

INDO CARIBBEAN

News Views and Information



May 2003

Issue 3

INDIAN ARRIVAL IN THE CARIBBEAN

Indentureship to the Caribbean, the 'coolie trade' started when two ships the SS Hesperus and the SS Whitby landed in British Guiana from British India on 5 May 1838. The Indian coolies were replacing the labour force of African slavery, which lasted for over 300 years from 1516 to its abolition in 1834. And so the planters turned greedily to the millions, of Indians, who they believed could be induced to labour in the cane fields for a pittance no greater than that awarded to the slaves.

The Indentured Trade

John Scoble-Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society alleged that the scheme "*give a 'carte blanche' to every villain in British Guiana and every scoundrel in India to kidnap and inveigle into contracts of labour for five years, the ignorant and inoffensive Hindoo*".

The recruiters who were paid by the number of people they got on board the ship, offered fictitious sums to the Indians, they exploited their simplicity and ignorance and resorted to fraud and coercion, some were kidnapped while others were confined for weeks and instructed to say 'yes' to whatever questions posed by the government examining officer at Calcutta. It was only



Ships on the Hughli river Calcutta, waiting to embark emigrants. On some ships over one third of the Indians died.

on the ship that they realised what was happening and in desperation, many committed suicide by jumping into the Hughli River. Recruiting women was more difficult, one third of the coolies were expected to comprise of women, the ships were often held up at extra cost to the shippers if the quota were not reached. Relationships between the men awaiting transportation were encouraged with the women they befriended which ended up with the women going to the Caribbean. Many of the women who boarded emigrant ships were young widows and married or single women who had severed all ties at home, had lost caste or become prostitutes.

INDO CARIBBEAN promotes the culture and heritage of people of Indian origin from the Caribbean

During famines women of high social status opted to emigrate rather than face starvation. Married women were lured from their husbands, daughters seduced from their parents and children kidnapped and registered as dependants of others.

The Voyage – The other middle passage

The trip from Calcutta to the Caribbean took between three and six months, in comparison the slave ships took three weeks to cross the *middle passage* under appalling conditions for the slaves. The voyage, which on paper should have been normal, turned into tragedy on many journeys. While the slaves of the previous century were arriving battered bruised and naked in chains the coolies on their forced adventure of false promises were dying by their hundreds enroute. On some ships over one third of the coolie cargo died. During one period between 1856/57, twelve ships left Calcutta with 4,094 coolies, 707 died before reaching the West Indies. Over 50% of infants and 30% of children were dying during these long journeys, while dozens died within days of arrival. It is difficult to understand after all the coercion to get the coolies on the ships why was not better care taken of the cargo. Fortunately, pressure from British India and economics dictated an improvement in mortality rate, which never got to acceptable levels during the ninety plus years of the coolie trade over the Kala Pani (dark water).



Indian children at breakfast at sea. On ships like the Salsette over 50% of infants and 30% of children died during the three and a half months voyage.

The Arrivals of ‘docile, quiet and orderly’

Between abolition of slavery 1834 and the arrival of the indentured, in 1838 an observer noted, “*The streets are overgrown with weeds, the houses look as though something much less than a hurricane would level them to the ground*”. Of the 396 that landed (33 died enroute) on 5 May 1838, 67 more died within 18 months of arrival. The Indians were described as “...*a docile quiet, orderly and able bodied people*” and can survive mainly on a diet of rice.

The state was now set for the introduction of labourers destined to change the course of history and the fortunes of the sugar industry from the predicted ‘ruin’ to prosperity-which they did under ‘A New System of Slavery’.

