also took up this problem and hereafter it developed into a stable organization which claimed to represent the Indian population in Trinidad. Fitzpatrick was the first Indian to be appointed as a member of the Legislative Council in 1912.

Another organization, the East Indian National Congress (EINC), obviously named after the political organization in the motherland, was founded at Couva, an Indian village amidst the sugarcane producing area, in 1909. Francis Evelyn Mohammad Hosein, one of the founder-leaders, was also baptized after getting education at a Canadian Presbyterian school and called to the bar (Lincoln's Inn) in England. Giving evidence before the Sanderson Committee in 1909, he told that his father was managing a plantation farm and using Indian labourers. One more important leader of the EINC was Sarran Teelucksingh, also a Christian belonging to the Anglican Church, who wielded an enormous influence in the Indian community as a landlord and successful distributor of Indian films. Though initially demanding moderate political reforms to be gradually applied to the Indian community, both these organizations were the forerunners of enhancement of political consciousness among the Indians in the 1920s and 1930s.
6. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN TRINIDAD AND INDIAN COMMUNITY

Trinidad had experienced three great changes by the end of the First World War. The first change was the discovery of oil in commercial quantities in 1910. The output of crude oil increased from 125,112 barrels in 1910 to 2,082,027 barrels in 1920 and thenceforward oil occupied the pivotal position in Trinidad economy.

The next important change was, as mentioned before, the end of indenture system of Indian labour in 1917. In the latter part of the 1910s the Indian peasantry had already owned more than 90,000 acres of land in Trinidad, planting paddy, cocoa and sugarcane. The abolition of indenture system was accepted as the beginning of a new area not only by the Indian community but also by the African and other communities.

The last of the three was the rise of workers' movements "assisted quite accidentally by the overseas service of the British West Indian Regiment." The British Indian soldiers who fought for democracy on many a front came back home prepared to agitate for political changes, that is, self-determination. These soldiers had experienced racial discrimination on the fronts and found their ideological mainstay in Marcus Garvey's teaching that appealed to "the black man to see beauty in himself." In this state of affairs, Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani (1875-1945), a rich French Creole cocoa planter of Corsican origin, on his return from war started to revive the almost dormant Trinidad Workingmen's Association (TWA) in the direction of constitutional reforms. The Russian Revolution and socialist views of workers in Europe had a far-reaching influence in the West Indies and especially on the labour movements.

Dock-workers' strike of November 1919 under the TWA leadership, which was followed by many labour disputes of the other sections of workers, developed into the general strike in
December. Indian labourers in the sugar estates (including factories) in Caroni District also joined it. This is said to be the first occasion for the Indian workers to join hands with the Africans in demanding higher wages and better working conditions. 58

In 1921 and 1922 the British Colonial Office sent a Commission under Major E. F. L. Wood, later the Governor-General of India in 1925-31, to investigate political situations in the West Indies. The Wood Commission finally submitted a report which rejected the demand for granting of the responsible government. But following its recommendation, the first elections to the Legislative Council of Trinidad were held in 1925. Since the income and property qualification franchise refused the voting right of working masses, the electorate was only 21,794 (about 6%) of the total population 365,000. Cipriani who claimed to be a representative of the TWA captured one of seven elected seats out of twenty-six total seats and Sarran Teelucksingh was also elected. Though in those days predominantly African labourers' organization, the TWA attracted some important Indian leaders through the Legislative Council elections. Timothy Roodal and F. E. M. Hosein as well as Teelucksingh were given the post of office-bearer in the TWA.

