

Editorial Note

As Nidān moves to become more broad-based journal of Indian Studies, in this issue we are including three papers that are based on fictional narratives to offer an insight into the history of the Indian diaspora. Often fictional narratives are underestimated in offering insights into historical situations. As much as they are imagined and reconstructed events of real life scenarios, without having to offer concrete empirical evidence they can illuminate history and hence real life. We have consciously begun this new journey of the journal with these innovative ways of depicting Indian diasporic life. The fourth paper is based on normative scholarship and together all the papers attempt to fill the gaps in our understanding of the Indian diaspora. We hope readers will find these papers insightful and illuminating.

Indian Indentured Labourers of Guyana – A Historical Fiction Perspective

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Abstract

My discourse here is about the fictional portrayal of these amazing ancestors, showing what kind of people they were, what made them endure and eventually overcome the hardships they faced, and how they helped to shape us, their descendants. I do not wish to dwell too much more on the hurt, pain, and suffering of our hard-working ancestors, but more on their resilience, inner and outer toughness, their unbounded capacity and willingness to succeed against such intimidating odds.

Keywords: Indian, Indentured, Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad, Mauritius, Migration, African Slavery

On the 5th of May 1838, a long arduous journey was completed by the first Indian Indentured labourers to work on the British-owned sugar plantations in the then British Guiana (now, Guyana). That migration was prompted by the end of African Slavery in the colony in 1834.

Guyana, where I was born, is still the only country in South America with English as its primary language. It is about 83,000 square miles in size with a very fertile coastland, resource-rich hinterland and a population of only about three quarters of a million people. Guyana's immediate neighbours are Venezuela to the west, Brazil to the south, Suriname (or Dutch Guiana) to the east and the Atlantic Ocean to the north. Other neighbours of relevance due to shared cultures are the key islands in the Caribbean, including those where Indian Indentured labourers were taken to-- Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, St Lucia, Grenada, St Vincent, St Kitts, and Nevis. The French took Indian Indentured labourers to Guadeloupe, Martinique, and French Guiana. The Dutch took their lot of Indian labourers to Suriname.

Shortly after the end of African Slavery the plantation owners were filled with anxiety regarding where the replacement labour would come from. An initial migration of Portuguese labourers from the island of Madeira situated in the Atlantic Ocean was undertaken, but this was not as successful as anticipated. Madeira was once the world's largest producer of sugar, and the Madeirans were

¹ Author of: *Sugar's Sweet Allure* and *The Domino Masters of Demerara*. November 2015.

expected to be most knowledgeable and suitable sugar plantation workers. However, the challenging working and living conditions in Guyana quickly took their toll, and after a series of stops and starts in the migration those that remained in the colony took to other opportunities on offer and soon began to thrive in various business enterprises.

Other sources of plantation labour were also tried, but without much success. These included European workers from Scotland, Ireland, Germany, and Malta. Meanwhile, the former African Slaves were not happy about the Apprenticeship System that was being imposed on them in an effort to keep them employed on the sugar plantations. The freed people rightly opposed the system and many moved away from the plantations to work in gold mining in the hinterland and ground provision farming on the small pieces of land that they were allocated.

So, a request was made by John Gladstone, a plantation owner and the father of the then British Prime Minister, William Gladstone, seeking workers from India. This was arranged through the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the first recruits were placed in a holding Depot in Calcutta in January 1838.

The first two ships, the S S Whitby and S S Hesperus, carrying 414 workers then left the port for an arduous and fearful sea journey of 112 days across the Indian Ocean, round the Cape of Good Hope, and through the South Atlantic Ocean, to Guyana. A total of 18 died on this awful journey and the bodies were unceremoniously dumped into the sea. This must have been a most harrowing and hurtful experience for the survivors.

This hardship was only the beginning of what followed when they finally arrived in Guyana on the 5th of May 1838. They were distributed to the various plantations in much the same way as the former African Slaves. The majority of the workers were the Dangars from the hills of West Bengal. They had no experience of such sea journeys or the hostile working and living conditions they were confronted with. In addition, there were many incidents of punitive fines, painful beatings and other punishments for minor misdemeanours which were reported both within and outside the colony. This mistreatment and horrible experience was likened to that of another form of slavery, and is well described by Hugh Tinker in *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830-1920* (Hansib Publications, London, 1993).

After significant protestations by the British Anti-Slavery Society in the British Parliament the migration was suspended in 1839. 236 Indians took the offer to return to India, leaving 60 who opted to remain in the colony. There has been no detailed account of the pain and suffering of the 100 who perished in such a short time after their arrival.

The migration resumed in 1843 with the introduction of better checks at the holding Depots in Calcutta and Madras, the promise of improved medical care

prior to and on the sea journeys and more acceptable working and living conditions in the colony.

My discourse here is about the fictional portrayal of these amazing ancestors, showing what kind of people they were, what made them endure and eventually overcome the hardships they faced, and how they helped to shape us, their descendants. I do not wish to dwell too much more on the hurt, pain, and suffering of our hard-working ancestors, but more on their resilience, inner and outer toughness, their unbounded capacity and willingness to succeed against such intimidating odds.

In my first historical fiction novel, *Sugar's Sweet Allure* (Hansib Publications, London, May 2013), Mustafa the eighteen year old principal character, had to leave his village outside Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, in 1843, with the desire and hope of finding work and earning enough money to return for Chandini, his childhood love. He headed eastwards on foot along the historical Grand Trunk Road, hitching rides on bullock carts, taking a small job by the roadside and finally unwittingly boarding a cart which was taking new recruits to Calcutta.

Mustafa was not formally educated but he had access to the tenets and teachings of his Islamic faith and had listened to the stories of the Ramayan and Bhagwad Gita. He experienced more philosophy and words of wisdom as he and his new companions ventured through places such as Allahabad, Varanasi, Bodhgaya, and Gaya. He even spent some time at the Holy Trinity Church in Allahabad, learning some English and the Christian way. Such exposure to these major religious teachings and practices clearly contributed to his widened spiritual wellbeing.

In addition to this, Mustafa and his fellow workers were suddenly being placed in situations which were unfamiliar to them. Most of them had never travelled together as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, Shudras, and Muslims. They soon had to learn how to adapt to each other and to the new environments such as in the Bhawanipore Depot in Calcutta. This togetherness gave birth to the idea of being "Jahajis" who recognised that they needed to cast their differences aside as they faced up to the perilous sea voyage to a place they knew very little about.

The Jahajis found a new strength in their unity and they became more supportive and protective of each other. The concept of Jahaji became an unwritten code to use whenever the need arose, especially when they arrived in the strange colony where they encountered even more people of different races, including the highly suspicious former African Slaves, the Portuguese, the native Amerindians, and from 1853, the Chinese.

Mustafa and Kanhaiya, his adoptive brother whom he befriended on their ship, were easily spotted as potential leaders of the working gangs by the British Drivers or Foremen, or, in their case, by Ragubir who was one of the survivors of the initial migration.

The Jahajis quickly realised that one way to survive in their new situation was to reach out to their new neighbours. Despite the lack of understanding of each other's languages, they managed to achieve this collaboration over time. This Indian capacity to adapt to such multi-faceted environments is still evident wherever we happen to be in the world.

Of course, such assimilation was never going to be easily accomplished when the over-riding priority of the plantation owners was to have the sugarcane planted, harvested, and the sugar produced through the absolute commitment to the tasks by everyone on the plantations. It was much more important to the owners for the workers to be restricted in their movements in and out of the estates. But Mustafa knew how to get around such restrictions by cleverly using Ragubir's longing for the affections of the beautiful Mumtaz to obtain passes for a visit to find his friend Ishani on another estate. Not only were the passes secured, but the transport was also laid on for the trip by the love-struck Ragubir. There is a saying in Guyana that "the stricter the government, the wiser the population." Mustafa and others like him could easily have coined this phrase.

This shrewdness and cunning allowed our ancestors to carve out benefits from any situation, take risks, and pursue the opportunities that were presented to them. When news came back

from India about how bad conditions were there, Mustafa, Kanhaiya, Ragubir and others thought long and hard about returning to their homeland at the end of their initial three or five years contracts. Mustafa in particular was torn between his desire to return for Chandini and the allure of more regular work, improving living conditions, better relationships in their communities, their own pieces of land, and the encouragement to stay by the plantation owners and their managers.

So, having built up a good reputation as a leader and well-respected young man, Mustafa listened to the persuasive arguments made by his friends. He finally decided to stay on in the colony to develop his business and he eventually got married on the estate. This was a courageous and pioneering decision. Having done so, Mustafa and his friends set out to build their own houses, cultivate rice on their small plots of land, acquire further acreage when they could afford to do so, open small retail outlets, and most importantly of all, took on the task of building their communities through their religions and customs. Hindu Temples and Muslim Mosques began to emerge in each of the sugar plantations and their constituent villages across the colony.

The celebrations of major festivals including Holi (or Pagwa), Deepavali, and Eid were vibrant and caught the attention and interest of the other peoples of the villages as well. Traditional Indian folk music and songs were always prominent and played an important role in raising spirits and morale. It is not surprising that

Guyana has national holidays for Holi, Deepavali, Youman Nabi and Eid ul Adha, alongside the Christian festivals of Easter and Christmas.

This love for entertainment and celebrations also saw the increasing tendency for the men in particular to consume the very potent locally distilled Guyana rum. Mustafa, Kanhaiya, Joshua and others tried in vain to encourage the workers to restrict their drinking habit. Sadly, this love for rum, beer and illicit drugs continues to be a serious issue for Guyana.

The first ever historical fiction novel about the Indian Indentured labourers of Guyana, *Lutchmee and Dilloo* was written in 1877 by the Indian born John Edward Jenkins, an English lawyer, politician and author. He essentially focussed the story of Lutchmee and Dilloo on their plight and struggle that they faced in the colony. Dilloo is portrayed as a hot-tempered but hard working Indian labourer who was more than prepared to fight for his rights even if this meant abusing his steadfast wife, Lutchmee. Dilloo saw unfair practices and never succumbed to injustice right through to the end that saw as well a momentous fight with his arch enemy, Hanooman.

It is important to emphasise the very significant roles played by the Indian women indentured labourers who were for many years in the minority. The compelling story of *Coolie Woman* by Gaiutra Bahadur, (Hurst, 2013) expresses the experiences of Indian women who carried the dual burdens of back-breaking manual labour as well as incessant demands for sexual favours. The latter was primarily due to the greatly disproportionate ten to fifteen percent of women to men over the early years of the migration, and which only ever reached equal numbers in later years up to the end of the traffic in 1917.

Despite such extraordinary burdens and abuses, these women and their descendants have emerged as highly intelligent, formidable, and amazing leaders and influencers in their families, communities who have even reached the highest offices. It is absolutely vital for us all never to forget or casually dismiss the amazing sacrifices, resilience, and outstanding drive of the women of the Diaspora who still continue to inspire and lead their families wherever they are.

The fighting spirit of female martyrs who stood at the very front of the workers and who took action by organizing strikes in the estates in Leonora (1869), Lusignan (1912), Enmore (1948), and Leonora again (1964), must never be forgotten. Such actions of leadership, bravery, and in many cases, ultimate sacrifices by heroines such as Sumintra and Kowsilla (known as Alice) are referred to in *The Domino Masters of Demerara* (Hansib Publications, London, 2015), the second of my intended trilogy of the related historical fiction.

The Indian women have also exhibited a strong affinity for business. It will not be unusual to find that behind many successful Indian business families and companies in Guyana, the most influential drivers have been the women. They have used great insight to spot opportunities, known how best to handle

customers and encourage the men to take more risks. They have calmly allowed the men to take the plaudits and credits for the successes whilst quietly going about their business in the background.

Indian women not only took on their responsibilities as labourers in the working gangs, but also their commitment to managing their households and looking after the children. They taught the children about their culture, religion and language of their heritage. This was principally Hinduism alongside Bhojpuri, and for Muslims, Islam and the Arabic language.

Humour has always played a considerable role in helping anyone to cope with the stresses of life. It is also used as a device by individuals and communities to make light of their circumstances, especially when these are dire. Mocking or aping those in authority is another way of reducing the impact of the harm that they effect.

The exploits of the characters in *Sugar's Sweet Allure* and *The Domino Masters of Demerara* are combined with their ability to see the lighter side of almost every situation they encountered. This dry wit and ability to find laughter even when there was so much hurt and pain around them, was and still is, very evident in the melting pot that is Guyana.

Humour was to be found even during the ghastly years of racial disturbances between people of Indian and African descent in the towns and villages of Guyana during the early 1960s. The senseless beatings and murders committed by both sides left horrid scars on the minds of Guyanese then and the mistrust is sadly still evident to this day. However, incidents such as the many failed attempts by Indian vigilantes on the life of an African police informer were typical of the humour that is recounted in *The Domino Masters of Demerara*.

The Indian people of Guyana have also managed to create a popular fictional character by the name of Balgobin. Everyone tries to create incidents and jokes featuring the cunning of Balgobin who is generally assumed to be of low intelligence, but always gets the upper hand. Indeed, Balgobin is now officially recorded as a character for posterity, through the publication of *The Balgobin Saga* by Petambar Persaud (Hansib Publications, London, April 2009). A typical Balgobin joke which I heard very many years ago concerns his clumsy attempts to do well in school. He goes home in tears and complains to his father about being punished for not spelling correctly. His very enraged father takes him back to school and confronts the teacher. "Why do you ask the boy to spell such big animals like Cow? Why not ask him to spell little things like Mosquito?"

Interestingly, Balgobin is similar to the "Paddy" or "Murphy" character that the Irish people in the UK tell jokes about. I think that when a group of migrants in any country can begin to make jokes about and laugh at themselves it is a sign of maturity, of confidence, and of a sense of being well established in the new environment.

Of course, peoples of Indian descent in Guyana, Trinidad, Suriname, Mauritius, Fiji, Reunion, East Africa, and indeed South Africa can easily identify with the characterisations reflected on in my writings, and indeed of others.' I trust that more of such stories will continue to be written for everyone in the Indian Diaspora and other peoples of the world to enjoy and reflect upon. This will hopefully be one more way for us all to live in mutual respect, peace, and harmony.

Totaram Sanadhya's Experience of Racism in early White Australia (a transcreated narrative)*

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Abstract

This essay falls outside the genre of the usual scholarly and analytical paper or article. Here I wish to indulge my readers in a narrative, a story, that is somewhat fictionalised,¹ albeit from real events that took place and chronicled in the journal (issued shortly after as a book in India in Hindi²) of an itinerant Indian nationalist activist, the late Pandit Totaram Sanadhya (*totarām sanāḍhya*). Pandit Sanadhya happened to be returning from the colonised islands of Fiji in 1914, after his sojourn there of some twenty-one years among the Indian sugar-cane plantation indentured coolies. He was lured to the backwaters of the Empire deceitfully by British recruiters who he believed were taking him to the Caribbean. Beginning as a humble indentured labourer he rose to become a *sardar* or plantation overseer, while also servicing the subaltern Indian community as a *bona fide paṇḍit*: indeed, one of the few in the colony to have received the acclaim from the Indian community of being an 'ardent Ārya dharma lecturer and debater'. He was instrumental – in collaboration with C. F. Andrews – in bringing to an end the horrendous indenture labour system in the colonies (often dubbed as 'the second abolition') which since its inception had effectively replaced the erstwhile slavery system.

Keywords: Race, Indenture, Indian, Slavery, Diaspora, Girmīt, Empire, Australia, Theosophical Society

¹ This is a work of semi-fiction or faction, and thus does not cohere to the chronology of historical studies but draws on a range of events and personalities in connection with the central theme of the story. Rather, I have made an intersectional play of narratives, stories and recollections (as of the cultural collective, even if the dates do not jell or cohere), and so the events may appear a little jumbled. For a more academic and analytical study, see *The Indian Diaspora Hindus and Sikhs in Australia* (eds). P. Bilimoria, J. Bapat and P. Hughes. New Delhi: D K Printworld, 2015, and articles published in previous issues of this journal.

² *Mere Fiji Dwip me Ikkis Varsh* (in Hindi: *mere fijiī dvīp me ikkis vars*) Varanasi: Banarsidas Chaturvedi, 1st edition, 1914; 2nd edition, 1919. The 4th Hindi edition was issued as *Fiji Dwip me Mere Ikkis Varsh*, (again by Chaturvedi, 1963); Totaram Sanadhya's *Bhūṭlen kī Kathā Girmīt ke Anubhav* (or *Bhūṭlen ki Katha*, or *The Story of the Haunted Line*) (in Hindi)) edited by Brij Vilash Lal, Ashutosh Kumar, and Yogendra Yadav (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2012). See also, Totaram Sanadhya, *My Twenty-One Years in the Fiji Islands: The Story of Haunted Line* (being the English translation of both the Hindi texts in one by), John D. Kelly and Ultra.K. Singh, Suva: Fiji Museum, 1991.

Chale Aastalia (Let us go to Australia)

As the steamship rolled into Sydney harbour and the sun broke through the Pacific horizon, the lone traveller from distant shores, Pandit Totaram Sanadhya, breaking his long journey back to India to join Gandhi's nationalist movement in Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, exiting the land of the secondary colonisers for King George V, rubbed his weary eyes to gain a better vista of the approaching civilization. With some bewilderment, he could just make out what his fellow-travellers on the open berth were babbling on about and excitedly pointing to. It was an overly-large bridge, it seemed, shaped like an inverted moon crescent or a women's comb of the kind the Indian village women stick between their scalp and the protruding hair-bun. Usually, he pondered, bridges are built from concrete slabs spanning across the opposite ends of the banks of a river or a creek, with the supporting poles strutted under the structure; but here amazingly, he could not see a river as such: *Chalo hoga koi pooll...saale gore log sab cheez ulti pulti aur apne liye badi se badi banaate hain.* ('Well, it must be some kind of bridge; the white fellows make everything for themselves upside down and in large size'), he ruminated to himself, half-wondering what the fuss was all about. Of course he had never seen photos of this 'Wonder of the World' or of the even more strikingly challenging (not though to Indian sensibility at least that knew only of the Taj Mahal as the greatest single edifice the human race ever erected) by then the universally-acclaimed Golden Gate Bridge joining San Francisco to Marin County.