On arrival the coolies were taken to their allocated plantations, they occupied the old slave quarters, they had no period of adjustment or acclimatisation, in contrast on arrival the slaves were given one to

COLONY	ADULT MALES	ADULT FEMALES	% OF WOMEN
Trinidad & Tobago	31,989	17,159	35%
British Guiana	53,083	34,799	40%
Jamaica	7,137	4,775	40%
Fiji	20,062	8,785	40%

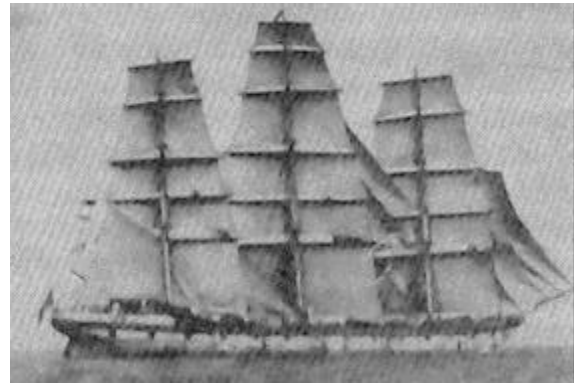
In March 1914 the Colonial office gave the following breakdown of the sexual ration of the total Indian population in four colonies

three years of easy work to build up their strength after their three-week voyage. The coolies started work immediately on the sugar estates after three and a half months at sea. The work they were given took a creole (a former slave) 7½ hours to complete a 'task' (work allocated for a day) which will earn the coolie \$1.20 a week about 10p or 16UScts. Over 50% of the coolies could never finish this 'task' in a day while the pregnant women never completed these tasks, the majority of coolies who landed on the SS Lord Hungerford in 1845 even though muscular and strong could only perform half a 'task'. None completion of the 'task' meant a fine or imprisonment and later extension of indentureship. The system rotten to the core was a blatant extension of slavery without the responsibility to feed and clothe the new slaves called coolies. Chief Justice Beaumont said *"This is not a system of more or less, or this or that safeguard, of an occasional defect here, or excess there. But it is that of a monstrous rotten system, rooted upon slavery, grown in its stale soil, emulating its worst abuses, and only the more dangerous because it presents itself under false colours, whereas slavery bore the brand of infamy upon its forehead"*

The first batch of coolies that arrived in 1838 were flogged in the same way as the former slaves at 'Nigger Yard' some with their hands tied behind their backs and some tied in front.

After arrival of the SS Hesperus and SS Whitby in 1838 questions and concerns about the 'coolie trade' meant it took another seven years before the resumption in British Guiana

and Trinidad where the first ship the SS Fatel Rozak arrived on 30 May 1845. The deceit of 'coolie trade' from India continued in the West Indies where every



The Coolie ship Avoca. Some of these journeys took as long as six months at sea.

effort was made to keep them there. As Rama Deva Kurup an eye witness wrote, *"Death from malaria, dysentery, typhoid, tuberculosis and other diseases took their daily toll...the estate workers were woken at 4.30am...they toiled in the torrid sun from dusk till dawn for a pittance.... Sugar workers did not have sufficient money to eke out a livelihood.... Quite frequently many Indians were unable to bury their dead"*.

The New System of Slavery lasted for 90 years ending in the second decade of the twentieth century.

Captain's Log

Of the 324 Coolies who left Calcutta on 17 March 1858 on the British ship SS Salsette for Trinidad 120 died before the ship arrived three and a half months later on 3 July with 204 coolies.



A Group of immigrants – British Guiana Many of the women who boarded emigrant ships were young widows and Married or single women who had severed all ties at home, had lost caste or become prostitutes.