It was also at this time that Krishna Deonarine (alias Adrian Cola Rienzi 1905-1970), a pivotal figure in political life of the Indian community in later years, established a branch of the TWA in San Fernando City. 59 Deonarine's more radical outlook on political and labour issues, however, was incompatible with the stand of Cipriani whose main concern was quite moderate constitutional reforms. The colonial authorities also gave attention to Deonarine's "markedly seditious views" and "anti-British" posture. After 1928 Cipriani and central leadership of the TWA took a policy of shunning Deonarine and his
San Fernando branch. In this year he changed his name from Deonarine to Adrian Cola Rienzi. As for Cipriani, he converted the TWA to a political party which was renamed the Trinidad Labour Party (TLP) in the belief that "the political strategy was more important than the development of trade unions." But his leadership of moderate gradualism lost the support of the workers and especially his ineffective attitude toward the redress of the workers whose living conditions were seriously hit during the depression period disillusioned them.

In the late 1920s the national movement for independence in India started to wield a tremendous influence on the Indian community in the West Indies. Swaraj, swadeshi, khadi (khaddar) and "passive resistance" were the household topics among the Indians at that time. East Indian Weekly (EIW) which started in April 1928 and continued till December 1932 provides us with information about many aspects of Indian life of the time. The owner and publisher of the paper was Leonard Fitzgerald Walcott, a black citizen of the capital, Port-of-Spain, but he allowed Chandra Bahadur Mathura (1894-1953), son of an indentured labourer from Mathura, UP, "a free hand to write his highly critical articles lambasting the British in India and in Trinidad, local persons in position and/or wealth as well as his fellow East Indians." According to its first issue, the policy of the paper was "to represent and advocate the various views of the masses and classes here irrespective of colour or creed."

Various kinds of news, articles and correspondence appeared on the paper, covering political agitations, economic problems, labour movements, campaigns for elevation of women's status, diffusion of education and so on. Notorious Mother India (1927) by Katherine Mayo, whose husband owned a sugar estate in Trinidad, was severely criticized. Supersad Naipal, father of the famous writer V. S. Naipaul, deplored "many symptoms of demoralization
and loss of identity" among the Westernised Indians and emphasized the necessity of strengthening the Hindu value system among "the sons and daughters of Aryavarta." 66 The paper reported the enthusiastic welcome offered by the Indian community to Mehta Jaimini, an obscure Hindu missionary from India, who delivered about 400 lectures on social and political as well as religious matters in many parts of Trinidad from December 1928 until March 1929. His powerful lectures, the paper says, stimulated the Indian "national" consciousness by wiping off a feeling of inferiority from the minds of the Indian immigrants, whether Hindu or Muslim, and awakening their pride. 67 Jaimini was at that time called Mahatma by them. 68

During the period when the Indian national struggle was gathering momentum, fellow countrymen in Trinidad were prepared to respond to it fervently. They sent "fraternal greetings" to the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress which had finally adopted the resolution of complete independence in December 1929. 69 The Satyagraha movement launched with "Salt March" was also received with great enthusiasm here and speeches and activities of M. K. Gandhi were reported in detail on almost every issue of EIW. In the meeting of the East Indian National Congress held on May 1, 1930, the tri-colour flag of the Indian National Congress was hoisted and "Bande Mataram," a national song, was sung by the participants. The meeting resolved to send the fraternal message to the Congress Working Committee urging the country to strengthen Gandhi's non-violent and non-cooperation campaign. 70 Later in June 1930, a new political organization named the All-Trinidad Indian National Congress (ATINC) came into existence, into which two old organizations were also integrated. 71

A. C. Rienzi was the central figure who helped raise the Indian national feelings and bring about the integration of the
Indian opinion in the 1930s. He showed keen interest in and sympathy with Jawaharlal Nehru, leader of the radical group within the Indian National Congress, and made his anti-imperialistic stand clear in public. While believing that "Gandhi's campaign has won the moral sympathy of USA and certain other countries, and situated as India is at present, it is the most expedient way to achieve (Indian independence)," he stated unequivocally that "civil disobedience and passive resistance is not practicable and would serve no useful purpose" in the West Indies. On the other hand he pointed out that "the raid carried by the insurgents on the Armoury at Chittagong and the seizure of the city of Sholapur by Nationalists are indications of the militant revolutionary mentality of those people who are aiming to set up the last named socialistic—author] form of government." 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the Servants of India Society whose head office was located at Pune in Maharashtra. Finally, the total amount of $54,490 was handed over to Dr. H. N. Kunzru who visited Trinidad on behalf of the Society.  