However, as he looked across at the port his memory jolted for a bit. Then he recalled that this was the very harbour where the local Theosophical Lodge, as it was called, had built a sizeable amphitheatre just for the occasion of receiving and welcoming the youthful Jiddu Krishnamoorthi (formally known as Jiddu or just J. Krishnamurti) on his much-touted first visit to Australia. Totaram could scarcely contain his smirk as the next thought passed through his mind: Krishnamoorthi had been picked out among the many boys who were staying in the Adyar Lodge with their parents while playing innocently with his siblings, as all children around Madras do, on the beach. This jackpot spotting of the supposed divine aura around this boy, circa around April 1909, fell to the good fortunes or *divya-cakshu* (blessed eyes) of the controversial ex-Anglican priest, Charles W. Leadbeater - an ardent follower of the expatriate Russian mystic, Madame Blavatsky, who founded the Theosophical Society (in New York in 1875). Leadbeater informed Annie Besant, who had just taken over as the President of the Theosophical Society, after its headquarters moved to Adyar (outside Madras, now Chennai, in South India). Besant was equally enamoured, indeed taken by the handsomely intelligent disposition of the lad, and shortly after, despite the objections from the father, whisked the young unsuspecting Andhra boy to Sovereign England where he would be groomed for the high stakes of the expectant World Teacher and made ready to assume the messianic throne of the 'Star of the East'. The much

prophesied plan was that the avatarically-chiselled Krishnamoorthi would disembark the ship while still at some distance from the harbour and miraculously "walk on the water" across to the piers – yes, like Jesus two millennia before him on the expansive lake (they called it the Sea of Galilee) – making his way straight onto the amphitheatre where a motley crowd of 2000-odd ardent Aussie and Kiwi theosophists, spiritualists and onlookers would be awaiting eagerly to greet and garland him. Totaram chuckled again to himself as he reached the climax of the story, recalling that the little Jiddu (magic-boy) waited until the ship berthed and then just simply and nonchalantly walked down the ramp onto the concrete platform: *Is jaadugar ko kyun avatar bana diya, ye mamuli sa madras bacha? Wah re wah, krishan ji ki pathar moorti!* ('Whereforth did they make this magic-walker into an avatar, this ordinary southern boy, jee-wiz, some stone idol of Krishna!?)

He too walked off the ramp like Krishnamoorthi some ten years before him, though there wasn't any visible crowd in an amphitheatre or any such construction expectantly looking forward to welcoming him and falling at his Guru-blessing feet. There were throngs of people for sure excitedly awaiting his fellow-passengers from the upper decks to descend; but they were all of the Angrez (Anglo-) kind, and the passengers they greeted in welcome were of the same colour and profile. His arrival was conspicuously absent of any ceremonial display – such as, for example, the gallant reception afforded to Gandhi when he arrived in South Africa (that was the second time, he checked his memory of Indian national history, not the first time, whence he was thrown off the train after reaching Johannesburg); or of the kind afforded to him on his own departure from Fiji after his twenty-one year sojourn there.

The truth is that, as he wrote in his diary while passing time on the long lonely sea-journey, he found himself in the impoverished islands quite by accident, being deceptively recruited as a *girmitiya*³, indentured "coloured" recruits, classed under the more general vernacularised term "coolie", from India (an arrangement or agreement that was contractually to last five years with a return passage guaranteed); five years later at the end of his contract he became a leading activist in the 'Haunted Line' and re-invented himself as an emissary of the Servants of India Society dedicated to uplifting the woeful condition of emigrant Indians in the Empire's little lacklustre jewel. And he worked with Charlie (C.F.) Andrews to have the indentured system, which merely substituted the outlawed practice of slavery and 'blackbirding', abolished once and for all in the colonies of the Empire. Totaram, however, understood that the practice was continuing in some form in Australia despite the second abolition. Just as he averred a form of slavery of the Africans was still prevalent in parts of North America, especially in

³ A corrupt form of the English term 'Agreement', into '*Girmit*', used mostly in Fiji but spread across to other colonies as well where indentured workers were present; it seems Gandhi was aware of this term while in Natal, though he did not coin the term as some have suggested; he did use it for himself.

the southern resistant states. The fledgling nation was plunged into a bloody civil war to fight over the right to continue slavery, and here the Britishers are shamelessly continuing indentured labour as a surrogate to slavery, that only his great heroes, D. Gopal Krishna Gokhale and disciple Mohandas K. Gandhi rightly stood up against, – and more recently he too of course, after serving as one himself....*Ooops, please be excusing me*, he apologised as he brushed and bumped his way through the almost stationary crowd.

Anyway, the lonesome traveller was feeling a little seasick and needed to get to his hotel to wash-up and rest, and indeed to do his mantra-*puja*, the rite of chants. As he walked towards the nearby hotel he wondered about his countrymen who had migrated to Australia, much like the Indians in the island colony, though the former started arriving twenty-to-forty years before he reached the forsaken *dwip*, the outpost island to the other outback/antipodean colonies (later federated states) in Australia, not as indentured coolies or labourers known as *girmitiyas*, but as recruited domestic servants and camel drivers along with hordes of 'Ghans or Afghans, Pathans, Baluchis, Sikh and Muselman Punjabis, and as plantation workers in the hinterlands. Some, mostly Sindhis, even came later as free immigrants, made money managing their own general stores that supplied imported Indian wares to their brethren hawkers and pedlars in the outback. He expressed a desire to himself visit these motley bevy of Indians in whichever vicinities or neighbourhoods near Sydney they may have taken up residence. He made a mental note to himself to pursue this matter on another day. Meanwhile, a passer-by helped him locate the corner street where his nominated hotel was situated. Good thing, he thought, they speak English here and understand the Indian accent . . . well, only just.

Checking-in at the bed & breakfast wharf-side hotel was not such an ordeal as Totaram had expected because he carried with him a letter of credentials and good character from a sympathetic Australian executive with the Colonial Sugar Refining Company back in Fiji (the *Company*, as it was known, that was largely responsible for the exploitation and insufferable conditions of the Indian planters. Ironically he had served as a front-line *sardar* (over-seer) for the *Company*, but with much diffidence and in defiance even as he agitated as an ardent activist for the rights of the coolie force – a movement that spilled over in the subcontinent as well and gained momentum more widely across the colonies). The good *gorasahib* had the foresight and generosity also of 'loaning' him money in Australian currency. He handed the letter with the customary greeting (having been in Fiji for so long, the native greetings rolled off his tongue): 'Bula Ratu.. arrr Maramma'.

'No, this is not Bulla Route and I am not Marrienne; you are in Sydney Harbour and my name is Sandy, Sandy Hore'. He wondered why Sydneyites would be so open about their embarrassing names, like naming one-self '*Chappan-cchuri* (56-knives)'. Nevertheless, he offered his British Subject passport that all Indian

nationals were entitled to, although his was procured in Fiji. Still rather bemused, the young attendant at the front desk could not help bursting out aloud at the sight of the photo and the alien look-alike staring in her face, with a stereotypical aside. 'G'day Stranger... so your name is Mr Toot-a-raam Sundayahoo, *toot-toot?* But you all *black*, got no soap, Mister Gad-fly?' While the sea-fared guest felt offended at being mistaken for an alien and a black man – given that he was a shade or two paler and a British Subject – even more blasphemously, for being stridently maligned with the brazen "god-fly" – the feisty rebellious demi-god, as recounted in an apocryphal epic he knew well from his scriptural learning – he remained silent. "Toot-a-raam" was presently not in the mood to make any sort of considered response or defence, as he would have back in Fiji, that might ruffle the feathers of the unknowing apostate, or mar the first minutes in the otherwise promising lodge he felt he was lucky to be taken into – despite the stringent persistence of the 'White as Snow' policy.

Once in his room, as a good Brahmin or Thakur would, he prepared to do his rituals and ablutions or the necessary purification rites using water; emptying his jholly (jute-satchel), he set out the *moortis* (idols), ghee-lamp, the copper mandala-(bearing geometric engravings), *dhoop* or tiny cubes of sandalwood incense, a small *lota* (brass receptacle), alongside a few little items of dried fruits, nuts and two still-intact bananas, as his temporary Kashi-Vishvanath shrine. He also carried with him a spare larger *lota* that he would fill from the faucet (or the village well, as the case maybe) and take with him whenever he was moved to answer the other holy nature's call. In those days, the outhouse (euphemistically called by Americans 'Restroom' or 'Bathroom'), was situated a little further away from the main dwelling towards the rear end of the small pocket-garden (or dirt-bed as it was also called). One reached it via a narrow concrete path and small steps. While he was inside for the humanly natural ablution function, other guests of course needed to use the 'dunny'– as it was also called in the antipodes, – as well, and one such lingered around expecting the unknown guest to evacuate and vacate at any moment. But Totaram, even though he was aware of the singular waiting-in-line vagabond, was taking his time (time was not in any rush as his protracted journeys across the seven seas had taught him; and eternity can never run out of time either, the Lord willing otherwise).

The now rather desperate guest hanging around outside noticed to his utter bewilderment a trail of water running out and down from under the door of the dunny-house; this is most unusual, he thought to himself in refined Irish accent (as he too was an intrepid or perhaps a recent immigrant just arrived seeking to make a decent livelihood in the antipodes). Something seemed not right, perhaps untoward; so he rushed back inside the building and enquired of the owner-manager at the desk, whether some accident might have become of the incumbent, whoever that might be, occupying the grand throne in the dunny-chambers.

Don't see u'ater comin out of the dunny, ain't we?

Hhhmmm, the bloody darkie Indian or Ceylonese shod is up to somethin' unwieldy there'

Cor blimey, has he soiled the seppo then? Or the bugger missed the bowl.. got the trots?

Holy shit; fair dinkum ma'te?!

A larikan from India, me thinks.

Before the conversation went too far, the self-purified much-relieved itinerant Indian advocate of human decency emerged, only to be affronted by the irate king of the castle himself, who he noticed sported a felt hat with a largish rim which strangely had bottle-corks drooping off it; and there was the Irish strongman standing next to him providing moral support and a muscular arm, if needed. The big boss almost stuttered as he tried to roll out the word 'water' in high pitch, each time that he touched on it in his kangaroo-court interrogation.

So what you suppose, Mr Ghandhi, you have been doin' inside the dunny of ours? Spoiling our bog, yeah? Where is the wo'tta comin' out-from, you nigger? There is just a bloody hole in the ground and a 4-gallon hollow drum over it, no wo'tta in-there, mai'te.

Never-mind, he thought, the prickly *gaddhi*, royal throne or holy see, patched together with sawn-off bits of ply-wood from imported Indian tea-chests or Bengal rum crates that he had just escaped falling off from his *padmasana* lotus pose, before settling for the Indian police-squat position. Startled, the Thakur (though a Brahmin he assumed the status of a Thakur back in India for ease of recruitment) now began to feel affronted if not polluted by the sheer fact that a person without doubt of a lower-caste than his warrior status (he had the Irishman in mind while he was doing his morning business) could dare to cross his path. What could be a worse slight than now another *mleccha* (of barbarian stock) snorting his overly-large nose in his *disha*, direction, to cross-exam him about his washing habits even as he prepares for, or is about to, his next calling, which is to offer the routinely daily *sandhya* or obeisance to the Hindu gods. He retorted thus with an air of diplomacy.

He'yr, from this lota; I carry water to clean myself....

This was such a shocking pot breaking news cast to the lodge manager and the bystander alike, as would be were the little wireless tuned to Radio Australia (unmistakeably blurring from the scintillating cathode-tubes on one side of the counter), for instance, to announce that Martians have landed on Sydney Harbour

Bridge with an armoury of German-supplied weapons portending a holocaust in the penal outpost! Could the lightly-turbaned "darkie" be serious about cleaning himself in the loo?

Shoot me dead... wo-tta? lo-tta? What ar'ye talking about, ye bugger? Youu took some wo'tta from the house, what for... to clean your back passage, uuh up-shit-creek mai'te? We don't have enough wo'tta to drink, Shire Gungodean coolie: you reckon w've your holy Ganges flowing down our backyard, or somethin'/? Why don' ye go do yu'r ablootion rights behind the bush there, pundit Hindoo?!

Totaram's attention stopped at the mention of 'coolie', an unbecoming appellation he had heard a million times over in the islands; 'So', he muttered to himself: 'If I am a *kooley*, what is he, a *chamaar* (leather-worker), *bhangji* (scavenger), probably the son of a penal colonist?' After a short pause in which he composed himself, in a learned tone, but in as calm a voice as the avowed Gandhian principle of *ahimsa* coupled with *satyagraha* would dictate, he questioned the manager himself.

What is the difference, Mr John (all white men to him seem to be called John or Tom)? I will be washing myself otherwise in the bathroom only; better to do [the] rite after the action, no?

You bloody Inzians, you're a menacing curse on the Empire and now you are dread-set to destroy God's own country...

Totaram heard 'dead' in place of 'dread' in proportion to the angst welling up in his chest at that precise moment; but he did feel the characterisation of the antipodean land as '*Gods' own country*' a trifle overdetermined, for he had always believed that that description was reserved by the gods of Sanskrit for India, as *apna Bharatdesha*. Never-mind that silly slippage; Totaram did not have time for this fracas, and excused himself, muttering in his immaculate sonorous Benarasi Hindi that echoes off the Ganges' ghats (s), to the effect: *but this was no crime, I was merely following my custom, as prescribed in the ancient texts, and did not use bleach-filled paper, or tufts of grass, which the mlecchas and some of the lower class use*. Thereafter he entered his assigned room and bolted the door from inside. Soon though it was breakfast time and the bell in the dining room summoned all the guests to that common hall. The sugar-cane field veteran fighter and self-proclaimed ambassador of the Indian diaspora in Oceania had just finished his rituals and so was ready for a bit of *naashita*. He paced gently across to the hall with his little jholly which he popped down by his side on the floor, for, as per his experience on the steamer, he thought he might want to reach inside it for certain provisions he would likely need to supplement the contents of the sparse breakfast he expected he would be served (and eggs and bacon are not his cup of tea).

While waiting for the Darjeeling-picked tea (called Bushells in the colonies) that would arrive first, he noticed a strange metal object on the table which bemused him no-end but also troubled him as it carried an air of inexplicability about it. He bent over to examine it more closely and noticed that it had a rather corrosive look about it; parts of the silver-coating seemed to have fallen off, possibly with age or disuse or abandonment, and it looked every bit incongruous sitting there. Ahaha, he suddenly figured it out: it was a short, simple, book-holder or at least a rack for placing chapters for a book as they evolved; he thought to himself: *now I am a learned self-made pandit and have been writing my own memoirs of my long years in the benighted colony next door, well in imperial terms anyway for it is run virtually by the Colonial Sugar Refining Company headquartered in Sydney or Brisbane with its myriads of sugar-cane loaded trains that chuck along the railway lines humming, 'compaany ki ma...' (he couldn't utter the unspeakable slang in his own high-brow company). And yes, I am calling the book "Mere Fiji Dwip me Ikkis Varsh" (My Twenty-one Years in Fiji); this will be the first such book on the atrociously impoverished life of the indentured subalterns in the Empire, and I pray to God that the original Hindi version which I will publish in Varanasi finds its way to Australia, even just one copy, in the hands of the descendants of us girmitiyas, or one of my compatriot's grandsons in their university. Four chapters have been written, another planned, and three are yet to come which will be finished' – Totaram prophetically assured himself – by the time I am reaching my longed-for motherland.*

So this ingenious invention of the industrial era, he thought to himself, could come of much use; its presence here is probably totally wasted and, besides, no one would notice its absence. Thereupon he moved the metallic object to one side and let it glide into the other hand which lowered itself and deposited the new-found treasure into the jholly resting on the ground (almost as though it was his clandestine cobra that he was surreptitiously feeding from the brekkie table). Done, he thought, and imagined how the emergent chapters from his book on his antipodean sojourn (few year less than the time Gandhi spent in South Africa) and other memories would look like when they are completed; indeed, Shri Banarsidas Chaturvedi would not waste a moment giving him a lucrative contract and carrying away the chapter-rack with the pages intact to his office for re-transcribing, editing and printing, even if the British government in India moves to proscribe and possibly ban the book because of its subversive, anti-colonial undertone (the Kunti story – notwithstanding the dubious sexual assault allegations she has made against a white overseer and *sardar* at the plantations –, I will also underscore as a symbol of the *dalit*-subaltern cry for the 'second abolition' of the oppressive mass labour industry and the systemic abuses within it). Pray to the Almighty, the English version when it is translated by Sri Chaturvedi's son or gotten done by his good friend Rev C. F. Andrews or whoever, wherever, later on, will be read by these whitefellas in this country as well, if they are at all literate.

No sooner had he finished this dreamy thought, then a large-bulgy person of indiscernible gender – for an oversized apron and a white-cap hid parts of the body that would otherwise disclose the creature's physiognomy – carrying a tray on which sat a tea-cosy and some other items, appeared by his table. S/he with a heavy thud propped the tray on the table, and immediately as s/he reached out towards the spot where the metallic implement would have been sitting, intuiting by a mode of non-perception its stark absence, enquired in no mean pitched tone:

And where is the bloody thing-me-bob gone from here?

From the squeakily husky voice bellowing out of the fire-pump belly, the somewhat startled Totaram could make out that his intruding second-in-command host by his table that was otherwise nicely draped over with hand-embroidered white cloth, which he was just now admiring, was none other than Madame Dragonfly herself.

What "think-me-god", Madam?

Her voice reached a pitch higher as the dialectic unfolded.

You bloody-well know what I meant, you scum: the toastt-rack! I cleaned it this morning as I do every morning and putit h'ree, right on this spot... where is it? Or, I'll screw your tiny neck, Mr India, or Mr Ceylone... I never know what damn coolie country these niggers come from.

As she was finishing the line, her head turned slightly towards the guest at the next table, hoping for an approbating nod to the ambiguity just expressed in respect of the land of origin.

Oh, that suchmuch thing, the book-holding item... it is falling off the table, Madame, being of no use at brekphaast, I let it to be on the floor, only.

Well, well, let me tell ye, Mr Hindoo Shakespeare, it ain't no book-holder, you stupid illiterate coolie; you wouldn't know what a book looks like if you saw one, you still-dirty scoundrel.

Before she could finish the lexical explicative that without doubt is absent in the Hindi or Sanskrit semantic treasures that he is aware of, Totaram was moved to assert his status, which the literate tradition of India had cultivated over two millennia as distinct from the mere one millennium history in Western culture, and maybe extant only just in the European-settled Australia.

I write books, Madam...here look at the chapters of my happen-coming memoir.

I am not interested in your book or writing or the Baghdad-Guitar like them theosophists come on the wireless with their Masters' nonsense, what they call them Maitariye and Krishnimooti.,... the toast is getting cold and moist, and I need to go and serve the other real guests... put it back up here or I'll stuff your little mouth with these toasts I am holding in my hands...

The raucousness attracted the family dog that looked more like a fox than of the normal canine kind, who in a curious haste galloped over to the table-side of the *cause célèbre* and proceeded to sniff out the bulky jholly. Dismayed, the resident canine guest who is treated better than phoren guests, let out a couple of disagreeable sneezes, most likely due to an allergic reaction to the odour of some remnant camphor in the satchel, a white aromatic substance made from saturated terpene-ketone into small goblets that the devout god-fearing Hindus ritually use for *aarati*, the finalé to the twice daily mantric supplication to the gods. A dog, however, in lieu of a god hovering around the food table signalled an added bad omen.

As the stage-frightened learned Thakur-turned *paṇḍita* while in the colonies reached into his jholly and shuffled out the implement he would have used as a ruin or spoil from the major Oceanic colony to bolster the gift of learning and writing true to his own cultured civilization, blessed by Goddess Saraswati herself (they called her Sophia is Greece and Luba in Russia), the imposing manageress could not hold back one last invective, a faux pas, as the memory of the morning's incident inside or outside the dunny relayed to her by her husband-owner and the Irish seaman, was woefully still fresh in her chef's mind. In flat-pan deride she howled:

Cri[e]key man, throw another shrimp in the barbie...; you come to my hotel to spoil everything, take precious little wat'r we have from the bathroom to the dunny house... and then not wash yourself in the bathroom; have you no soap, or sand-soap even as your people use? We don't want your kind here in our house; go stay with 'em Inzians in the bush or the outside town, in Marysville... plenty of y'ur type out there, dark and dirty, niggardly and with filthy habits, and stealing our things, and fighting among themselves, like the Inzians and Muhammadans around your loin-clothed Mr Ghandi.. ppphhooo, you stinking Inzians, make-troublers: that's what you all are. But don't come here to make trouble to us!