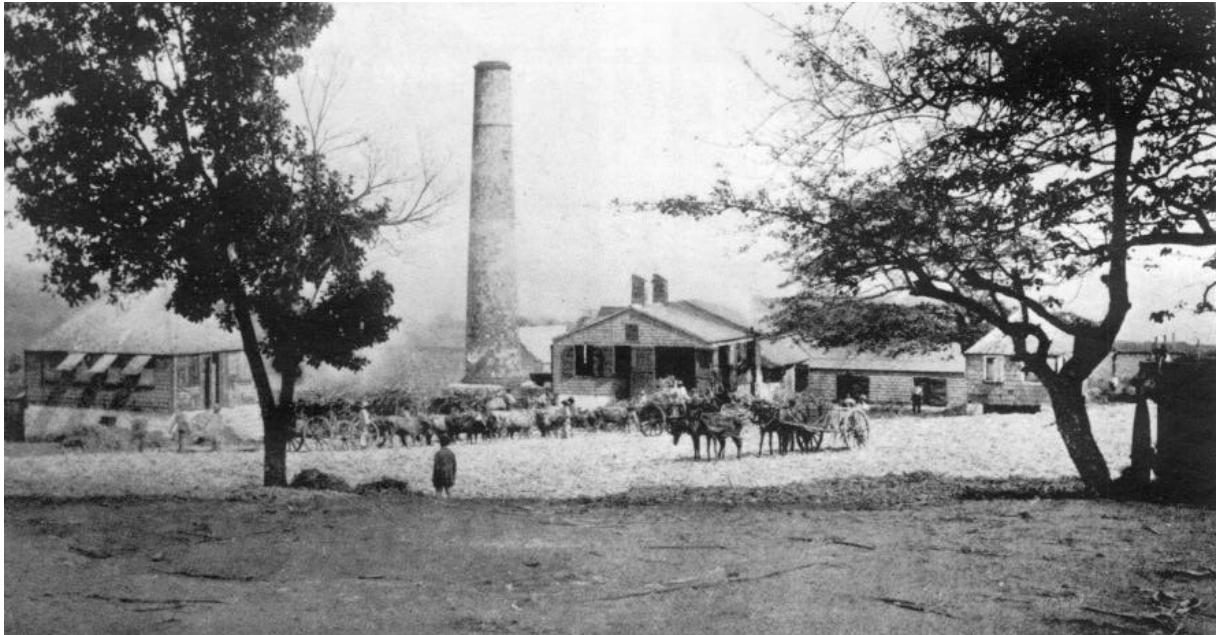
Jewellery and peasant dress of young Indian women. East Indian women's resilience, constant hard work, caring for the young and the men, of whom initially outnumbered them by 100 to 25.



After slavery was abolished coolies were sent to most of the Caribbean islands. Don't be surprised if the two books opened in this picture are not the Gita and the Quran. The Coolies brought two of the world's great religions to the Americas, Hinduism and Islam.

... *“My Mother relates that she had to work from 7am to 6pm manuring sugar cane in the fields for 8 cents (approx. 2p) per day, and also three times a week from midnight to 6am fetching fine bagasse into the factory for 4 cents (1p) for the 6 hour period. Her total take home pay was about 60 cents (12 1/2) per week. She often recalls how difficult those days were: **“Bhaiya, ahwee proper punished”** (brother, we really suffered)...*

Cheddi Jagan – The West On Trial



The stage was not set for the introduction of labourers destined To change the course of history and the fortunes of the sugar industry from the predicted ‘ruin’ to prosperity – which the coolies did under ‘A New System of Slavery’