The 1930s was one of the most important decade for Trinidad's labour movement. In 1932 the colonial government planned to enact a trade union legislation with which they could place all the unions under strict administrative control and deprive the workers of their rights of peaceful picketing or of protest against unfair labour practices. In the face of this government offensive, the Indian factory workers of sugar producing areas in central Trinidad who had lost their jobs because of the curtailment policy of the estate-cum-factory owners started a series of demonstrations and boycott of works in July 1934. These labour disputes involving workers of almost all the main sugar estates and factories began to take on a violent aspect with the hunger march and many Indian workers were arrested, jailed and sentenced. But these "disturbances" were historic in the sense that the Indian labourers who had been expected to be "easily coaxed and cajoled into accepting unfair treatment from employers" exhibited their socio-political awareness of their own as labourers to face economic exploitation and social injustice of discrimination.

In December 1935, A. C. Rienzi took the initiative of holding in Princes Town a public protest meeting against the Italian invasion into Abyssinia of the same year which had aroused the political consciousness especially among the Creoles of African origin in the West Indies. In this meeting Rienzi emphasized that the freedom struggle for Africa and India had to be seen in the broader context of a grand battle against imperialism which called for the united efforts of Africans and Indians. It was the first occasion that any local political leader projected the concept of Afro-Indian political solidarity "in an attempt to broaden the
narrow ethnic outlook of the black and Indian petit bourgeoisie." This attempt was to be materialized, though not completely, in the island-wide general strike and establishment of the unified labour organizations that followed.

In June 1937 when an arrest warrant for Tubal Uriah 'Buzz' Butler (1897-1977), oil labour leader from Grenada, the waves of protestation and demonstration of workers against this measure of the government spread from Faizabad in the south to the north of the island including Port-of-Spain and even to island of Tobago. This was called the "1937 Disturbances." The government sent for two warships as well as an army of policemen. Rienzi, on behalf of Butler who went underground, led this struggle. Indian workers of sugar producing areas also participated in it. As E. Williams characterizes it, "it was a united front of all the workers in the colony, irrespective of occupation and irrespective of race." More important was the fact that after this struggle there emerged two large trade unions in Trinidad. One of them was the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union which organized about 90% of the predominatly black labourers in the oilfields and other the All-Trinidad Sugar Estates & Factory Workers' Trade Union composed mainly of Indian labourers. Both the Unions elected Rienzi to presidency. The same year the Federated Workers' Trade Union was also founded by Rienzi and other black labour leaders. The significant role that Rienzi played in the field of labour during the 1930s has been repeatedly referred to as symbolic of unified labour movement by the present-day labour leaders for whom unity of Afro-Indian labourers is the pivot of their movement in Trinidad.

The 1937 struggle in Trinidad turned out to be a forerunner of the great labour disputes in Jamaica and other British colonies in the West Indies. Two years later the British Government was compelled to appoint the West India Royal Commission, commonly known as the Moyne Commission. The Commission in its report
submitted belatedly in 1945 recommended the introduction of constitutional reforms including enlargement of the legislative and executive in the whole of the West Indies. In Trinidad a committee was appointed to consider the problem of enlarging the electorate. One of the most controversial issues was whether the language test should be adopted for enrollment in the voters' list. This measure of language test being withdrawn by the efforts of Rienzi and other Indian leaders, the first general elections on the basis of universal adult suffrage to the Legislative Council were held in 1946. Though the Governor still kept the ultimate authority, this was at least one positive step toward the political independence of Trinidad.