Totaram of immense self-esteem that even his compatriot, the Rev Charlie Andrews, England's own self-exiled Jesus helping Gandhi and Tagore in the freedom struggle, had acknowledged in no small terms, could not take it anymore. Without engaging in any sort of contestation, he could not however dismiss the emergent thought in his mind even as he tried to swallow down his palpable fury: *ye gore logoin ka ghamand iis desh me bhi kam nahi hean, yahi inke company-walle baap jo Fiji-dweep me hum bharatiya ko ganne-ke pattiyo se taang dette*

hein, aur yaha wahi tarah ka bakwaas karte hean.. hum ko bhi toast-reck-pheg se taang denge ye log.. toh yaha se bhaagna-chahiye. (These white folks have no less such self-deceptive cheek even in this country; the same lot, their Company fathers, who in Fiji islands would hang us Indians using sugar-cane leafs, carry on dastardly here also.. lo, they'd probably hang me by the toast-rack.. better I flee from here). With that self-sermon he reached down, grabbed his jholly and dashed to his room; within a few short minutes he had his tin suitcase readied and the motley puja-accoutrements repacked in his little jholly, then exited as abruptly as a prey would avoid a predator. At least he had learnt now of the next destination, wherever; he would get out into the street and jump into a cab, and ask of the cabbie: 'I am told Indians in the plenty are seen outside the city, Mary's-anvil I hear; could you just take me there?'

With that he hailed a cab, and got into the back seat. No sooner had the destination been amicably negotiated with the attentive driver, the fugitive Totaram, dropping his head down as if into a deep meditative state (always his saving grace, and the Lord be with him), began the self-reflection, albeit in low audible frequency: *They are sure to treat me better, for the honoured dignitary and learned ātmā (soul) – even if never proclaimed to be Mahatma – that I am and well-recognised by the humble and humblest of people, my own and the natives as well.. and I'm sure they have in their stores a better quality book-holding think-me-god than what the hotel could afford for its guests.* The driver could barely understand let alone care to follow the soliloquy that ensued in the backseat; besides, he had to focus his consciousness on the road, as at any moment a callous Indian might rush out from the sidewalk to cross the carriageway just when a vehicle or two happen to be approaching. Maybe they bring this habit from India, the driver had strongly contended on many such occasions when he just missed running over a brownny miscreant.

Once they reached the outskirts and Totaram began to behold people on the streets of various shades and colours, mostly Indians and Chinese, and a few South Sea Islanders as well, he felt relieved and comforted that he was more among his own people than among the acrimonious and very prejudiced *gorewalle* (whitefellas). And indeed, he remembered also that the real leader, sometime President, of the Servants of India Society, who had risen up the ranks of the Liberal (Tory) Party of India when Gandhi was thrown into prison by the Britishers, thereby leaving a vacuum in the Indian reformist-cum-freedom movement, had walked these very streets. Going by the name of Right Honourable V. S. (Valangaiman Shankaranarayana) Srinivasa Sastri [Shastri], this Indian diplomat, to be precise a Tamilian Headmaster from a family of orthodox Vaidik Brahmins, with a captivatingly mellifluous tongue that spoke faultless Queen's English, was one-time member of the Madras Legislative Council and the Imperial House of Legislature, later to be hailed as the widely celebrated jubilee-boy, or to be more precise, the 'Silver-tongued orator of the Empire'. And that honour was earned

him because he did not see things eye-to-eye with the Mahatma and rejected the extreme nationalists' call for India to break-away from the British Isles. He recalled from the conversation he had with the great, somewhat off-beat savant when he was passing through the Fiji Islands *en route* or after New Zealand, that he had just visited Australia. To be sure, Sastri was on a veritable mission to plead the cause of Indians in the colonies and to enlighten the Colonial Governments of the local *girmitiya* Indians' entitlement to their natural rights precisely because they were British Subjects like those of European descent, domiciled territorially anywhere in the Dominions of the Empire. Apparently, he was officially deputed by the Colonial Indian Government on the invitation of the Australian Premier of the time, what was his name? *Billie the Hugh-es*, they had met at the Imperial Conference in London where the stalwart of the Empire made quite an impression on the Australian parliamentary leader with his pontifical concern for Indians scattered across the diaspora, including Australia, although – permitting the colonialists this moot face-saving point –without as much as passing any remarks or innuendos about the rampant racism prevalent in South Africa or, for that matter, the unmentionable White Australia policy downunder past the Pausengi seas.

In any event, Sastri was welcomed with aplomb by the resident Indians in the suburbs of the very metropolis Totaram now found himself moving about in lonesome self-company. On their behalf the acclaimed Right Hon Sastri had delivered thundering speeches to the national Parliament and adroitly campaigned with the media, Liberal Party politicians and the Church, all of whom he somehow managed to formidably impress, following his tryst with Hugh-es (as Totaram pronounced the last name to himself) in South Africa – much to the chagrin of a very reticent General Smuts then at the helm in South Africa - , with his impeccable English and upper-crusted Brahmin attire, in the form of an *achkan*, a longish button-up dark frocky-coat adorning what came to be known as the 'Nehru collar.' Through his gallant efforts and cunning argumentation he had succeeded in procuring votes for Indians (the first non-whites to be given universal franchise in Australia), as well as rights to purchase property, apply for permanent residence, bring their spouses and children from India for re-union, and establish their own business and cultural institutes. And what was this clever self-educated southern Brahmin's argument? It was that, since Indians here were, again, *bona fide* British Subjects, and India being the jewel in the crown but also soon to be (at least that was his unrequited dream) a Dominion, yes a Dominion, there was no basis to discriminate against Indians, on parity with the full citizenship that white Australians enjoyed within the British Empire! But there was a caveat that passed through Totaram's mind as he had a much closer first-hand encounter with the colonies than Sastri had.

Sastri was, in Totaram's humble estimate, this flighty privileged diplomat of one single argument, or to put it in another way, the coy-admirer of the greatness of

the European civilization whose role of educating the Indians and coloured peoples everywhere was inexorably providential. He likely had no idea, despite the pervasiveness of caste-ism and the patriarchal gender-bias in the subcontinent, of the exact and deep ramifications of racism, colonisation, disenfranchisement, and marginalisation. Sastri refused to acknowledge the existence and predicament of the native Aboriginal people in the sixth continent – whose plight in some ways was even worse, having been victims of genocide and the 'stolen generation' criminality at the hands of the same colonisers and internal colonists. Sastri had avowed to turn a blind-eye to historicism of the Lockean *terra nullius* judgment that soon after the European "discovery" of *terra australis* led to the dehumanisation of the very people who had inhabited and preserved this continent over some 80,000 years, and against whose wishes the British government dumped petty criminals to what they first used as a panopticon-wired penal colony before turning it into a sovereign colony (or colonies) for their own settlement and aggrandisement. How could Sastri have been so blinkered to the persistent prevalence of the '*Shveta Aastalia palicy*? So much so that he did not once make a reference to this pernicious apartheid proclivity of the majority population with a Parliamentary mandate (even though Westminster wasn't entirely sanguine about this departure – hence the quizzical agenda of the Imperial Conferences). The condition of the – to be sure non-indentured – desis or the desiporias in Australia must not have been due to the White Australia exclusivism but rather owed it to a minor shortcoming within the Australian constitutional pragmatism and pending reformative adjustment within the Empire! While the indigenous inhabitants were not constitutionally-mandated as citizens of the newly-federated nation (if they were even accorded the full status of right-bearing human beings), Indians somehow pre-empted the remaining Aboriginal tribes by being accorded – that is the argument – the status of British Subjecthood with equal rights on a par with other members in any of the Dominions. Whereas Totaram, having been a witness to and scarred by two decades of expropriation, racism, and marginalisation in the South Seas, and more influenced by Gandhi's determinations towards moving to a robust discourse of (human and labour) rights and self-governing Indian polity, could have taught Mahopadhyaya, or better Maharaj, Sastri a lesson or two. But the well-heeled and officially-courted diplomat did not have enough time, due apparently to his busy schedule according to his ever-accompanying personal Secretary, one G. S. Bajpai, to have deeply meaningful and profound dialogue with his countrymen. To be sure their concerns and legal wrangling with the authorities, without doubt, were foremost on his mind; but he had a clear agenda, which only a British-minded freedom fighter, like Annie Besant could – that even Gandhi having failed to – understand. The ruminations on Sastri continued as he looked out the window.

The poor fellow of impeccable polished black Johnny Walker leather shoes, ardent devotee of the Empire, had forgotten that the Britishers had stolen the land from coloured natives. Oh well, never-mind that oversight, as Totaram tried to dismiss

any negative thoughts or ill-will towards the greatly admired scorn-free national hero, a disciple of the towering Indian leader, albeit pre-Gandhi, Gopal Krishna Gokhale (also a guide later-on to Gandhi), who was a pukka British-Indian quasi-nationalist patriot. In the township teeming with hard working Indians would that Totaram himself be a beneficiary of the victory clinched by Sastri in his erstwhile momentous visit to this country about the same time that Annie Besant had brought Jiddu Krishnamoorthi to this land? His elephantine memory made one small addition to the theosophical coincidence as the taxi came to a halt: *The trio had actually met briefly on a railway platform in the middle of the desert-skirting country as their respective trains stopped for uploading supplies or whatever.* By now the driver had assumed a self-imposed deafness to the deaf noise emanating from the rear.

Sir, your destination has been reached; your compo is 1 guinea, called out the cab-driver from the front seat, whose accent indicated that he too was a migrant from some region in Eastern Europe maybe, or an in-exile Jew fleeing from Germany perhaps, and so even though he didn't follow a word of the solo-chatter in Hindi that went on in the back-seat, he could humble himself to address another alien-looking wanderer or hopeful migrant as '*Sir*'. While the thought did pass through his mind, he was too preoccupied with his own concerns to ask of the driver if he was subjected in his adopted taxi-land to the type of anti-Semitism that was rife in Europe. But the thought that registered sanguinely in his mind as he was about to alight the passenger's seat was that that no one since his arrival thus far had addressed him in such honorific terms. On the contrary, he was called names, many insufferable names, that very morning within an hour or two of his arrival. *God help this unlucky country...*

Handing the cabbie the calibrated fare which needed some fast calculation in terms of the miles traversed as it seemed exorbitant by the standards of India or Fiji, Totaram disembarked on the footpath. Taking a deep breath as if celebrating a sense of comforting relief, he merrily wandered off with his tin suitcase and jholly in the direction of shops that displayed amateurish sign-boards in English and in Hindi and a couple also in Gurumukhi for the benefit of the Sikhs, advertising wares such as 'Indian SiliK Clo-thing', 'India Otencils', 'Singhs' Farm Hardwear,' 'Patel Oil', 'Sindhi Jewelers', 'Bulsar Sattelwalla', 'Billimoria Bootstore', and so on. He felt this was the moment of his home-coming that he had longed for when he left the accidental escapade in an equally accidental Ramnik Dwip (the island of banished exiles), even though India, his true destination, was another some 7,500 miles and many sea-months like light-years away. However, he reminded himself coyly as he paced along the uneven footpath with unevenly laid concrete slabs, a few more chapters of his sojourn in the Pacific and Indian Ocean waters remained to be completed before he would reach Ahmedabad. Yes, Ahmedabad, and not his erstwhile city of lights and *panda*-thugs Kashi, as he had decided, indeed avowed, that he would live in Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram where

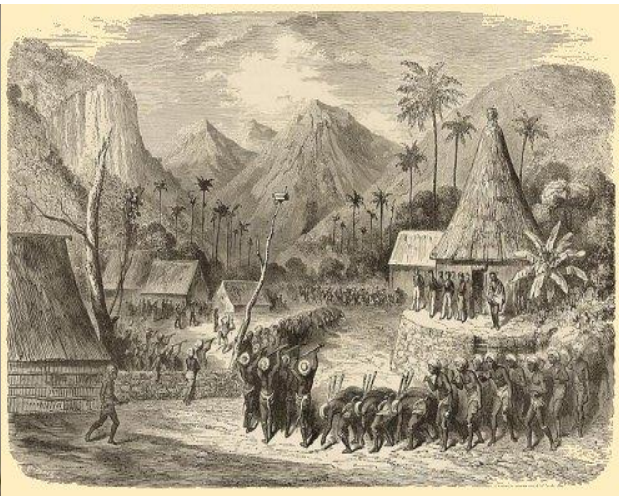
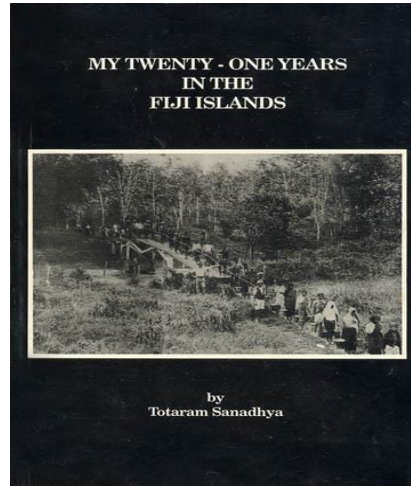
he would throw the whole force of his soul and the learning experiences from his overly prolonged sojourn across the Kālāpānī (Black Water) behind Gandhi's 'Quit India' Movement: the sun must set, sooner rather than later, in the axial of evil they call the British Empire.

Have a civilization.

No, thank you, we have our own.

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Routes and Dwellings: Transnationality and Writing the Indian Diaspora in Ethiopia in Abraham Verghese's *Cutting for Stone*

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Abstract

The narrator and surgeon, Marion's words, "Where silk and steel fail, story must succeed" (9) in commencing to tell the story of a wound that divides two brothers, could well be mimed and rhymed in "Where history fails to tell, story must succeed" as the novel *Cutting for Stone* spans Ethiopia, India and America and the lives of expatriates and transnational workers and their children in four continents across three generations. And in the process it also touches on a chapter of Ethiopia's modernity that awaits to be written, i.e., one that over a long period of time involves Indian doctors, teachers, merchants, traders, entrepreneurs, architects, artisans, nuns and priests from the orthodox church in Kerala.

Keywords: Indian Diaspora, Transnationality, Ethiopia, Migration, Modernisation

I

The story of the twins Marion and Shiva born in Addis Ababa of Sister Mary Joseph Praise, an Indian nun who dies at childbirth and Thomas Stone, a British surgeon who abandons them after the woman he loves dies, traces the ironies of human choices, the twists of destiny and the hidden trails of history. Hanging precariously at the edge of life in their dying mother's womb, the twins are brought safely into the world with the furious intervention and medical skills of Hema or Hemlatha, the Indian woman gynaecologist at the Mission Clinic of Addis Ababa, and eventually raised and parented by Hema and Abhie Ghosh, the other Indian surgeon of Mission (called Missing in the novel, though, as Ghosh says, like a Hindu god it has many more names). Growing up in Addis Ababa of the sixties and seventies, Shiva and Marion's world of Hema, Ghosh, Matron, the British matron of Missing, Naema, the staff probationer from Eritrea, housekeepers Gebrew, Almaz, Rosina and her daughter Genet, is a fusion of many places, many peoples and many ways of being. Their world is the filter through which we see the exciting years of Ethiopia's history from the Emperor Haile Selassie's times to the revolution and Mengistu Haile Mariam's dictatorship with references to an earlier Ethiopia of Emperor Menelik as well. The Indian doctors in the novel are an integral part of that history as the intimate encounters between Indians and Ethiopians in the novel take place in the capacity of doctors and those they treat, the narration of disease, medicine, discourses of the anatomy and the world in which it comes to have meaning telling the intimate story of cultures and cultural contact. It is illness and medicine which handcuffs Hema and Ghosh, and later

Shiva and Marion to Ethiopia's history, connects them to the royal family, risks them the friendship of revolutionaries, acquaints them to the poverty and misfortunes of commoners, to cultural mores, rituals and belief. Marion's life, reminiscent of Verghese's years in Ethiopia and America makes *Cutting for Stone* an autobiographical engagement with fiction, thus shaping the novel as "hybrid form . . . part social inquiry, part fantasy and part confessional"¹ with other allegorical structures built into it that write the poetics of diaspora.

Marion, whose voice carries the story of both Marion and Shiva, is a surgeon whose medical studies being disrupted due to political turbulence that enters his life in the shape of a personal crisis, migrates to America. The novel's author Abraham Verghese, much like Marion, had grown up in the city of Addis Ababa where his parents were Physics teachers at the University and after his schooling started his studies in medicine that was disrupted due to political turmoil and saw him going to America, then to India to complete his studies in medicine and back to America, where he too like Marion practiced medicine as an Indian intern. Far exceeding the explanation for writing the novel as "want[ing] to depict my love for that land and its people, for their incredible beauty and grace and their wonderful character" in the event that "the few images one sees of Ethiopia are uniformly negative about war and poverty"² The structure of the novel reads as a form that bespeaks a deeper involvement of the self around questions of longing and belonging that an expatriate's ties with a land that cannot be claimed as homeland and a transnational's rootlessness are fraught with. "From the time I was born I lacked a country I could speak of as home. My survival had depended on a chameleon like adaptability, taking on the rituals of the place I found myself to be in: Africa, India, Boston, Johnson City" (Verghese 1994: 58) and "I was an outsider of sorts: an Indian born in Africa. Was there ever going to be a place in the world to call my own?" (Verghese 1994: 308) says the narrator of the autobiographical novel *My Own Country* written almost a decade before *Cutting for Stone*. The fictional expression of the longing for home is given expression in Marion's return to Ethiopia where he continues to live as a medical practitioner serving the people. In Ghosh who dies in the place of his work, never going back to India, and in Hema who never goes back to India either, we see yet another fictional form of this desire. Peter Brooks writes of plot as a 'machination of desire,' its intentionality lying in its orientation toward the end even while the end must be achieved only through detour.³ The desire for home written as return to Ethiopia drives the plotline to its end even while working through many detours—the departure and the stay in America as exile. A narrative of return though it might be, the alienation of being a foreigner in his land of birth, of the foreigner's

¹ Salman Rushdie "In Defence of the Novel, Yet Again." *Step Across this Line*, Modern Library, 2003 p. 52

² Interview with Abraham Verghese. Bookbrowse.com

³ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1984, p108

experience of being what Rimbaud calls the ungrammatical *Je est un autre*⁴—I is another – keeps writing into the plot in the symbolic language of otherness—wounds and death.