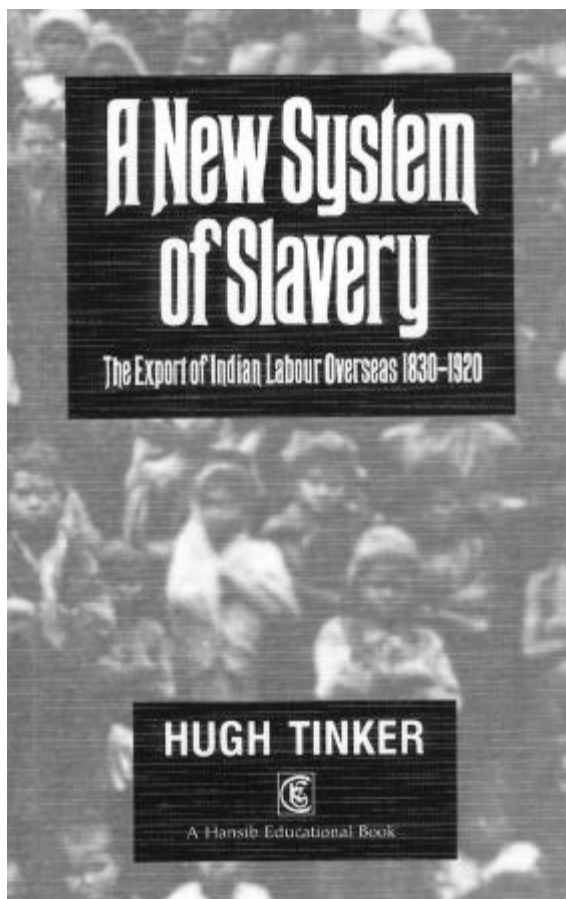


The Fatel Razak was the first coolie ship to arrive in Trinidad, Landing on the 30 May 1845 with a cargo of 227 coolies.

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THE MORE YOU GIVE, THE MORE YOU GET

The more you give, the more you get.
The more you do unselfishly, the more
you live abundantly.
The more of everything you share, the
more you'll always have to spare.
The more you laugh, the less you fret.
The more you love, the more you'll
find that life is good and friends are
kind.
For only what we give away, enriches
us from day to day.



New System of Slavery, portrays and discusses the recruiting and exporting from India, the sufferings of the indentured Indians during the long voyages.....

6

CHUTNEY MUSIC MAKES ITS DEBUT

The year 1970 would mark perhaps the biggest turning point in East Indian music. In this year, a young man out of Barrackpore, Trinidad by the name of Sundar Popo leapt to fame with the song "Nana and Nani." The song, almost comical in nature described the affairs of a grandfather and grandmother. Sung in Hindi and Trinidadian creole, and backed up with the music of the dholak and dhantal as well as that of the more western Guitar and synthesizer, the song instantly became a number 1 hit in Guyana and Trinidad. Sundar soon became known as the King of Chutney. The word Chutney was derived from the Hindi word that was used to describe a hot peppery mix. "Nana & Nani" became the biggest selling Chutney single of its time.

Drupatee emerged onto the Indian Soca scene in 1987 with the release of the single "Pepper Pepper," a song in which she describes the hardship of being an East Indian housewife. She once again leapt into the charts with her new song entitled "Mr. Bissessar."

By the end of the 1980s, no less than 20 new artists had emerged into the new Indian Soca scene. Among these were Babla & Kanchan, a veteran husband and wife team out of India who had risen to fame after a successful career in providing music for the Indian movie industry. They emerged onto the Caribbean scene in 1984, when they released two albums doing mostly Indian Soca covers for some of Sundar Popo's older songs.

In 1986, they did another cover of Arrow's "Hot Hot Hot" and Baron's "Buss Up Shot." Babla & Kanchan have continued to produce songs well into the 1990s releasing no less than fifteen albums, including, "Na Manu Na Manu" in 1995 where they did covers of Nisha Benjamin's hit and of Dropati's "Lawa." Another new artist on the scene was Atiya out of Holland. She was discovered on the Mastana Bahar television program while doing the Guyanese folk song, "Ke Ghunguru Toot Gaye."

A more detailed article on the history of Chutney Music will be featured in the JUNE issue of Indo Caribbean.

COMMENT

Who are we? The 1.5 million of us? Everyone has a different categorisation of themselves. Therefore I can only answer for myself. ***I am my Culture***. Whether that be in my heart, mind, music preference or the food I eat.

We can choose to acknowledge our culture or forget it, but there is no doubt that for the past 165 years Indians have been in the Caribbean and we have helped shape the West Indian culture as it is today.

I find it strange that after 165 years the term Indo Caribbean is still foreign to many.