In August 1947, India, though partitioned, finally obtained her independence. But just before this, in April that year, J. Nehru, Prime Minister of the Interim Government, appealed to overseas Indians to identify with their adopted countries, thus rejecting their getting dual citizenship. B. V. Keskar, Deputy Minister for External affairs, Government of India, in 1949 more clearly stated that "it would be best for those Indians who were domiciled outside India to identify themselves with the people of the country in whose midst they lived for years and years and where they had established roots." This was a manifestation of the official policy of the Government of India for their fellow countrymen overseas. And from then onward a new stage in the history of Indians overseas started.
POPULATION RATIO BY ETHNIC GROUP OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO (in percentage)

Trinidad & Tobago

1 40.65 Indian
2 40.81 African
3 0.53 Chinese
4 0.94 European
5 0.09 Syrian/Lebanese
6 16.32 Mixed

Plymouth
Scarborough

Tobago

Port of Spain
San Fernando
St. George
Arima
Chaguanas
Caroni
Couva
Nariva
St. Patrick
St. Patrick's
Maiaro

Total Population of Trinidad & Tobago
1,055,763 (in 1980)

Source:
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Central Statistical Office (Ministry of Finance), Population and Housing Census 1980, Vol. 11, Port of Spain, 1983, pp. 16-39
NOTES


(3) *ibid.*, p.293.

(4) E. Williams, *op. cit.*, p.348.


(6) *ibid.*, p.49.


(8) Tinker, *op. cit.*, p.53.


(11) J. D. Tyson, *Memorandum of Evidence for the Royal Commission to the West Indies*, New Delhi, 1939, p.43.


(18) ibid., p.106.


(20) E. Williams, History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago, p.119.

(21) San Fernando Gazette, Feb. 5, 1870 (Laurence, op. cit., p.69).


(23) Brereton, op. cit., p.113.


(26) Ranade, ibid., p.148.

(27) Tinker, op. cit., p.283.


(30) Zaidi & Zaidi (eds.), Vol. 6, New Delhi, 1979, p.146-147.

(31) Tinker, op. cit., p.308-310.

(32) ibid., p.328.
(33) ibid., p.318.

(34) ibid., p.343-344.


(36) Kelvin Singh, The Roots of Afro-Indian Conflict in Trinidad in Indentureship Period, East Indian in the Caribbean Symposium, St. Augustine, 1979, p.16.


(38) East Indian Weekly, May 9, 1931; June 27, 1931 etc.

(39) V. S. Naipaul, Prologue to an Autobiography, Vanity Fair, April 1983, p.149.

(40) S. H. W. Norman, Correspondence Respecting the Recent Coolie Disturbances in Trinidad at the Mohurram Festival with the Report, London, 1885, p.36.

(41) Norman, op. cit., p.1.

(42) ibid., p.8.

(43) ibid., p.7-10.

(44) ibid., p.46-53.


(46) Haraksingh, ibid., p.29.

(47) Brereton, op. cit., p.110.

(48) Ivar Oxaal, op. cit., p.44-45.


(51) *ibid.*, p.112.

(52) *Sanderson Committee Report, Part II*, p.311.

(53) M. J. Kirpalani et al. (eds.), *Indian Centenary Review - One Hundred Years of Progress 1845-1945*, Port of Spain, 1945, p.169.


(55) Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*, p.215-216.


(57) *ibid.*, p.69.

(58) *ibid.*, p.63.


(63) ibid., p.7.

(64) East Indian Weekly (henceforward EIW), April 7, 1928.

(65) ibid.

(66) EIW, Nov. 24, 1928; June 15, 1929.

(67) EIW, Dec. 22, 1928; Feb. 16, 1929.

(68) EIW, Jan. 5, 1929.

(69) EIW, Jan. 4, 1930.

(70) EIW, May 10, 1930.

(71) EIW, June 7, 1930.

(72) EIW, June 21, 1930.

(73) ibid.,

(74) EIW, June 27, 1931.


(76) M. Kirpalani et al. (eds.), op. cit., p.171.


(78) R. Ramdin, op. cit., p.133.

(79) E. Williams, History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago, p.234.