The vexed question of the expatriate's claim to belonging is played out when Marion leaving Ethiopia for having been endangered by Genet who hijacks a plane, is told by Solomon, "Go and good luck to you. This isn't your fight. I'd go if I were in your shoes. Tell the world about us" (371). Marion ponders on those words,

This isn't your fight. I thought about that as I trekked to the border with two escorts. What did Solomon mean? Did he see me as being on the Ethiopian side, on the side of the occupiers? No, I think he saw me as an expatriate, someone without a stake in this war. Despite being born in the same compound as Genet, despite speaking Amharic like a native, and going to medical school with him, to Solomon I was a *ferengi*—a foreigner. Perhaps he was right, even though I was loath to admit it. If I were a patriotic Ethiopian, would I not have gone underground and joined the royalists, or others who were trying to topple Sergeant Mengistu? If I cared about my country, shouldn't I have been willing to die for it? (371)

One can easily trace in these somewhat vexed and anxiety generated words the autobiographical element as one recognizes their context—the common practice in Ethiopia of referring to anyone not identified as Ethiopian or who does not 'look' Ethiopian as *ferengi* or foreigner. (Not only the local speaks of Ethiopia and the rest of Africa, but this divide of native and non-native has to do with the nature of African historiography as well—of late some Ethiopian scholars have started breaking out of the Eurocentric modes of writing the historiography of Ethiopian modernity in which Indian or Armenian contributions to Ethiopian modernity still awaits to be written⁵). As leaving Ethiopia to never return was the fate of the expatriates during the time of the Derg, the bloody rule of Mengistu Haile Mariam, Marion's return read fictionally as Verghese's own desire for return cannot be missed, nor that he returns in times of war to work at the Mission as doctor as his parents had done—especially so in the light of Solomon's words. Marion's return to the Mission at the time of war to serve the people, moreover, highlights the act of fighting illness as the other war that the expatriate doctors fight on a daily basis. In the novel Ghosh's making useful donor dumped medical machineries difficult to use for lack of adequate facilities like electricity, is indeed a form of battling, giving birth to the famous Ghosh adage thus, "Screw your courage to the sticking place" (212).

⁴ Rimbaud cited by Julia Kristeva in *Strangers to Ourselves*, Trans Leon Roudiez, Columbia University Press, 1991. Did Rimbaud write these lines when he was in Ethiopia or of his stay in Ethiopia? Rimbaud, who lived in Harar, Ethiopia in an Indian style house built by an Indian merchant, now famously known as Rimbaud house in Harar.

⁵ See the essays in *Callaloo* Vol 33, No 1, Winter 2010 that came out of a conference in Cornell University in 2008 on Ethiopian modernity.

In his Interview Verghese writes of choosing the medical profession and of the characters of his novel in the medical profession, "The beauty of medicine is that it is proletarian, and its prime prerequisite is that you have an interest in humanity in the rough. Many of us come to medicine because we are wounded in some way. Thomas Stone is a great example, but so is Marion and Shiva."⁶ In place of the economic migrant expatriate (the eternal outsider and foreigner), is the one involved with humanity in the rough and who has the most intimate encounters with the people of the land. While the likes of Solomon join the communist revolution to depose the monarchy and bring power to the people—a revolution that would justly raise critical consciousness but finally fail miserably with the military dictatorship taking over—Verghese finds another definition of the proletariat and another kind of revolution in the service rendered by Sister Mary Praise, Matron, Thomas, Ghosh, Hema, Shiva and Marion.

The definition of the expatriate worker as one being recruited from another country for better skills, drawing a larger salary, being temporary contract workers with deep ties to the mother country implies a strong sense of distance with the local people and temporariness. Contrary to these senses of the expatriate worker, in the account of Hema and Ghosh's work there is repeatedly an obliteration of distances. The assumptions of expatriate temporariness is addressed in the playful mimicking of the expatriate contract worker's temporary rights of work and stay as Hema, the Indian gynecologist renews her marriage contract with Ghosh every year. After the first few years of visit to Madras to supervise the repairs and rebuilding of her parents' house that takes place with the expatriated salary she sends home she stops going back as she adopts Shiva and Marion and marries Ghosh. Her work so valued, her skills so needed from the palace to the poorest of the poor that it is Ethiopia that she begins to think of as her home: "Wasn't that the definition of home? Not where you are from, but where you are wanted?" (79)

The Indian expatriate teacher's working state in East Africa that Verghese and his parents experienced in the 50s, 60s and 70s was one of kinship and closeness with the East African local culture. In autobiographical *My Own Country* is an account of the narrator's parents coming to Ethiopia along with four hundred other teachers Emperor Haile Selassie had recruited from the Christian State of Kerala for the schools he was going to start after having visited the southern state of India to see the churches of St Thomas and being impressed by the rows of schoolboys and schoolgirls in uniform heading for their morning classes. The narrator's parents had stayed in Ethiopia for thirty five years before moving to America when political unrest started. The account of their stay in Ethiopia comes across as one of kinship in the church services the small Christian Indian community conducted in the ancient language of Syriac in the rented Ethiopian churches. "My name Verghese has the same derivation as Georgios or George" (Verghese 1994: 196) he writes to emphasize his name's shared etymology and oneness with a popular Ethiopian name. In *Cutting for Stone* besides the

⁶ Interview with Abraham Verghese. Bookbrowse.com

Emperor's Namaste or salutation to the sari clad Hema in the crowd there are other indications as well of the kinship of cultures, the Indian presence in Ethiopia of which we get indications in the novel in such markers as the *Jai Hind* Indian barber shop, Vanilal's spices, Motilal Import Exports and the richly consumed Hindi films, the deeply felt cross cultural commonalities in beliefs such as the evil eye (called *buda* in Ethiopia) and rituals of protection—Hema's *rangoli* and Almaz's *thew thew* (spitting, similar to Indian rituals of warding off the evil eye) when the new incubator for the twins come, and in Hema's *pottu* and Genet's scarification ritual to ward off the evil eye, the rituals of gender. All of these would turn into the plot of the double, of the twins joined in the head at birth and mirror images of one another.

The Indian expatriate and non-expatriate migrant settler's journey from Africa to U.K and U.S and other parts of North America naturally understood as one of a journey of upward mobility but one undertaken in case of emergency such as the expulsion of Asians from Uganda and the violence of the Derg in the 80s that made many Indian expatriate workers leave Ethiopia is well recorded in Abraham Verghese's *My Own Country*. These were journeys made by those to whom Africa had become home and they had stayed there for several decades even though many of them might have first gone there first as expatriate workers, their contracts renewed many times over. As much as Verghese is sensitive to being called foreigner and to the sense of home and kinship that many expatriates, migrants, transnationals find in the place of their long stay and work, he is also sensitive to assumptions of expatriate superiority and expatriate detachment. When political turmoil erupts and even drags Ghosh to prison for giving medical treatment to the coup leader, Ghosh suggests that they leave the country. "We have had a good innings. Maybe we should leave . . . before the next coup" (285). Marion, the narrator, overhears him say and slips away, his own reaction to these words being one of vehement rejection, "Ghosh's words felt like a kick to my solar plexus: this was my country, but I realized it wasn't Hema or Ghosh's. They weren't born here. Was this for them a job only good for as long as it lasted?" (285). Neither Ghosh nor Hema leaves. Ghosh eventually dies in that land and Hema stays back with Shiva as Marion leaves, not because of the coup, but because of Genet, the woman he loves, who having joined the EPLF hijacks a plane and gets Marion into trouble due to his close association with her. And finally Marion returns.

It is in the metaphor of Tizita that Marion's integral connect with his birthplace and both his sense of alienation and belonging finds expression. Section three of the novel from where Marion's voice commences, begins with the chapter entitled 'Tizita,' the haunting Ethiopian music of memory tinged with regret. The chapter, anticipating the turbulent events in Marion's life in Ethiopia and in America acts as a subtext, a mirror for the entire novel as does the short preface at the beginning of the novel where we find Matron referring to Bach's 'Gloria' as she tells Marion that he should recognize the 'Gloria' within him and play God's instrument to the best. Autobiographical in character, as much as the novel is the story of Marion's

becoming a skilled surgeon and recognizing the Gloria within him, it is also the story of Marion's life as expatriate, exile, diaspora that finds shape in the metaphor of the Tizita, the song which Almaz sang to child Marion when he held her breast, the song that he would hear all through his years in Ethiopia, the song that he would carry with him in his cassette when leaving for America, the song that is "the heart's anthem, the lament of the diaspora, reverberating up and down Eighteenth Street in the Adams Morgan section of Washington D.C., where it pours out from Fasika's, Addis Ababa, Meskerem, Red Sea, and other Ethiopian eateries, drowning out the salsa or the ragas emanating from El Rincon and Queen of India" (187). It is the song that keeps the Ethiopian diaspora in the West alive where working in Marriott gift shops or underground parking lots or behind the counters of 7-eleven they remain invisible. In the years of exile as Indian intern in America experiencing the race and class divide while treating poor Blacks, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans on Medicaid in ill provided hospitals Tizita is also his song as Marion hunts for Ethiopian joints, meets old Ethiopian acquaintances, renews his relationship with Genet with fatal consequences.

The Mission and its patients, Shiva and Marion's growing up, Marion's falling in love with Genet, the failed coup against the Emperor, the killing of General Mebratu and his assistant Zemui, the illegitimate father of Genet, Marion's accidental murder of Zemuy's bicycle thief, Genet and Shiva's betrayal of Marion and his estrangement from his twin brother Shiva, Genet's genital mutilation, Rosina's suicide, Ethiopia in turmoil and the events leading to Marion's escape from the country is all told in the tenor and mood of the Tizita, as much as the plotline traced in the karmic belief of every action being dependent on another. Contained within the Tizita is Matron inspired Bach's 'Gloria' of Marion and Shiva's years of growing into fine surgeons and of M.S Subbalakshmi's 'Suprabhatam,' the invocation to Lord Venkateshwara in the mornings in Hema's apartment, also the music of the Indian diaspora in America and of memoirs of growing up in an Indian household in Ethiopia with the smell of Indian spices and readings from R.K Narayan's *Man-eater of Malgudi*. The entire experience of living and longing in the novel, a Tizita.

Homi Bhabha writes of turning loss into the language of metaphor and of the "double writing of dissemination" in narrating the lives of diaspora, exile, transnationals.⁷ In *Cutting for Stone* this double writing involves intertextuality as well as several layers of connected metaphors. A narrative that is informed by metaphors of medicine and surgery—right from healing the wound to liver transplant—following the lives of expatriate doctors and nurses, the series of medical crisis that drives the plotline, and the urge to tell the story of "humanity there in the rough"—a line that Verghese had found in Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* before setting out to become a student of medicine⁸—and that casts its soul in the metaphor of Tizita—has intertextual relations with other

⁷ Homi Bhabha, "Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation," *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, 1994, p148

⁸ Interview with Abraham Verghese, bookbrowse.com

narrative structures as well that go in the shaping of *Cutting for Stone* as Indo-Ethiopian novel.

The story of the twin brothers, Marion and Shiva, joined in the head at birth and surgically separated, henceforth to be carried by Marion's narrative voice as ShivaMarion, estranged from each other for their involvement with the same woman, Genet, and coming together again in the liver transplant from Shiva to Marion that eventually kills Shiva, other than being a metaphor of the broken family during the Derg owing to different political leanings of members within the same family, is reminiscent of the familiar formula of the popular Hindi film story and of the great novel of the subcontinent, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* of Saleem and Shiva, that draws its energy from that form. (Like Saleem, Marion can even see through olfaction at one point, and Genet takes the place of Parvati in the triangular relationship). The transposing of the allegorical form works to the end of doing new and exciting things intertextually when placed in the context of Indian expatriates in Ethiopia. *Midnight's Children*, itself a novel written in exile, imagines a plural India (of secular India unlike the other newly born theocratic State) through Saleem and Shiva exchanged at birth by nurse Mary Pereira (in a variation nurse Mary Praise is the biological mother in *Cutting for Stone*) and raised by adoptive parents, the place of the narrator's 'I' fusing both Saleem and Shiva (as much as Shiva and Marion are fused in ShivaMarion). Saleem's biological father the colonial William Methwold who departs to England after Independence, leaving behind his bastard child (playing thus another face of plurality) is replaced by the English Thomas Stone, the biological father of the bastard twins, who in a telling reversal of Methwold leaves India for Africa seeking the career of an Indian expatriate, though absconds to America after the birth of the twins. Interestingly, the choice of names Marion (a variant of Mary) after Marion Sims, the doctor in Alabama who revolutionized women's surgery, considered father of obstetrics and gynaecology, the patron saint of fistula surgery and Shiva whose name Hema had invoked in the turbulent air carrier and in the operation theatre when the baby wouldn't move, the Christian and Hindu names also after Sister Mary Praise and Hema, the two Indian women characters in the novel and the two mothers of the children, writes Verghese's plural India (Marion's praying to the many gods, from Muruga to the Bleeding Heart of Jesus, one of its expressions) as well as the plurality of India and Ethiopia fused in the expatriate experience. Genet, of the name of Ethiopian Christmas, does the other merging in Hema's Bharatnatyam lessons given to her and Shiva.

The world outside of Missing is one in which lines of race and class in Ethiopia are drawn in well- defined lines (ironically despite the inspirational Ethiopia of Marcus Garvey's Back to Africa fame) and the expatriate worker as *ferengi* or foreigner has gradations—a direct commentary on the racializing of development work in Africa (following the colonial model of racializing class) thus where the managerial positions of the North American and European funded international NGOs doing development and Aid related work are with a few exceptions all whites. At the free government schools of the Emperor's time Indian teachers were all degree holders

whom the Emperor hired from the Christian State of Kerala. On the contrary, at the British school LT&C the teachers had their A levels and the odd teaching certificate. "It is astonishing how a black crepe robe worn over a coat or a blouse gives a Cockney punter or a Covent Garden flower girl the gravitas of an Oxford don . . . accent be damned in Africa, as long as it's foreign and you have the right skin colour" (192) we are told. (Curiously, Marion and Shiva are light skinned, blue eyed, but it is as Indians that racial identity goes in the novel). To these English schools went the children of the merchants, diplomats, military advisers, doctors, teachers, representatives of the Economic Commission for Africa, WHO, UNESCO, Red Cross, UNICEF and especially the newly forming OAU, Organization for African Unity rather than at the government schools where the more qualified Indian teachers taught subjects like arithmetic, geography. Shiva and Marion too, like Verghese himself, perhaps, went to the school of English teachers for at the rough and tumble of the government school they would have been the only non-native children and in a minority of kids with more than one pair of shoes and a home with running water and indoor plumbing. Also perhaps in reminiscence of his memory of Ethiopia and East Africa of the 70s when the narrator of the autobiographical *My Own Country* writes of playing in the University band, the haze of smoke and the dancers of all colours and races against the stage, (for unlike in the rest of colonial Africa where races socialized in segregation, in Ethiopia there has always been free mingling) at the familial setting of Missing, where the fictional bid to shape a poetics of belonging is the strongest, poison turns to medicine, the differences between locals, expatriates, races, religions and classes having been made irrelevant in the bringing up of the three children, Shiva, Marion and Genet. How they come to be bound as one people goes in much of the novel's making.

The deeply racialized worlds of India, Africa and the United States are addressed, but through a race free imaginary imbued in a poetics of care and reversals. In Thomas Stone, the Indian born son of an Englishman and English woman, race is played in the reverse as he leaves India for Africa when his chances as an English doctor in the hospitals of Madras become slim after India's Independence. In writing Thomas Stone and his sons Marion and Shiva Verghese's writing of Christian India on the Ethiopian landscape includes thus the Anglo Indian as well, the other important group of Christians in India. Not in India or Ethiopia, but it is in the racialized world of Aid and Development designed in North America and Europe that Thomas Stone's whiteness comes to be a sign of mastery in Africa around which the darkness and underdevelopment of Africa is organized. An instance of this imagining is the medical textbook authored by Thomas Stone, *The Expedient Operator: A Short Practice of Tropical Medicine* carrying the book's description by the publisher in the back cover "During operations performed in darkest Africa" conjuring visions of "the white doctor, Thomas Stone, operating on his own finger inside a tent while reciting Cicero, a Hottentot holding a lamp, the only source of light, and wild elephants outside" creates an iconic image of Africa bringing American missionary donors to Ethiopia in the hope of turning savages to Christians. While made iconic thus of the white doctor in Africa,

Thomas Stone's character revealed as one of deeply wounded all through his stay in Africa (his symbol being the split finger and a deep wound) and ending in horrible tragedy and failure, undercuts that masterful imagery. It is the lot of the British Matron, having lived long in Ethiopia, who counters such typical western attitudes with the history of Ethiopia's Christianity and its unique modernity with the prevalence of the written document when Europe was still savage. The western imaging of Africa as the bestial and sexually perverse that reveals itself in the donor's agenda—Matron has to cook up non-existent city wide projects on gonorrhoea and syphilis eradication programs in order to procure funds she would use for basic medicines the likes of penicillin—are countered in the writing of the deep erotics of the novel involving the trio Marion, Genet, Shiva. Marion and Genet's sexual encounters break the boundary between the erotic and the profane. The profligate humours of Ghosh, his unashamed erotic ventures in the night clubs of Piazza and the candid expression of his sexual needs in his making out with Almaz and the bold Hema too break with the stereotypes of the docile Indian man and woman of western stereotypes (that now, due to the interests of Western powers to control the image of the region, is giving way to the other racist stereotype—the Indian man as rapist and the Indian woman as victimised, very often the content of frame stories for India in the western media).

In the class divided and racialized health care system in America where the poor are the sick and the one's that cannot afford medical treatment and the well-endowed medical schools, the domain of the rich white elite, are tied up with well stocked hospitals, Thomas Stone is top ranking surgeon, teacher and the world's greatest name in liver transplant surgery. How we come to find him occupy this plot line is, however, through his encounter with Marion, his son, an Indian intern working in the hospital that treats the blacks and the poor in Bronx on Medicaid and who wounds his absconded father by drawing on their racial divide that translates to a divide in their work space. Ironically, however, meeting him for the first time at the Mortality and Morbidity conference, Marion makes his first contact with Thomas Stone through the pedagogical code "words of comfort" out of Thomas Stone's humanist medical pedagogy of care become irrelevant in the world of the high tech hospitals of the rich white. What Verghese does with the isolated and wounded Thomas Stone in *Cutting for Stone* is actually in some ways akin to what he does in *My Own Country* with the HIV infected gay white men, wounded and isolated from the mainstream white society that constitutes ideologies of the norm and that does not accept them. Just as Verghese becomes involved as a patient listener in the stories of the marginalized HIV infected white men and women, Marion too becomes the witness and listener to Thomas Stone's stories of abject isolation and suffering.

As much as the familial space of Missing is built of a diverse group, the pushes and pulls of the native and expatriate relations leave their trace within the plot of the wound and death, often to be read in between the lines. In Rosina's brutal FGM of Genet after she sleeps with Shiva, her disbelief of Marion when he tells her that he wants to marry Genet when they grow up, and finally her suicide by

hanging from the rafters when Hema intervenes in her authority to 'protect' her daughter from becoming a housemaid despite her high English education (and we read in the narrative a voicing of what passes in silence in the case of Almaz), thereby choosing to discipline her as she pleases according to her cultural codes; in Marion's perception of Genet's difference in her sleeping in the separate quarters, of the differently smoky smell from the burning incense in her clothes, and finally, of the differences being the reason for her fierce competitiveness are some such flashes in the novel. In the Probationer who gets a name only in the last pages of the novel—a name she does not herself use anymore—and in her clumsiness and awkward inability to communicate or respond appropriately to situations is perhaps hidden more than meets the eye, hidden in her many displacements in Eritrea and Ethiopia—an orphan raised by Italian missionaries and severed from mother tongue and in Ethiopia placed to work in the Mission Hospital amongst English speaking expatriate doctors and nurses—and finally the making of a tongue tied native. The only time in the earlier sections of the novel when she expresses herself and emotes is when the ululations take place at Mary Praise's funerary ceremony, connecting her to her own orphan childhood.