Many West Indian delicacies have come from Mother India, not to mention the beautiful people that were migrated to the Caribbean '*Our Ancestors*'. If we do not maintain our culture, we will lose it. It is up to us to preserve it and it's our duty to pass it on and not let our ancestors be forgotten in vain, we are living their unknown legacy.

How many of us have been asked "Where are you from?" and answered "the Caribbean" only to be questioned "but you're not black" or "I thought you were from India". Just because we are from the Caribbean, does that strip us of our Indianess? Or just because we are Asian why should that deny us of our Westindian culture?

"INDO CARIBBEAN hopes to change the stereotypical view that the Caribbean is of African orientation and show that the West Indies is a culmination of many beautiful cultures. We Indo Caribbean's are a minority in the Caribbean as a whole, but never the less our *small* presence has had a *big* impact, socially, culturally and historically. Isn't it time our Indian presence is recognised and we are not pigeonholed into being this or that when we have our very own culture which we have shaped, live and are proud of.

Remember every thing Indian enjoyed by the peoples of the Caribbean was brought there by Indentured Labourers.

Finally, yes we are of Indian background but nevertheless we are as Westindian as anyone else.

By an Indo Caribbean student Age 16

'If you do away with your traditional way of living and give up your good customs you had better first make certain, that you have something of value to replace them'.

Quotes

- Indians are very rich or very poor. The majority of overseas Indians are poor. They are part of the lowest layer of the industrial labour force. They carry out the more disagreeable jobs in the public services such as refuse disposal, they are the machine minders in the factories; and they are the bearers of burden the pullers of handcarts and rickshaws – they are the 'coolies'.
- "India pioneered the way of protest against Western domination"
Professor Hugh Tinker
- Knowing is not enough; we must apply.
Willing is not enough; we must do.
Goethe
- The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands, but in seeing with new eyes
Marcel Proust
- Discovery consists of seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody has thought.
Albert Von Szent-Gyorgyi

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Under 16 Talent Show

The Caribbean Indian Dance Troupe will be staging a talent show for 16 and under in July 2003. If your child has any talent be it dancing, singing, playing an instrument or any other performing arts and would like to take part kindly submit name, age, address, telephone number and a brief description of their talent to:

**Caribbean Indian Dance Troupe
Talent Show
72 Northbank Road
Walthamstow
London E17 4JZ**

Closing date for audition 31 May
2003

Articles, Events and
comments are welcome
for future issues.

Promote your culture,
introduce
'Indo Caribbean' to
your family and friends.

Useful Information

Indo Caribbean Organisation (ICO)
Contact : Anjani Narayn – 0973 960 870

**Caribbean Indian Social & Cultural Association
(CISCA)**
Contact: Mr Taji Ramnarace – 020 8442 0977

Trinidad and Guyana Music Connection
Contact: Suresh Tel / Fax 020 8671 6806

The Dharma Centre
Mrs Rita Singh Tel : 020 8292 9909

Caribbean Hindu Society (CHS)
Tel : 020 8674 0755

**London Islamic Cultural Society Mosque & Cultural
Centre.**

Quran Teaching, Legal and Social Advice, Wedding
Receptions and Funeral Services.
389 Wightman Road Hornsey N8 ONA
Tel : 020 8348 0353

United Islamic Association
JUMMA every Friday 12 : 45pm
31 Crawley Road, Wood Green, N22 6AG
Tel : 020 8372 3023

**Al Muzzamil Mosque and Community Centre of
Tooting**

8 Gatton Road, Tooting London, SW17 0EX
Tel : 020 7767 7477

Jamaican Indian Society (JIS)
Promoting awareness of Indo Jamaican culture in the
UK
Contact Mark: 07956 111273

Next Issue.....

**To mark Indian Arrival Day in Trinidad
and Tobago *Indo Caribbean* will conclude
this article in our June issue.**

Part 2 will deal with how the “docile quiet
and orderly” coolie survived the abuse of
both the whites and blacks and their fight for
better working conditions and liberty.