Told in a language of medical metaphors, alienation and a longing for belonging spin a plotline of wounds and desire in *Cutting for Stone*. Lacan writes of desire being "a relation of being to lack. This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn't the lack of this or that, but the lack of being whereby the being exists."⁹ The hole in the core of the being of one who is foreign in one's land of birth and the desire for that place (spread over food, music, eroticism, cityscape, relations) finds a sign system in the language of wounds on the one hand, and a plot of return on the other. Appearing in the Prologue along with a brief account of the twins joined at birth and separated by a wound, the image of pierced in the heart by the angel, Bernini's *Ecstasy of St Teresa* in which the spiritual and the erotic merge, becoming thus symbol of the disgraced nun Sister Mary Joseph Praise, presage the plot of wounds and desires as do 'Tizita' with baby Marion and Shiva at Almaz's breast, experiencing the first stirrings of the erotic life that runs deep in the novel while hearing for the first time the Tizita, song of nostalgia, also the song of Marion's life. Addressed to the image of St Teresa on the wall the child Marion's longing plea, "When are you coming, Mama?" (5) that is answered by the very structure of the novel as wound and desire when read as the journey not just of Marion but of the lost travelling letter of Mary Praise to Thomas Stone that Marion finds in the end after his return to Ethiopia with all of the drama of wounded bodies and wounded psyches involving the twin brothers and their many parents having taken place in different operation theatres in different parts of the world.

The narrator says in the Prologue "My intent wasn't to save the world as much as to heal myself" (6), the medical metaphors of the wound and the hole that awaits stitching and fixing applied to the broken family, a metaphor itself of divided

⁹ Jacques-Alain Miller (ed) *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book II, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p223.

peoples, the displaced being and its fragmented self—"we are all fixing what is broken . . . it is the task of a lifetime . . . we'll leave much unfinished for the next generation" (8). In this story of generations made of different sets of parental plots wounds play a role in mobilizing the plot both vertically (the generational and migrational involving history over space and time) and horizontally (affects and symbols) and it is through wounding that those of disparate backgrounds come together in a deep affective relationship. Wounds (both physical and psychic), mirroring, transference and doubles all come together in the scene of birth of the twins, Marion and Shiva, as Thomas Stone, a wounded man (his sign in the novel is the split finger) who had transferred his love for his dead mother on to Sister Mary Praise, wounds his own sons at birth and kills the woman he loves, repeating with a fatal difference the scene of the gruesome death of his own mother murdered by his father's lust. In an ironic twist characteristic of much of the plotline, years later Thomas would meet his son Marion in the Morbidity and Mortality conference in New York. Shiva, wounded at birth by his father and who remained speechless for a long time, speaks for the first time the soul piercing words to Hema, "Will you forget if someone kills me or Marion?" (203) when he experiences a psychic wound witnessing the killing of the pups of the Mission's dog. The triangular Marion, Genet, Shiva relation opens to other wounds that touch the depths of native and expatriate relations in a familial setting of people of unequal ranks. Tragedy due to an erotic tension and misunderstanding also involving a filial, parental plot, repeats itself in the erotic tension that develops in Marion, Genet and Shiva's relation followed by the brutal FGM and the gruesome suicide of Rosina. In both these scenes, as well as the scene of Thomas Stone's mother, Hilda's death, psychic and physical wounds are deeply connected, involving generations and cross cultural players, influences and encounters in the tragedy. For Genet, the physical wounds—scarification of the face and FGM—are also wounds of culture that Rosina marks her with and that invariably subjects the young girl to the war of will between the two women, Hema and Rosina. The scarification of the face, a coming of age ceremony to ward off evil taking place sixty days after the death of Zemuy, whose bastard child Genet is, involves thus another parental plot of wounding and another double, that of Eritrea and Ethiopia. When Hema goes into Rosina's quarters to protest, Genet tells her, "This is the sign of my people, my father's tribe. If my father were alive he would have been so proud" (290) in a reverse of the wound of bastardy and hatred of the Eritrean Zemuy, her mother's lover, that she let the blindfolded Marion see in the dark only a few months back. The change of heart the new wound entailed would lead her to join EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front) and hijack a plane in a few years' time, leading to many wounds in hers and Marion's life.

In the exile section in America takes place the narrative transformation of wounds into the plot of return. On the one hand the old wound of the parental plot reopened for transformation after Marion meets Thomas Stone at the Morbidity and Mortality conference in Boston, and on the other, the opening of the old relationship with Genet living in America a wounded life of failed revolutionary, failed marriage, failed motherhood, poor and convicted African exile and

immigrant. In a reversal of their earlier separation over Genet, fresh wounds, physical and psychic, in Marion's renewed relation with Genet would generate the cause for the two brothers to come together in an organic whole, ShivaMarion, with Thomas Stone conducting the operation of liver transplant to save his son's life before the plot turns into another reversal mode in Shiva's death, the novel's final wounding before Marion's return to Ethiopia. Shiva, Christ like gives his life, while Marion's recovery and coming back to life as the old ShivaMarion is akin to the resurrection of Christ and Lord Shiva like divine transformation, the route of the reversal completed in the return to Ethiopia by way of Marion and Hema stopping in Rome at the Cornaro Chapel housing the blue marble sculpture of Bernini's *Ecstasy of St Teresa* where Hema lights a candle in memory of Mary Praise as Marion admires her wonderful faith and lack of self-consciousness that can be so inclusive—"a Hindu lighting candles to a Carmelite nun in a Catholic church" (526)—giving the final healing touch after a saga of wounding.

II

The story of the doubles and the plural played out through the absence of biological parents and through the adoptive parents and of each of the main characters experiencing several homelands in *Cutting for Stone* "contests genealogies of origin" in tracing the "structures of cultural liminality within the nation" becoming thus the conditions for emergences of a minority discourse.¹⁰ None of the characters in the novel claim or go back to origins or roots, save Genet, who in order to pay allegiance to her illegitimate Eritrean father she hated when alive, joins the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and hijacks a plane, becoming thus the only character in the novel who looking for roots commits an act of violence that endangers the family at Missing and forces Marion to leave Ethiopia. She carries to America that self-delusion that repeats itself in other relationships and eventually turns to violence against her own self and destroys her. Marion returns to Ethiopia, not in search for roots, but in tracing a destiny of care to the place of his birth. Son of a colonial officer in India, Thomas Stone leaves India for Ethiopia after Independence when he notices that Indian hospitals are no longer interested in giving positions to English doctors. He leaves Ethiopia for America when Sister Mary Praise, in whose love as in his own dead mother's was his real true belonging, dies giving birth. Tsige leaves Ethiopia and makes herself over in America as the owner of Queen of Sheeba, the Ethiopian music and food joint. Hema, Missing's gynaecologist and Tamilian Brahmin from Madras, having left behind labels of caste is gone so far away that we are told that the word Brahmin meant nothing.

In *My Own Country* the narrator speaks of his mother, a single woman, who had gone to Ethiopia to work at the University and married there. It is after her, Verghese's own mother, that the lives of the outbound women who have left their communities, families and many of their mores behind, bringing to the new place

¹⁰ Homi Bhabha, "Dissemination: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, 1994, p148.

some of the customs of the other place, the single Indian women expatriate workers in Africa, Sister Mary Joseph Praise from Kerala and Hema, the biological mother and adoptive mother of the narrator Marion, go in the making of the novel's poignant minority histories of cultural liminality. The novel is framed by these two women, the absent presence of Sister Mary Joseph Praise haunting Marion's narrative. The first two sections before we enter Marion's narrative of the Mission and the Indian diaspora in Ethiopia, are of Sister Mary Joseph Praise's and Hema's. Sister Mary Praise's leaving the almost two thousand year old orthodox Syrian church of her family's faith in Kerala to join the Diocesan Carmelite order of Madras and then enrol for nursing at the Government General Hospital of Madras is already a severing of roots before leaving in a ship for Aden with sister Anjali to start her mission in Africa. That the journey of these two Indian women to Africa is not the same as that of the European missionaries is presaged by the abbess's foreboding as she sees them off on their voyage out, "The English missionaries have the almighty Empire behind them, but what of my girls?" (14). Sister Mary Praise's journey and experiences while outbound are those of a woman called by her vows to give her services but also of one made vulnerable because of her singleness and youth. In the ship, breaking all boundaries between man and woman, self and other, she nurses day and night the plague ridden Thomas Stone back to life. Yet the death of her only companion, sister Anjali, in the ship and her rape and abortion in Aden—the figuring of the risks of a single woman travelling to unknown places—before escape to Ethiopia and Missing, leave her with the first experience of doubt before she enters into the new life of nurse in Ethiopia, serving by the side of Thomas Stone. Her advanced stage of pregnancy discovered too late and with fatal consequences that leaves everyone shocked, is the mystery that hangs in the novel and finds a way of substituting the shock over her death involving the taboo subject of the nun's sexuality with an image and a symbol that fuses the erotic with the divine—the calendar print of Bernini's famous St Teresa, her lips parted in ecstasy hanging on the walls of the dead Sister Mary Praise's room.

It is the research and writing of the life of his biological mother Sister Mary Joseph Praise that takes Marion to India, instead of the other route in *My Own Country* where the narrator goes to India to complete his medical studies as did Verghese. But this fictional journey as researcher is autobiographical no less as it unfolds the two thousand year old history of Christianity in India that came in with the apostle St Thomas, a history that belongs to a structure of cultural liminality within the nation. The name of Mary echoed in the namesake Marion connects thus India, Ethiopia, America (of Marion Sims the revolutionary surgeon of fistula as much as where Marion and Mary's letter have travelled to) and Europe of Bernini's St Teresa, the many roots and routes of Mary and Marion.

Hema, the pottu wearing Sari clad woman, identifiable for the ward boys of Missing with Nargis in *Mother India* so popular in Addis Ababa along with other Hindi movies, we first encounter as a formidable castrating figure who backed by Malayalis, Armenians, Greeks and Yemenis, brings to task an unscrupulous French

pilot in an endangered air carrier on its way to Ethiopia, playing thus the colonial scene of the empowered white male and the threatened and docile native in the reverse. We are told that Hema's anger was directed not just at the Frenchman in her deadly grip but at "all men at the Government General Hospital in India who had pushed her around, taken her for granted, punished her for being a woman, played with her hours and schedule, transferred her here and there without so much as a please or by-your-leave" (66)—the familiar scene not just in India but of many workplaces of the world. In mid-air in an air carrier, truly liminal, she plays by her own rules giving thus the fight to both racism and patriarchy.

Having left Madras, and gone so far away as to leave behind labels of caste, the word Brahmin meant nothing to her. Her entering into a relationship with the wild and free spirited Ghosh, the half anglo, half Parsi, half Bengali who called himself the high-caste Madras mongrel, and in miming the expatriate contract worker's renewable yearly contract, living with him on the playful condition of a renewable contract marriage, while raising two adopted children with him, the rules again are her own. Sending money home in the first few years, both the actions of an earning expatriate and an empowered daughter, and going back to Madras to oversee the additions to the house made with her money, her commitments gradually change with the coming of Marion and Shiva into her life. Henceforth what we see is not a Madras of Hema's returns, but an Indian home in Ethiopia of Marion and Shiva's childhood of cow milk, their naming ceremony with rice spread on the floor and their names spelt in Sanskrit with grains and predictions made by travelling astrologer, on the Grundig in the morning the playing of M S Subbalakshmi's 'Suprabhatam,' invocation and a wakeup call for Lord Venkateshwara, rangoli drawn with rice flour on the ground to ward off evil spirits, Hema's Bharatnatyam lessons to Shiva and Genet with leather thongs of bells tied to the feet, the reading of R.K Narayan's *Man-eater of Malgudi* to Shiva and Marion, the large framed photograph of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister hanging on the wall of Hema's bedroom, in Hema's bedroom closet a shrine dominated by the symbol of Shiva, a tall lingam in addition to little brass statues of Lakshmi, Shiva, Muruga, with the additions of an ebony carving of Lord Venkateshwara, the ceramic Immaculate Heart of Virgin Mary and a ceramic crucified Christ after the birth of Shiva (the namesake of Lord Venkateshwara) and Marion. An Indian home where invocations to Lord Venkateshwara flow into Almaz's Tizita, and the palette savours *injera* (staple bread), *kitfo* (minced meat), *doro wot* (chicken with sauce) and *gored gored* (pieces of marinated cow and buffalo meat) cooked by Rosina and Almaz; and Amharinya and Tigriniya spoken along with English, Hindi (Hindi film songs are enormously popular in Ethiopia), Tamil, Italian (become Italiniya in Rosina's tongue) brings Ethiopia, Eritrea, India all under one roof and sometimes even on a single page.

III

The insider outsider's narrative of *Cutting for Stone* opens what Homi Bhabha calls 'the third space of enunciation.'¹¹ For those transnationals who have lived and worked long in Africa as had Verghese's family, their fictional counterparts, Hema, Ghosh and the Matron in the novel, and Shiva and Marion born and grown up there as did Verghese and his siblings, their position is one of the insider outsider. They neither partake of the outsider's view point, i.e., one that sees Africa as some primitive bestial other whose sole identity is hunger and disease and one that Western Aid organizations and their discourses of development partake of (famine in Ethiopia's case, and in more recent times AIDS; the writing on the back of Thomas Stone's textbook *The Expedient Observer: A Short Practice of Tropical Medicine* evoking a dark Africa and white saviour doctor)—or of the nationalist view point that practices for itself a proud uncritical narrative of romantic grandeur and exclusions, or that of the people's that maintains a strong discourse of native and non-native, insider and outsider/foreigner.

Cutting for Stone gives us that unique narrative of the transnational turned insider outsider's perspective living through times of change. It has as much Matron Hirst opposing the western discourse of Aid and development in Africa as she counters the rich history of Ethiopia's orthodox Christianity with the American missionary's donor discourse of christianizing the primitives—as that of irony heavy confessions of an Ethiopian, the brother of the dissenting Colonel Mebratu, who testify to the apathy of the local elites who make token donations to health centers of local initiatives and the corruption involved that force them to close. Ghosh, as doctor of the Mission and the one who helps Colonel Mebratu at a great risk is considered insider enough to be told these stories of his own people and get a deep understanding of the position of the revolutionaries. While countering the impression of Africa as savage and poor seen through the prisms of the West, as much as the narrative tells us of the battle of Adowa in 1896 where barefoot Ethiopian soldiers of Emperor Menelik defeated the Italians and of that completely impressive feat of Emperor Haile Selassie's standing before the League of Nations just before World War II, with Mussolini ready to invade Ethiopia, and rightly warning the world of the imminent danger of Germany following in its heels, of the Emperor's strong modern military consisting of army, navy, air force and the impressive Imperial Bodyguard, the equivalent of the Queen's Guard in England who stood outside Buckingham Palace—all recognizably iconic of nationalist pride—we are also told in Matron's voice that in 1941 when the Emperor was brought back with Wingate and his troops and marched into Addis Ababa, "his head swivelling this way and that to take in the cinemas, hotels, shops, neon lights, multi-storey apartment buildings, paved avenue lined with trees" (135) he perhaps wished he'd stay in exile a little longer. And looking beyond the neo expatriate's admiring view of the city of Addis Ababa of European built is the city of the Emperor's men who conduct public executions in broad daylight. As much

¹¹ Homi Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory" *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, New York, p37.

as we are told of the remarkable grace of the people of the land, we are also told of the caste divide like hierarchical society in the ranks of the Rases, Dejzaches, and then the lesser nobility, the vassals and peons, and of the 'half castes,' the half Italian Ethiopians, their naming thus speaking volumes on designating inside and outside. Not just how the Italians behaved in occupied Ethiopia, the peasant Florino becoming Don Florino, the ambulance driver reinventing himself as a physician and of the looting and the killing of people, we also encounter the graves of Italian soldiers with NATO A ROMA and DECEDUDO A ADDIS ABABA inscribed on the tombstones through Matron's wistful eyes that have seen her own beloved, an English soldier of Wingate's troops killed in the hands of Italians and buried in Addis Ababa which would also bear the burial of Sister Mary Praise, Matron's daughter from India.

IV

"Born in Africa, living in exile in America, then returning at last to Africa, I am proof that geography is destiny" (8) claims Marion in the Prologue, writing Ethiopia his homeland, fulfilling Verghe's own desire. The revelation 'geography is destiny' turns into a destiny of care in the plot of Marion's return as doctor to serve the people in the midst of a raging war—a different fight and caring from Solomon's. A destiny of care is also writ in giving a narrative to the Indian expatriate life in Ethiopia and thereby writing new chapters to the history of Ethiopia's modernity, something that Verghe shares with Mahmood Mamdani¹² who too returned to Africa years after the mass expulsion of Indians from Uganda to fulfil geography's destiny of care in decolonizing African historiography. The writing of 'geography is destiny' as a destiny of care extends as well in the writing of the Christianity that the apostle St Thomas brought to India two thousand years back.¹³ and in the writing of the hybridities in which Indianness is shaped in India as elsewhere in the world. The story of the two Indian Christian born in Ethiopia, the sons of a Keralite nun and an Englishman, and raised by Hindu parents and Ethiopian and British other mothers who give them an Indian and Ethiopian, Christian and Hindu upbringing, is one of those many hybridities.

Geography's destiny of care is also in the writing of the medical divide in America as one of the making of race and class divide in a capitalist system. Positioning himself as an Indo-Ethiopian in the American diaspora, the destiny of care is in the telling of the little known story of the Indian intern, the Indian immigrant or transnational doctor who shoulders the work of the Medicaid programme and is subject to the racialized class system of capitalism, and of telling as well the little known story of the Ethiopian diaspora in America. Dinaw Mengestu's novel *The*

¹² Mahmood Mamdani, *From Citizen to Refugee: Ugandan Asians come to Britain*, Second Edition, Pambazuka Press, Cape Town, 2011.

¹³ That history is in danger of being denied in the current Right wing Hindu ruled India that only considers a "pure" Hinduism to be India's authentic religion and sees in it India's true identity. Hybridities are denied as well, and all history writing of the hybrid and heterogeneous cultural make of India placed under threat, turning thus the medicine of democracy into poison.

Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears published in 2007, two years before *Cutting for Stone*, and later republished in the name *Children of the Revolution* tells the story of the Ethiopian diaspora in the U.S in the tenor of the soulful Tizita. Through the tender story of an interracial friendship between a young Ethiopian immigrant and a young white single woman academic and her daughter what Dinaw Mengestu traces in the stretching of the American city as expanding capital and the relation between class and race in the process is explored differently by A. Verghese in treating the matter of medicine in America. The subtly hinted at Asian American and African American relation in the making of class difference in the city of Washington (the chill settling in as Sepha Stephanos receives a notice from the law firm of Elkin and Govind and has to close down his store) has a different set of angles in Verghese's novel when seen from the perspectives of migrant Indian trainee doctors treating the poor, those on Medicare and Medicaid in ill funded hospitals of America. *Cutting for Stone*, straddling the borders of African, Indian and American literature of the diaspora thus opens many doors in following the path of geography's destiny of care. As it opens to the complexity of the Indian diaspora routes it also breaks the hyphenated bounds of the American diaspora identity that the writer is known by, "place of origin" (nation or region) at one end and American at the other, this limning of late that has been put to use skilfully for global governance.¹⁴

A literature in which studies of Africa abound is Development studies. The writing of Verghese's geography as destiny that takes place in a medicinal imaginary of care and a narrative of illness and disease built within the structure of human

¹⁴ Examples of such limning used strategically for America's global governance in recent times by way of giving heavy weight accolades ironically pertain to both Indian and Ethiopian writers in the diaspora. Not only do Jhumpa Lahiri (awarded the National Endowment of Humanities gold medal from the American President in 2014 right after the publication of *The Lowland*) and Dinaw Mengestu (author of the 2007 written *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bear* and renamed *Children of the Revolution* given the Mc Arthur Foundation award in 2012) write about exiles who had fled their countries because of the violence that finally destroyed the 70s communist ideology inspired students revolution movements in India's Bengal and Ethiopia that gave these places some of their finest minds. Jhumpa Lahiri awarded soon after the toppling of the Left in Bengal by the U.S and its allies backed leader and her party in 2011, has her novel *The Lowland* triggering discussions on the excesses of the 70s Naxalite movement in Bengal at a time when people all over India were and still are being killed in the name of Maoists and Naxalites for resisting the occupation of forest lands for mining. Dinaw Mengestu's novel that has on the cover the quote from the New York Times Book Review "A great African novel, A great Washington novel and a great American novel" was awarded at a time when massive Indian investments in formerly Aid dependent Ethiopia had turned into a threat to America's grip on that country and on that continent generally—the threat having been played out in western media's various strategies of demonizing the Indian presence in East Africa—and it is through the diaspora which it has considerable influence over ("There is a deep friendship between our two countries . . ." p 124 from the uncle's unsent letter to the Congress) and the diaspora that also wields considerable power in Ethiopia that the grip was sought back. Among many other ways that grip would be in the shape of initiations and investments in a space program that would eventually involve the government and eat into its health and education programs, the welfare initiatives. Awarding an Ethiopian writer in the diaspora with one of the biggest awards in America at this time was strategic in many ways. This is not to downplay the power of these two writers or of their novels, but to highlight some of the obvious strategies of control and rule.

relationships that explores pain, care and a whole domain of feelings is completely different from the Development studies of disease and populations in Africa and its scientific documentation that so dominates nutrition and health related studies on Africa and pedagogical tools given in African Universities to study their own societies, keeping African students and teachers from finding a language and an analysis to write the deep story of their own people. Unlike development discourse that originates externally rather than internally,¹⁵ its narratives coming out of appearances of scientific studies and armed with graphs and statistics behaving accordingly, the narrative of illness and its perception by Marion and Shiva, the face to face encounters and the interactions between the expatriate doctors who have lived almost all their lives in Ethiopia and their patients is one that is generated from an inward looking. Not the graph, but the 'story' of the patient is heard to piece the history of the patient's illness. Ghosh listening to stories the likes of 'on St Stefano's day I passed urine on a barbed wire fence' coming out of explanations given after visits made to charlatans, while he searches the body for signs to piece the real story of the illness, knows thus most intimately those he treats.

In *The Body in Pain* Elaine Scarry¹⁶ writes of pain's resistance to language (and hence its manifestation in the body as metaphors of which there is much reading in *The Cutting for Stone*) and of the rarity in which physical pain is depicted in literature. Writing the body in pain and illness Verghese taps into sentient awareness in treatment as communication and healing that has been done away by the high tech systems in medicine, symptomatic of a larger structure of dehumanization (now taking its final turn in robotization of everything, including medical treatment). He writes of one of the reasons for writing the novel:

I wanted the reader to see how entering medicine was a passionate quest, a romantic pursuit, a spiritual calling, a privileged yet hazardous undertaking. It's a view of medicine I don't think too many young people see in the West because, frankly, in the sterile hallways of modern medical-industrial complexes where physicians and nurses are hunkered down behind computer monitors, and patients are whisked off here and there for this and that test, that side of medicine gets lost. . . . "Words of comfort" relate to a sense I have that the patient in America is becoming invisible. The patient is unseen and unheard. The patient is presented to me by the intern and resident team in a conference room far away from where the patient lies. The patient's illness has been translated into binary signals stored in the computer. When we do go to the bedside to make rounds, often physicians are no longer at ease. It is as if the patient in the bed is merely an icon for the real patient, who exists in the computer. But none of

¹⁵ Della Faille, Dimitri "Discourse Analysis in International Developmental Studies: Mapping Some Contemporary Contributions," *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, Vol 6, Issue 3, 2011

¹⁶ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, The Oxford University Press, 1985

these tests done at a distance substitute for being with the patient, for the “words of comfort” aspect of treatment.¹⁷

The ‘words of comfort’ aspect of medicine and conditions of sentience removed from the high tech world of American medical system now being sold to the rest of the world lives on in Verghese’s novel with Thomas Stone. The human touch of the ‘words of comfort’ aspect of medicine in the novel comes not just out of the pedagogy of the old British system in which Thomas Stone had been indoctrinated, but also out of the event of transnationality, the mobility that acquaints the doctors with diverse groups of people in diverse situations. Also significantly, it is the Indian doctors, including Thomas Stone, with the knowhow both of machines and working with humanity in the rough, who can go all the way from India to Africa and America, and be the bridge between different systems.

In the Ethiopia section, writing the expatriate Indian doctor’s connecting with the African body in pain is like entering into faith—Elaine Scarry writes, “to be a foreigner is also an extreme form of disbelief, a state of existing wholly outside the circle of faith”¹⁸—and what makes it for Verghese a spiritual calling and truly proletarian, colours, smell, touch, the listening of stories making for the sentience of the doctor’s work. Fistula, infant mortality—medical conditions that have become synonymous with western stereotypes of Ethiopia—are given names, faces with eye contact, exchange of words, stories and relations. “The answer, all answers, the explanation for good and evil lay in medicine” (270) writes Marion, and the novel of curative intentionality routes an exploration of the good and evil of the different worlds through Hema, Ghosh, Matron, Thomas Stone, Marion and Shiva through a discourse of care and medicine.

Postscript

Cutting for Stone was published in 2009 when a new phase in modernization and development was ushering into Ethiopia, India having played a key role in it by bringing in over four billion dollars in investment followed by other countries. The country that had become completely western Aid dependent after the end of the Communist regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam was moving from Aid to trade and also seeing huge investments in infrastructural development in areas where Kalashnikovs reached but no drinking water did, where no roads, hospitals and schools had ever been built. In Ethiopia development happened mostly in the highlands of the North ruled by the Amhara emperors. The regions where agricultural land was being bought by investors were those from where the northerners procured their slaves and no development had ever taken place. Since investment had now brought money into the government’s coffers, development work could happen in these areas. In the city of Addis Ababa a huge number of housing complexes of low priced apartments and low rent were built as affordable

¹⁷ Interview with Abraham Verghese, bookbrowse.com.

¹⁸ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, The Oxford University Press, 1985, p202.

housing. The Chinese who had taken contracts from the government were building flyovers and shopping malls at great speed. The half *habesha* half European styled charming city of Addis Ababa cradled by mountains that gave me many glimpses of the beautiful things that heaven bears was not exactly getting prettier, but globalized, i.e., being modelled after American cities, like many Asian cities have been. Investments could come from India or China, but the models of development were all according to the rules of globalization and the terms of global trade be it agri business or city building. And just as globalization had done in other places, with development came inflation, crowding of cities and the change of set life styles.

Indian investments were largely in the agricultural sector, large tracts of lands being bought on lease for flower production, fruits and grain production. The western media was suddenly filled with the history of slave trade in the Indian Ocean, like there was no other history of exchanges or relations between India and Ethiopia ever. The negative images of India filled the international media especially when the shift happened from growing flowers to food grains. There were funds in North American and European Universities to study slave trade in the Indian Ocean. There were also writings on the Indian land lease in Ethiopia, likening it to colonial invasion. In 2009 and 2010 when I was in Ethiopia I also met with Ethiopians, professors in American Universities who had come with University grants to research on the evils of the development that had come into Ethiopia. They all belonged to the elite groups of northerners, especially Amharas who came armed with critical discourses of development—indigenous people losing their ways of life, the place losing its character, etc. Not just Ethiopian elites of the diaspora, but the discontented lot for historical reasons were the elites of the residing northern families.

By 2010 when I left, most of the contracts of the Indian teachers at Addis Ababa University and of Indian doctors and professors teaching medicine at the medical school had been terminated by the University's then President, also holding an important post at the UNHCR. Indians and other South Asians in high managerial posts in the foreign NGOs and international organizations like the World Bank were transferred out of Ethiopia. They were few in number anyway because those at the top positions in these organizations are usually white Europeans and white North Americans. The new group of Indians who were seen in Ethiopia were the affluent lot of the investors—a group that the Ethiopian elites (mostly returnees from Washington D.C since that is where a large concentration of the Ethiopian diaspora is) had not seen since the Emperor's times. While relations were good between affluent Indians and Ethiopians during the Emperor's time, things would be different now because of the role played by the west.

2009 was not just the year that saw the publishing of *Cutting for Stone*. It was also the year when *Slumdog Millionaire*, the billion dollar 8 Oscar winning anti-India venture featuring Indian actors and Indian music director (making it appear as an authentic film on India) took off in all the multiplexes of the world, including

in Ethiopia. It was the beginning of a long slew of anti-India images using existing stereotypes projected by the West, presumably to counter India's rising global economic power image. The effect of the film was also meant to diminish the power and influence of India wherever they were going in with investments. In Ethiopia where India came in with huge investments, made many non-profit initiatives in the poorly funded health sector, pump vigour and energy into the Ethiopian film making initiative, the overwhelming response to this film was the discussion in many quarters of the Ethiopian elites that India, a poor country had come to Ethiopia to become rich. *Avatar*, (2009) the next block buster from Hollywood showing all over the world would declare the white American male with the help of the white American woman as saviour (ironically, with a Black President in the White House) of the indigenous peoples of the non-west whose lands were being taken and forests destroyed for purposes of development by their governments and MNCs. The two films, having been famously planted as the eyes of the world to see India in times of its rising power and economic wealth and to see all of the developing world where human rights discourse and environmental discourse in the new world order would significantly be a western one (blue eyed blonde white male American its symbol), the indigenous people have a voice only if the western white (American) man and woman give them one, silencing, turning a deaf ear to, or even demonizing all local initiatives. This should explain what is happening with Naxalites in India and their projection as terrorists in the global and some in the local media, and conversely with the western discourse (mainly American and British) of Ethiopia being colonized by Indian agricultural businesses.

Next in line after *Slumdog Millionaire* would be the Western media's obsessive engagement with slave trade in the Indian ocean and the maligning of Indian investments in Ethiopia, and following on its heels corruption and rapes in India to make disappear from international news the landmark food security bill tabled by the Congress party President Sonia Gandhi (that would eventually cause Washington D.C to summon African Heads of States, asking them to stop supporting India, and the World Trade Centre to be closed for three months). The Congress's young prime ministerial candidate Rahul Gandhi was maligned in western media and then local media for stopping mining by MNCs to prevent environmental degradation in one of the eastern states. The western media's sole focus on rape and corruption as news on India continued as critique of the Congress and indirect support for the rival party which after coming to power in 2014 got rid of many welfare programs, drastically reduced spending on health and education and has been a great trading partner for the U.S. The documentary film *India's Daughter* by British director Leslee Udwin made for the BBC on the rape of a young woman in Delhi and that was turned into international bestselling news, achieving for the Western media and Western interests what *Slumdog* did, happens to be this year's only entry of Indian cinema (even though its director is not Indian) in the Ethiopian documentary film festival! It tells much on who really has power in Africa even though India and other Asian countries might come with billions of dollars of investments, and it says how the battle lines in today's

Ethiopia and Africa are drawn. Suffice it also to say that in times when sexual violence against women has risen several folds all over the world, thanks to the education of male desire in ever new kinds of violence by the new media and communication programmes, such western accolade winning films and plays make no difference whatsoever. Moreover, they play the role of the white male American saviour of *Avatar* by sabotaging and silencing the voices of Indian feminists.

I went to teach at the new program for Cultural Studies at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University in 2005, and eventually ended up teaching courses in Museology and Gender Studies as well. The institute was housed in Emperor Haile Selassie's palace turned museum and library. I went as an expatriate teacher. There was a huge pay difference between Ethiopian staff and expatriate staff. Also, the expatriate salaries varied—European, Indians and African expatriate staff got different grades and the Ethiopian staff had a salary scale much lower. All of the salaries came from UNDP funds and these were the UNDP terms of payment. Qualified Ethiopians from North American and European Universities who wanted to come and teach in Addis Ababa University were not eligible for the higher salaries. (Good scholars had to supplement their meagre income at the University by doing consultant work for the Aid agencies and producing studies as per their requirements and methodologies that destroyed their own capacities as thinkers, scholars and writers). Thus, to start a Cultural Studies program in Ethiopia and get qualified staff it was easier to hire someone from India who had a degree from an American University and could teach the required courses. Besides teaching, I also was a columnist for documentary films and art for the English national newspapers, designed programs at the University President's office, and practiced reflexology formally as a volunteer at a nursing home and informally for friends. Through teaching and other activities, completely involved with Ethiopia, my only reason for unhappiness was the salary and housing divide between Ethiopian and expatriate staff that created many difficulties at the work place. Whenever I hesitated over renewing my contract, my Ethiopian friends reminded me actually how meagre my University salary was compared to salaries received by expatriate staff at the development organizations. Whatever it was worth, it was several times more the amount what my programme director, an Art historian from Cornell University drew. In 2010 I was made an exciting offer in interdisciplinary studies in the Arts but did not renew my contract for the modular system (assigning only one month for one course) freshly introduced and beginning to destroy the Humanities and Social Sciences programs, cutting the two year M.A program to one—a price the country had to pay for the new economic development—had made an intensive Cultural Studies program of serious intentions and scholarly worth impossible.

During my stay, travels and work in Ethiopia as assistant professor of Cultural Studies I realized how deep the connections between India and Ethiopia were and for how very long, pervading all aspects of culture. I met Indians who lived there for generations, many of them married to Ethiopians—Kashmiri Pandits and Indian

Muslim trading families that settled in Harar after the Partition of India instead of going to Pakistan and old Gujrati trading families amongst others. Gujrati style Indian architecture, some more than 70 years old, is very much part of the cityscapes. The Emperor Haile Selassie is supposed to have spent his boyhood years in one such house in Harar. Churches (the Raguel Church on the Entoto mountains) have been designed by Indian architects. The eleventh century rock cut Lalibela Church had Indians involved in its building. From Axum to Gondar to Addis Ababa to Harar, and back in India so much speaks of Ethiopia's connection with India that dates back to centuries. Official written histories or museum displays of neither Ethiopia nor India speak of the many connections. Both would happily cite their deep connections with the Greeks in ancient times, but never with one another. Even though many new influences like Indian spiritualities (The Brahmakumaris, Art of Living) and healing systems have of late come into the city of Addis Ababa, the greatest Indian presence in Ethiopia for several decades now is the Hindi film and Hindi film songs. And they will continue to be for a wide public, try as much the committee of Addis documentary film festival, out of whatever motivation, screen *India's Daughter* as the only entry of Indian cinema. Through the Hindi films and their songs, Hindi has entered into the young Ethiopian's vocabulary. One day at the photocopier's shop an eager young person asked me the difference between *ishq*, *pyar* and *mohabbat*! Trying to explain the meaning of the words I realized that is what I felt for this beautiful country and its people—*ishq*, *pyar*, and *mohabbat*, the many shades of love.

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Hindostanis in Suriname 1873-1920: Indenture, Plantations and Beyond

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Abstract

The indentured Hindostanis survived the plantation life in this sparsely populated Dutch colony with abundant fertile land. Moreover, they capitalized on the opportunities offered by the Dutch Colonial Government which was very satisfied with these 'new colonists'. In fact the Hindostanis prospered in due time. The enormous population growth among the Hindostanis compared to British Caribbean colonies demonstrates this. Their (work) ethos, strong ethnic identity and cultural heritage and the opportunities in Suriname resulted in a success story.

Keywords: Indentured, Hindostani, Caribbean, Suriname, Indian, Slavery, Guyana, Trinidad, Creole, Girit, Migration

Introduction

The indentured period of Indians in Suriname lasted from 1873 till 1920.¹ More than 34 000 indentured labourers arrived in Suriname as temporary labourers; almost 12 000 of them returned back to India. The Indians in Suriname referred to themselves during this period mostly as Hindostanis². Although the Hindostanis

¹ This paper is based on an extensive research on the Hindostani migration from India to Suriname and their integration in Suriname between 1873 and 1920. My book of 736 pages was published on 5 June 2016 (143 years Indian Arrival Day) in Dutch under the title *Hindostaanse Contractarbeiders 1873-1920; van India naar de plantages in Suriname*.

There are few extensive studies about the indenture period in Suriname. The classic study by De Klerk was published in 1953. Hoefte did a Ph. D. research published in 1998 about the Hindostani and Javanese labourers and published many articles. Also Emmer published many articles about the indentured period in Suriname. Bhagwanbali published three books: the first in 1996 about the recruitment in India and in 2010 and in 2011 about resistance in Suriname. There are British reports by D.W.D. Comins (1893) and Mc Neill and Lal (1914). Furthermore there are also reports of British Consuls stationed in Paramaribo. Also the Dutch government published the yearly Colonial Reports (*Koloniale verslagen*) with detailed data for example about the wages. In 2014 Hassankhan published an article also dealing with the wages. Only one indentured labourer has reported extensively about his experiences in the indentured period: Munshi Rahman Khan's biography was published in English in 2006. There are also some articles reporting about the indentured labourers and their experiences. And there are numerous data in the archives in Suriname, the Netherlands, Great Britain (in the British Library and Indian Office Records – IOR)) and in India (State Archives of West Bengal) to be explored.

² I prefer to use the designation Hindostani instead of Hindustani because some (in India) think that by Hindustani the Hindustani language is addressed. Furthermore, in Trinidad and Guyana the local Indian lingua franca that developed during the indentured period was also called Hindustani.

were British subjects till 1927, Dutch penal law was applicable to them. Thus a breach of the (indenture) labour contract by them, unwillingness to work or desertion was considered a criminal act and was severely punished. Besides these negative factors there were some differences in their conditions from the Indians in the British Caribbean colonies that had more positive effects on their integration in Suriname compared to the other group. For example, all Hindostani adults or households settling in Suriname obtained since 1895 a plot of fertile Crown land free and without yearly rent for six years. At the same time they received 100 guilders (comparable with 40, -Guyanese Dollar) in lieu of their (free) return passage after finishing their 5 year contract. Moreover, the British consul appointed in the capital Paramaribo protected the Hindostani indentured labourers and pressurized the Dutch planters to treat her (British) Majesty's subjects well. He reported yearly on this matter to the Imperial British Government. Furthermore, the Dutch Colonial Government policy resulted in retaining the culture of the Hindostanis. Besides, more than 3000 Indians from the other Caribbean colonies settled between 1865-1920 in Suriname.

The Hindostani indentured labourers were exploited and oppressed, but the majority had agency and were not behaving like victims of the indentured system. There were about 40 collective resistances and uprisings. In 1884 and 1902 massive resistance resulted in killing of not only Hindostani ringleaders but also bystanders. On the other hand, Hindostanis killed plantation managers or wounded them. Nevertheless, accommodation took place because the Hindostani indentured labourers could compare their lives in Suriname with their experiences in India. The indentured Hindostanis survived the plantation life in this sparsely populated Dutch colony with abundant fertile land. Moreover, they capitalized on the opportunities offered by the Dutch Colonial Government which was very satisfied with these 'new colonists'. In fact the Hindostanis prospered in due time. The enormous population growth among the Hindostanis compared to British Caribbean colonies demonstrates this. Their (work) ethos, strong ethnic identity and cultural heritage and the opportunities in Suriname resulted in a success story. The descendants of the more than 24 000 Hindostanis and 3 000 Indians from the Caribbean colonies who settled in Suriname numbered in 2013 more than 300 000; namely 148 000 in Suriname and 175 000 in The Netherlands (Choenni 2014a). In more than 100 years, the Hindostani population increased more than tenfold (from 27 000 to more than 300 000). Not only is this huge population growth remarkable, but the Hindostanis are a successful and culturally distinctive group in both countries.

Hindostani/ Hindostanis is the translation of Hindostaan/*Hindostanen* (in Dutch). The Indian Diaspora expert prof. N. Jayaram also preferred the designation Hindostanis because he stated that Hindostanis is a unique designation of the Indian Diaspora in Suriname and The Netherlands. By the use of the designation Hindostanis the confusion with Indians of India and elsewhere is avoided.

All in all, between 1973 and 1920 the Hindostanis in Suriname did slave labour and have been exploited and many did not survive. But at the same time they had agency and they took full advantage of the opportunities. Combined with the special circumstances (i.e. a plot of land free for settlement) resulted in a success story. Hence, indentured labour in Suriname was for the Hindostanis after all not so much 'a new system of' slavery but rather an opportunity for a better life than in India. They came to earn money and return back to their beloved India. But the majority settled in Suriname and prospered through hard labour. The indentured period in Suriname is distinguished in the pioneering phase, the group identity phase and the settlement phase. Compared to Guyana, Trinidad, Jamaica and Guadeloupe the Indians of Suriname had and still have retained their Indian language and culture the best, while the number of Indian indentured labourers arriving in Suriname was smaller.

Between 1873 and 1916 more than 34,000 Indian indentured labourers arrived in the Dutch colony Suriname (Dutch Guyana). Suriname was a plantation colony and had in 1873 quite a small population of around 60 000 inhabitants, while plenty of fertile land was available. In 1831 Suriname had a population of 61,000 and among them 53,000 were slaves. This 'black' population decreased gradually during the 19th century. When slavery was abolished at last in Suriname in 1863 the slave population has been reduced to 33 000. Besides these now free slaves a group of slaves had already acquired their freedom earlier through 'manumission'; sometimes the planters bought them free or they acquired their freedom because of certain circumstances, for example in case they were (illegal) children of white masters and black slaves (these *coloured* or *mixed* persons numbered then more than 20 000). These groups and their descendants were called afterwards Creoles. The continuous reduction of the slave population and the decrease after 1863 (the abolition) in the so called Creole labour force instigated the planters and the Dutch (Surinamese) government to look for labourers for the Suriname plantation economy elsewhere.³ The need for labourers on the plantations had indeed become very urgent. After the abolition of slavery in 1863 an apprenticeship system (*Staatstoezicht*) was introduced to keep most of the Creoles as labourers on the plantations for 10 years. In the meantime, the Dutch government had negotiations with British Imperial government to allow the Dutch to recruit Indian indentured labourers for Suriname. The driving force behind this request was the success of Indian indentured labour on the plantations in the neighbouring British colonies.

³ The planters received for every freed slave 300 guilders (approximately 140 dollars) as compensation from the Dutch Government, while the slaves did not receive a single penny as compensation and most were bound to work for 10 years on the plantations after their liberation. But many chose to leave the plantations and settled in the capital Paramaribo, living on subsistence level. In order to be productive the free slaves could obtain a plot of land around the capital Paramaribo for agriculture, for example to grow vegetables. They could get a premium from 100 to 500 guilders if they became productive farmers (Gowricharn 1990: 56).

Koelietraktaat

In 1870 a 'Cooly Treaty' (*Koelietraktaat*) between both governments was signed to allow the Netherlands to recruit Indians for Suriname. But the British government demanded some kind of compensation. It took almost three years before this immigration Convention could be implemented. In exchange, the Dutch possessions on the coast of West Africa (for example the slave fort St. George Del Mina) were sold very cheap to the British government.

In 1873 recruitment started in India after the Dutch government had based a 'Suriname' Agency and a depot in the port area *Garden Reach* in Calcutta. On 1 July 1873 the 10 year apprenticeship would end and the need for labourers on the (sugar and cacao) plantations was highly urgent. The first ship *Lalla Rookh* arrived just in time on 5 June 1873 with 410 Indian Labourers in Suriname. Within one year --between 5 June 1873 and 4 April 1874-- almost 4000 indentured Indian labourers arrived in Suriname with eight transports. The labour shortage and the problem of a shrinking population were solved through immigration. First by immigration of Indians between 1873 till 24 May 1916 when the last transport arrived and from 1890 also with indentured labourers from Java (now part of Indonesia) who emigrated to Suriname.

Hindostanis

When the period of Indian indentured labour was almost over in 1920-- few Hindostanis worked under indentured contract after 1920-- the total population in Suriname had risen to 110 000. Around one quarter (26 000--30 000) of the Surinamese population then were Indians or *Hindostanis*.⁴ Till 1920 they were officially named British Indians (*Brits-Indiërs*). However, the Surinamese Immigrants Association (*Surinaamse Immigranten Vereniging-SIV*) pleaded for naming them *Hindostani* (*Hindostanen*), the term they frequently used for and among themselves. Hindostani means people originating from *Hindostan* (one of the authentic names from India). Hence, gradually the British Indians of Suriname were named --also officially-- Hindostanis (*Hindostanen*). The Indian indentured labourers who left from the port of Calcutta for Suriname were almost all from the provinces of Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Western Bihar of the *Bhojpuri* and *Avadhi* region. However, they often referred to themselves as *Kalkatijas*-- meaning departed from the port city Calcutta. They were also called *Kalkata soema*

⁴ It is not clear what the exact total numbers were around 1920. The influential expert R. Van Lier reports based on the first population census the number 30.530 Hindostanis in 1921 (Van Lier 1971: 190). Others report more than 26,000 in 1920 based on the counting of Hindostanis in the registering agencies. We must also keep in mind that during the indentureship period the demographic situation was fluid. Besides the arrivals of Hindostani emigrants and departure of returnees, the free Hindostanis became gradually the largest part of the group, while the second generation (children born in Suriname) and their children (the third generation) increased in numbers after 1900. Unfortunately, exact numbers of these demographic changes during this period is not available.

(people from Calcutta) by the Creole population. Sometimes the term *Krantraki* was also used, derived from the Dutch word *arbeidscontract* meaning labour *contract* indicating the (labour) agreement they were bounded to; this is comparable with the word *Girmitya* in the British colonies (from *Girmit* meaning the agreement they were bounded to). Between the first sailing ship *Lalla Rookh* (The tulip cheek) and the last (steam) ship the *Dewa* arriving in 1916 in total 64 transports arrived in Suriname. The 34304 Hindostanis arrived in 36 ships; many ships came twice or more times to Suriname leaving from Calcutta. It means that very few South Indians (*Madrasahis*) arrived in Suriname; only one transport had a group of South Indians. It also meant that the overwhelming majority were Hind(ustan)i speaking or a related dialect like *Bhojpuri* or *Avadhi* speaking. One third (11 600) of the 34 304 Indian indentured labourers returned back to India.

Her Majesty's subjects

Before focussing on the indentured Indian labour in Suriname and the life on the plantations/estates and beyond during the indentured period (1873-1920) we shall focus on some remarkable differences between Suriname and the British colonies. It took the Dutch government many years-- after the abolishing of slavery in the British (1833) and French (1848) colonies--before they abolished slavery in Suriname in 1863 on July 1. The Dutch Government and the mighty planters (estate owners) expected as had been the case in the British and French colonies, a labour shortage on their estates after the abolition. After extensive negotiations, the Dutch Colonial Government made an agreement with the British Imperial Government for the recruitment of indentured labourers for Suriname. Because the Indians as British subjects would work in a colony that was not a British Colony, a Convention was concluded. This *Cooly Treaty* signed in 1870 between the British and Dutch government consisted of 27 articles regulating the conditions and rules of recruitment and transport and the protection of her (British)'Majesty's subjects' in Suriname. We must bear in mind that the Hindostanis in Suriname were till 1927 not Dutch subjects but British subjects. Hence, as her British "Majesty's subject' they had protection of the British government. Therefore, there were some remarkable differences between the Dutch colony Suriname and the British colonies in the Caribbean particularly in relation to the position and opportunities of the indentured labourers in Suriname.⁵ It meant that a representative of the Imperial British government was stationed in Paramaribo to protect them and to report yearly about the wellbeing of these British subjects i. e.

⁵ In 1927 the Dutch government passed a law recognizing the Hindostanis as Dutch subject and the British consul had to leave afterwards. There were no objections from the Hindostani community that perceived it as a right step towards their becoming an integral part of the Surinamese society. They were no longer 'strangers' in the juridical sense (*vreemdelingen*) but subjects of Royal Kingdom of The Netherlands. The Hindostanis were very proud of the Dutch Queen and the Hindostani leaders had good relations with Dutch colonial elite. Moreover, they regarded them as their protectors against the assimilation pressure from the coloured middle class in Suriname.

the Hindostanis to the British government (according to article 19). It meant that the consecutive British Consuls in Suriname had an important role in protecting the rights and interests of the Hindostanis during the indenture period 1873-1920. They did that vigorously, often enraging the Dutch stakeholders (the government and planters). For example, when during the first two immigration years (1873 and 1874) the death rate on the estates turned out to be alarmingly high, the emigration from India was postponed after reports by the British consul. More than 18 per cent of indentured Hindostanis in Suriname perished between 1873-1874 due to insufficient health and housing provisions. Also the recruitment in India was done hastily and it was found that the majority of these emigrants did not have an agricultural background.⁶ The British consul informed the Imperial British-Indian government extensively of these developments. To the surprise of the Dutch Colonial Government, the emigration of Indians to Suriname was suspended in the end of 1874.

Benefitting from the improvements

After implementation of sufficient medical (a special medical school for medical specialists was set up) and housing provisions and guarantees for free inspection opportunities on the plantations for the British consul the emigration to Suriname was resumed in 1877. Because emigration to Suriname started not until 1873 (the last in the Caribbean), the emigrants to Suriname benefited from all the improvements in the indenture system like recruitment and transport facilities to the colonies. Another difference was that a special ordinance was implemented to stimulate the settlement of Hindostanis in Suriname. Since 1895 all adult Hindostanis or households could acquire a plot of Crown land free in settlement centres (*domeingrond op vestigingsplaatsen*) and without rent for the first six years in lieu of giving up their right to repatriation. They also received 100 guilders as compensation for their (free) return passage (*jahaj ke paisa*). For example, in neighbouring British Guyana many time-expired Indian contract labourers did not acquire Crown land free and many still worked on the estates after 1920, while in Suriname after 1900 many Hindostanis had their own plot of land (often 2 hectare or 5 acres)⁷. After 1920 almost all Hindostanis earned a living on their own plot of land primarily on agriculture (as small farmers) or as self-employed persons. It meant that they were not employed regularly as a plantation labourer, but could be employed during the harvest time by the

⁶ See De Klerk 1953: 111,112,119; Colonial Reports (*Koloniale Verslagen*) 1874 and 1875. In due time and in particular after 1890 the recruitment became better.

⁷ Such an area was considered sufficient to sustain an average family on a modest level of living at that time. But the Hindustanis who were mostly interested in outright ownership of land (and not in Crown land- *domeingrond*), gradually moved out and acquired plots outside the settlement centres. They had to clean up the jungle and build the (water) infrastructure while in the settlement centres the infrastructure was built and maintained by the government. Many had saved money because they had a sober lifestyle and bought the land cheap while others acquired it free from some plantation owners (Adhin 1961:76; Choenni and Choenni 2012).

plantation owners. Most Hindostanis became small farmers, while the (large) plantations gradually became bankrupt. Most (sugar and cacao) plantations were abandoned because the Dutch planters could not survive the competition with other colonies. On the few remaining (sugar) plantations after 1920 mostly Javanese labourers were employed. After 1920 the indenture period was indeed a bygone era for the Hindostanis and the Hindostani community building and identity formation really started (Choenni and Choenni 2012).

Furthermore, in the British colonies the time-expired Indian labourers could return back only after 10 years and they had to pay some of the costs after 1898 themselves. In Suriname they could return after 5 years and free of costs.⁸ Although the planters pleaded that the indentured return from Suriname back to India after 10 years, the Dutch Colonial Government did not allow that. While the planters exploited the Hindostani indentured labourers, they had also to create better facilities for them and treat them better to stimulate the time-expired labourer to renew their contract. Almost one third (9 725 of 34 000) renewed their contract receiving a premium of 100 guilders for 5 years, while in Guyana from 1874 to 1895 indentures numbered less than 6% (6 096 of 105 205) (Bhagwanbali 2010: 150; Williams 1970: 352).

Hindostani population growth

According to the experts, the population shortage was a huge hindrance for the development of Suriname. Hence the hardworking Hindostanis and other immigrants were regarded as an asset for Suriname. The growth of the Creole population was very low and gradually the majority of them moved to the capital Paramaribo abandoning the plantations. We must also keep in mind that after 1895 the Dutch government actively stimulated the settlement ('colonisation') of Hindostanis in Suriname. But still they were 'strangers' (*vreemdelingen*) because they were British subjects till 1927. There was still a shortage of Hindostani women in the early 20th century. The rate was roughly on two males to one female; for example in 1901. Nevertheless, among the Hindostani group a high population growth rate was discernible. The demographic growth in the Hindostani population is not only striking compared to the other Surinamese groups but also compared to Indians in Trinidad and (British) Guyana.

Table 1. Indians in Trinidad, (British) Guyana and Suriname in the end of 1917

⁸ The difference in 5 and 10 year term was important. For example, for one transport Indians had been recruited for Trinidad but when they were told that they could serve a shorter period in Suriname than in Trinidad they chose to serve in Suriname (Sanderson Report 1910). On the other hand indentured Indian women in Trinidad and Guyana had to serve only 3 years while the indentured period for women was longer in Suriname: 5 years. It was possible to buy "indentured women free." Some Hindostani men paid the planter if they wanted an indentured Indian woman as a spouse. Other *settled* Hindostani men went to the '*koeliedepot*' in Paramaribo to buy free women as their spouse. Like in the other colonies the shortage of Indian women was then a severe problem in the Hindostani community.

	Trinidad	Guyana	Suriname
Arrivals	149,606	238,879	33,721
Returnees	31,279	65,538	9,491
Netto	118,327	173,441	24,230
Population end 1917	129,251	137,959	31,410
Saldo	10, 924	-35.482	7,250
Growth	9,2%	-20,4%	29,8%

Source: *Westra 1918: 105.*⁹

The death rate among the Indian indentured labourers in 1917 in Trinidad was 9, 8 /1000 (pro mille), in Guyana 16/ 1000 and in Suriname 0, 6/1000. Among the not-indentured Indians it was higher for Guyana 38/1000 and for Suriname 17, 8/1000.

Koeliepapa

While presenting the abovementioned demographic data in a speech in 1918 in Suriname, the sub-protector of immigrants P. Westra stated that more immigration to Suriname had to be promoted to solve the problem of a small and insufficient productive population. Like in the British colonies, the role of the protector of emigrants (*Agent Generaal*) in Suriname was crucial for the wellbeing of indentured labourers. Between 1873 and 1920 three consecutive *Agent Generals* were appointed. They were called *Koeliepapa (father of the Coolies)* in Suriname. These powerful personalities who were also members of the Surinamese parliament (*De Staten*) were quite popular among the indentured labourers (Schalkwijk 2011). The first one was Cateau Van Rosevelt (this humane Agent General served from 1873 to 1891 until his death). He was comparable with his colleague *Papa James Crosby* of Guyana in his dedication and approach towards the indentured labourers. Like in Guyana the immigration department also bears the name of the protector among the Hindostanis and was called *Roosfeil* (in Guyana *Krasbee/Krasbi*) (De Klerk 1953:79; Mangru 1993: 17 - 42).¹⁰ For his

⁹ West Indië, an agrarian bulletin published this in 1918. No data of non-indentured Indians for Trinidad was mentioned. The total of 149 606 arrivals for Trinidad differs from the total around 145 000 or officially 143.909 in other reports/publications. His source is not mentioned; the captain and personnel of the ships received a premium after delivering the indentured labourers in healthy condition. The numbers were checked routinely. It was not in their interests to report a lower number, because they would not receive a higher premium. Likewise, if they reported a higher number they had to prove it by presenting the persons. When the indentured labourers disembarked they were registered and got an identification number. After that the ship's personnel were paid their premium. We must also keep in mind that the 'charter party' of the transportation was agreed in advance and paid for. Perhaps there were some small mistakes, but it is not reasonable that intentionally wrong total numbers were reported.

¹⁰ It is striking that the well-known protector of Immigrants H.W. Coombs in Trinidad who could understand and speak Hind(ustan)i was not as popular as his Guyanese and Surinamese colleague (Report Sanderson 1910).

successor Barnet Lyon who served from 1891 till his retirement in 1902 the Hindostanis erected even a statue (a bust) in 1902 near the Governor's Palace as a sign for their appreciation in protecting the Hindostanis against the planters' oppression and discrimination. Barnet Lyon had adopted the fatherless young boy Sital Persad (his father had been a pundit in India) who arrived in Suriname with his widowed mother from India. Sital Persad Doobay became a head interpreter. He was one of the first leaders of the Hindostanis in Suriname. He was the first chairman of the *Surinamese Immigration Union (SIV)*.¹¹ This organisation was established in 1910 on the instigation of the third protector of immigrants C. Van Drimmelen. Agent General Van Drimmelen who served from 1903-1921 was highly respected as a former District Commissioner of the Hindostani district Nickerie in neighbouring Guyana and as a geographic explorer. Van Drimmelen befriended the Hindostani leadership and also published writings about the Hindostani culture. Not only the *Agent Generals* but also some Governors and District Commissioners were sympathetic towards the Hindostanis and their culture; they felt an extra responsibility about these 'strangers' in their colony (Mc Neill and Lal 1914:169,170).

Not Black and White but Grey

Hence the Hindostani indentureship period (1873-1920) in Suriname is not a new form of slavery experience as the Hindostani author R. Bhagwanbali has stated, but the picture is more nuanced.¹² It is not a *Black* and *White* scenario of indentured labourers being only victims and the colonial stakeholders being only oppressors. There is a lot of *Grey* in it. The Dutch Colonial stakeholders (the Governors, the District Commissioners and their administrators and the planters) were not a monolithic group (see for example: Rahman Khan 2005). Some Colonial stakeholders felt responsible for Hindostanis as 'strangers' (British subjects) who immigrated to solve the labour problem in Suriname. Moreover, many had a positive attitude towards the hardworking ethos of the Hindostanis, their culture and frugality. A Dutch administrator wrote in 1908:

¹¹ Sital Persad's daughter Alice Bhagwandy married Jung Bahadur Singh who was a compounder on the immigrant ships. After her grand wedding party in 1908 on the grounds at the '*Koeliedepot*' in Paramaribo she moved by steamship from Paramaribo to Georgetown. Later J. B. Singh studied medicine in Edinburgh and became a medical doctor in 1917. Dr. J.B. Singh became a prominent leader of Indians in Guyana, while Alice was an active cultural leader in Guyana. See about Sital Persad *Autobiography of Alice Bhagwandy Sital Persaud (1892-1958)*, in:

<http://mittelholzer.oprg/forum/archive/index.php?t-313.html> J.B. Singh became Chairman of the BGEIA (British Guiana East Indian Association) and also surgeon major on one of the last ships with returnees to India in 1936.

¹² In his book published in 2010 about the Hindostanis in the indentureship period Bhagwanbali states that the indentured labour system was a new form of slavery. The subtitle of this book concerns the new avatar (*reincarnation*) of slavery (*de nieuwe avatar van slavernij*). Bhagwanbali has done extensive research and presents valuable data but he has a narrow approach. Furthermore, he negates what important authors have written and presents a black and white picture. See for a critical analysis of his study: Hoefte 2012.

The number of coolies is twenty seven thousand and it can be acknowledged that Surinam has benefited very much from these workers (Waltmans 2000: 24).

At the same time they complained about the lifestyle of Creoles, their 'laziness' and spending behaviour (De Klerk 1953; Snellen 1933, Staal 1928; Report Commissie Bos 1911: 72-75; see also yearly Colonial reports (*Koloniale Verslagen*) 1873-1920). After 1900 the majority of the Creoles-- barring a minority who stayed in the district of Para and Coronie as subsistence farmers-- had abandoned the countryside and moved to the capital Paramaribo.¹³

Hindostani settlers

Many of the Dutch stakeholders did their utmost best to please the Hindostanis and promoted their settlement. They perceived Suriname as agrarian country and the Hindostanis fitted very well as 'colonists' in their conception. In particular, after the protector of Emigrants and surgeon major D.W. D. Comins had visited Suriname in 1892 and had advised the Dutch Colonial Government 'to colonise Suriname with these Indians' an active settlement policy was promoted. The Dutch Colonial Government in The Netherlands had to subsidize the yearly budget of Suriname with more than one million guilders, i.e. more than quarter of the budget, because food like rice had to be imported. Hindostanis appeared to become good farmers and could grow rice. An Ordinance was implemented in 1895 and afterwards Hindostanis could acquire plots of Crown land free. The free Hindostanis settled in Suriname and bought property in land with money they had saved.

"In Surinam, between 1903 and 1911, over 200 000 acres of land were allotted to 31 068 immigrants (Hindostanis and Javanese -CC), either in free use, in lease, or by outright purchase; six out of every ten acres were purchased outright, at a total cost of 589 184 florins. In Trinidad, between 1885 and 1895, a total of 22 916 acres was sold to Indian immigrants; between 1902 and 1912, 4 450 grants, totalling 33 766 acres were distributed, the Indian paying £72 837 for them, or over two pounds an acre." (Williams 1970: 353).

Most Hindostani settlers became rice growers and the surplus was sold. Importing rice was not needed anymore and during the First World War rice was even exported. It turned out that the Hindostanis were successful in agriculture. Towards the turn of the nineteenth century the significance of Hindostani farmers was growing and the monopoly of the Dutch farmers (*boeren*)

¹³ Many Creoles had plots of land and were successfully growing cacao. But when the output was high (5 088 955 kilo) around 1896 the witch-broom disease (*krullotonenziekte*) on the cacao plants started (Adhin 1961: 82). Many Creole small farmers became bankrupt and left their land. Some were employed afterwards in the booming rubber (*balata*) -as bleeders of the hevea tree- and in the gold mining industry.

was first threatened and then undermined even before the First World War (Mc Neill and Lal 1914; Verkade 1937). Mc Neill and Lal who visited the British colonies and Suriname in 1913 as inspectors wrote:

The total population of the Colony in 1911 was about 85 000 of whom 27 000 or nearly one-third were Indians, including 5 876 under indenture. Amongst free Indians probably the largest classes are petty landowners while in and around Paramaribo a considerable number of cattle –keepers, cart-owners, market gardeners, mechanics and day labourers.... The milk supply of Paramaribo is now in Indian hands and Indians have taken over from the black population almost the whole of the land transport business....A few are prosperous traders and a number are petty shop keepers or licensees of stands in markets. (Mc Neill and Lal 1914:170,171).

Dutch Colonial policy

Because the agrarian orientation of the Hindostanis was related to their social cultural patterns, the Dutch stakeholders promoted the retention of their culture (Panday 1959:156,157). Many Dutch stakeholders respected the Indian culture, often opposing the Surinamese coloured middle class who in the colonial parliament (*De Staten*) and in the papers pleaded for assimilating these “coolies.” But it was not only the humanistic argument that matters: the Dutch colonial policy was first and foremost driven by making profits. The Dutch Colonisers did not have an assimilationist approach like the French Colonisers who strived to mould the ‘colonized’ into Frenchmen. Even not like the British who introduced the British culture, administration and lifestyle in their Colonies. The Dutch had a policy to manage the colonial population by letting them to retain their *adat* (culture and customs) while exploiting them, like they did in Indonesia. Hence, the Hindostanis were allowed to retain their culture in Suriname. Moreover, cultural persistence was even stimulated by the Dutch colonizers --in contradiction with the Surinamese political class-- because it was beneficial to the agrarian production in Suriname.¹⁴

¹⁴ The (Dutch) Governor and the Districts (Dutch) Commissioners represented the Dutch Colonial Government in Suriname while in the Colonial Parliament the Surinamese coloured middleclass was dominant. Often there was a rivalry between the Dutch Colonial Government and the local elite, especially about immigration and the position of the ‘Asian’ groups in Suriname. Governor A. Savornin Lohman (1899-1891) introduced in 1890 with consent of the British consul W. Wyndham four government “Cooly” schools (*koeliescholen*) and the teaching of the Hindustani language to the Hindostani children. (see: IOR/L/PJ/6/289, File 1932, Emigration to Surinam; Indian native school books asked for by the British Consul - 5 Nov 1890; IOR/L/PJ/6/306, File 1635 Emigration to Surinam; dispatch on Indian immigrants' schools - 3 Oct 1891; IOR/L/PJ/6/322, File 978 Emigration to Surinam; transmission of school books for the use of emigrants' schools in Surinam - 31 May 1892. In 1899 Agent General Barnet Lyon pleaded for more *koeliescholen* while the coloured middle class fiercely opposed it (IOR/L/PJ/6/518, File 16 Emigration to Surinam; report on the education of the children of Indian coolies in Surinam - 26 Aug 1899; IOR/L/PJ/6/362, File 2232 Emigration to Surinam; proposed law for compulsory education,-25 Oct

Caribbean migration to Suriname

This attitude towards the Hindostanis and the possibilities in Suriname lead to the notion among Indians in Guyana that you could retain your culture better in Suriname and acquire land easier (Choenni and Choenni 2012).¹⁵ It was also stated by a British expert that housing facilities in Suriname were not as good as

1893. The last two *koeliescholen* were closed in 1906 because there was fierce opposition. The Hindostani children attended government schools afterwards. Suriname had compulsory education since 1976 but many Hindostanis did not send their children to schools and in particular the girls were kept at home. They could help in the housekeeping and in the fields. However in due time and after 1920 almost all Hindostani children visited schools, although girls were restricted to only some years of education (De Klerk 1953: 129-130; Choenni and Choenni 2012:458-476). Another example was Governor J.C. Kielstra. He had been a professor in Colonial Economy and reigned Suriname between 1933 and 1944. Kielstra was very authoritarian and he singlehandedly legalized the Hindu and Muslim marriages. He opposed the intermingling of *Asians* with Creoles and preferred exclusively Asian settlements. Kielstra befriended the Hindostani leaders and also visited a Hindu wedding escorting the *baraat* (bridegroom's procession), while he was hated by the Creole elite (Choenni 2014b: 64). See also Pillai who states: "*The Dutch colonial power was mostly concerned:*

with financial gains from the plantation economies and did not bother to convert their subjects to their cultural style.... The Dutch believed that non-European races will never be able to grow beyond the feudal and semi-slave mental make-up. Indians in the French Caribbean, on the other hand, had to undergo the process of adaptation to the French culture. The Hindu identity of the Indians was not tolerated by the French and the Africans." (Pillai 2010)

¹⁵ In 1927 around 2102 British-Indians from the Caribbean colonies were registered at the Immigration Department (See: Colonial Report 1928). Indian deserters from Guyana also settled in Suriname. Between 1873 and 1920 there were frequent (religious and family) contacts between Indians in Guyana and Hindostanis in Suriname. One of the most important pundits, Bhawanibhiek Shriemisier who came as a child from India to Suriname went to Guyana to study Hinduism because there were no highly qualified pundits in Suriname then. For example, the teacher Rahman Khan –a Muslim Hindostani- who arrived as an indentured labourer acted also as a Hindu expert. He was teaching in Hindi (nagari script). My *paraja* (paternal grandfather) Halkorisaw Choenni (1865-1937) who was a *Mahant* (priest) of the Kabir Panhties (Hindu religious sect) in Suriname and had *chelas* (disciples) in Guyana. When they had their yearly *Gaddi* (religious ceremony) his *chelas* travelled to Suriname (to plantation Laarwijk) and stayed there for more than a week. His son Mahase Sukdev Choenni (1893-1972) converted to the Arya Samaj and became an Arya Samaj leader. He had a religious controversy with the aforementioned Rahman Khan in 1931 (Rahman Khan 2005: 194,195; see also Chikrie 2006; Chikrie 2011: 89; Mahabier and Choenni 2008)). My *parnana* (paternal grandfather) Menrilal Narain (1868-1929) acquired a large plot of land (Westindië 1918: 95). He had family in Guyana and visited them travelling by steamboat from Paramaribo to Georgetown; later when travelling was easier the Guyanese family came over to stay at my *parnana's* place where his descendants later owned a cinema hall. Furthermore, from the neighbouring district Nickerie it was easier and shorter to travel to Guyana. There were intensive contacts and marriages (Choenni and Choenni 2012). It was stated that fathers willingly married their daughters in Suriname because the Indian culture was more vibrant in Suriname (interview with Kamla Sukul, a famous Hindostani playwright). These data is based on intensive research I have done on the history of Hindostanis in Suriname with Gharietje Choenni (my sister). We did around 100 in-depth interviews with informants above 75 years between 2008 and 2012 to obtain an oral history. A book of 672 pages part I (in Dutch) was published about the period 1920-1960 in 2012. Part II will be published in 2017.

in Guyana 'but the Dutch are kind masters' (Sanderson report 1910; Comins 1893). This rather positive image also explains why more than 3,000 Indians from the Caribbean –in particular from Guyana- settled in Suriname during the indentured labour period (De Klerk 1953:177; Colonial Report (*Koloniaal verslag*) 1921). In 1913 Mc Neill and Lal mentioned that nearly 2,000 Indians from British West Indian colonies had settled in Suriname and observed:

"Between Surinam or Dutch Guiana and the adjoining British Guiana Indians in small number are constantly moving. The balance seems to be slightly in favour of Surinam while land is cheap and casual labour unlike indentured labour at the time of our visit, is well paid." (Mc Neill and Lal 1914:173).

Furthermore, roughly among 10 % of the arrivals in Suriname were immigrants who had already served in other colonies (Panday 1959: 159; Colonial Report (*Koloniaal Verslag*) 1888: 149). These data indicate clearly that the living conditions (plenty of fertile land and easy to obtain land, a small population, less inter-ethnic competition and no assimilation pressure) for Indians were better in Suriname than in some Caribbean colonies. It resulted also in a higher population growth among Indians in Suriname.

Exploitation

However, the positive attitude of the Dutch Colonial Government and in particular of some of the Governors and the District Commissioners towards the Hindostani indentured labourers did not imply that the Hindostanis have not been exploited. On the contrary, many planters and in particular the management of the estates (the directors, the overseers and white officers) were only interested in their labour output. Based on an ordinance of 1861 about the labour regulations the Dutch and British government agreed in 1870 that *able bodied* men should earn 60cents (comparable with 25 cents in Guyana) a day and women and *not-able bodied* men 40 cents. They had to work daily 7 hours on the field or 10 hours in a plant. But often task-work was given with the argument that they could make more money if they had finished their work in less than 7 hours. In the Colonial reports figures were produced about the working hours, wages and payments. Also in reports of Comins (1893) and McNeill and Lal (1914) such figures are reported. A report based on extensive research of 1911 concluded that on average a Hindostani man earned 140 guilders and a Hindostani woman 74 guilders annually. But the historian M. Hassankhan doubt if these figures are correct. He states that the wages were very low and '*many were not able to earn the minimum of 60 or 40cents per day*'. According to him it was for example annually in 1891 for Hindostani men 134 guilders and for Hindostani women 68 guilders, and 134 and 68 guilders respectively in 1901. Hassankhan concludes:

The official opinion expressed publicly was that the wages were reasonable. The savings and remittances to India were used to prove this. As an

argument against this we can say that there were some labourers who could earn more than the minimum wage, but many Indians during indentureship tried to earn money by other activities. They had additional income from agriculture, livestock and trade. In this way they were able to save money even though the wages on the plantations were low. The traditional Indian way of life was to save some from every rupee that they earned”(Hassankhan 2014: 211,230,231).

Whatever the exact payments were, it is clear that most Hindostani indentured labourers have been exploited. For most planters and the management of the plantations the Hindostanis were simply the coolies who came to work on the estates as a replacement for the ex-slaves. The condition of Hindostani indentured labourers in the sugar estates was not much better than that of the ex-slaves whom they replaced. They were forced to adopt almost similar conditions under which former slaves worked and lived, as many features of plantation slavery still existed in the sugar estates. Their labour was often slave labour.

The work on the cacao and other (banana and cotton) plantations was less harsh; for instance the indentured labourers could often work in the shade. Cacao was more important as an export product in Suriname than sugar during 1880-1900. After 1900 sugar, gold and balata became important as export products (Adhin 1961: 83). Perhaps many Hindostani indentured labourers in Suriname had a more bearable life than in Guyana because they did not work on sugar plantations but on cacao, cotton and banana plantations. There were comparatively fewer desertions among indentured labourers in Suriname than in the other colonies. Between 1873-1890 on average less than 0.3 per cent deserted yearly, while the average desertion rate in Trinidad was 5 per cent,, in Guyana 3.2 per cent, in Jamaica 15.3 percent in the years 1909-1911(Comins 1893:23).¹⁶

Penal Sanction

Violation of the labour contract rules by the indentured labourers (employee) and also the planters (employer) was dealt with Dutch penal law i.c. the penal sanction (*poenale sanctie*) was practiced. After complaints by the planters i.e., the management of the plantation, or the labourer, an inquiry by the District Commissioner followed. If the complaint was valid it was taken to the court. The planters who had paid in advance for the costs of recruitment and transportation of the indentured labourers demanded a profitable return on their investment. Absence from work was considered a criminal act. Sometimes they complained

¹⁶ Between 1873 and 1890 there were 161 desertions of which 55 were returnees from Guyana, which makes a yearly average of 12. In this period approximately a yearly average of 4,000 Hindostanis were under contract. 1per cent is 40 and hence 12 are 0. 3 per cent. We assume that the rate of desertion was overall very low in Suriname. In Guyana of a mean adult indentured population of 9 671 in 1913t here were 178 desertions and in Jamaica 61 of 4 125 indentured labourers deserted in 1912-1913 (Williams 1970: 355).

that the Hindostani labourers did not work hard enough. Often there was resistance at individual level against the pressure to work harder. Yearly there were many complaints about the Hindostani labour force. In 1909, 1910 and 1911 respectively 16.5 per cent, 16.0 per cent and 16.6 per cent of the Hindostani indentured labourers were accused (McNeill and Lal 1914:127). Between 1874 - 1889 more than half (54 per cent) of the complaints about the Hindostani labourers at the courts were about dereliction of work duty (*overtredingen inzake pligtsverzuim*). While 84 percent of these complaints ended in a conviction of the Hindostani labourers, only 18 per cent of complaints against the employers (planters and managers) led to a conviction by the (white) courts during this period. In 1898 for example, on the largest plantation (Mariënborg) 47 per cent of the complaints concerned unwillingness to work and 18 per cent concerned 'laziness' (Hoeft 1998: 187). Many Hindostani indentured labourers were convicted and sentenced to a fine or time in jail and sometimes they were put in chains. Unwillingness to work due to fatigue, stress and other psychological illnesses resulted in absence. The (white) judges had more trust in the planters and the management of the plantations. We must keep in mind that most of Hindostani indentured labourers were not aware of the consequences when they signed the contract or they had the attitude that everything was better than staying behind in India. They were not informed well about the labour laws in Suriname. We must also keep in mind that the majority of the planters and the Government were very satisfied about the discipline, performance and work ethos of the Hindostani labourers. Hence, there were good and bad masters/planters. Also, among the indentured labourers most were hardworking and law-abiding, while there were some troublemakers and even criminals. Some criminals were recruited and allowed to emigrate by the Suriname agency because the opinion was that they could become good labourers in different settings of the colonies (Sanderson Report 1910).

Resistance

Apart from the acts of individual resistance there were collective resistance actions sometimes involving almost the total Hindostani labour force of a plantation. Around 40 collective resistance activities are reported against the harsh conditions like working hours and heavy tasks, low wages and sexual abuses. Ending of these resistances involved government intervention from police, military, District Commissioners, *Agent Generaals* and judiciary, in restoring the peace.¹⁷ In a few

¹⁷ Bhagwanbali has done meritorious research on some of the collective resistance actions, but he states rightly that more research must be done. Besides the Colonial reports there are many archival sources unexplored. But these archival sources reflect often the view of officials. The point of view and experiences of indentured labourers and free Hindostanis during this period are not represented. However, research based on oral history is not possible while all of them have passed away. Interviewing their children and grandchildren to reconstruct this history has limitations. Furthermore, communication between the generations was limited around sensitive issues like the

cases peace was restored after bloodshed (De Klerk 1954; Hira 1983; Hoeft 1987, 1998; Bhagwanbali 2011). One of the first collective resistance action was in August 1873 on the sugar plantation de Resolutie in of the (sugar) district Commewijne. This sugar plantation was owned by the large Dutch company NHM (*Nederlandse Handels Maatschappij*). The first batches of Hindostani indentured labourers arriving in Suriname were employed in De Resolutie. Within 9 months there was a high death rate: 6.3 percent (32 labourers died). On 22 and 23 August 1874 the majority of the Hindostani labourers went on strike. These pioneers demanded better labour conditions and living arrangements. The ringleaders were arrested and sentenced to jail while some labourers deserted to Guyana. One labourer had set fire to a sugarcane field. Peace was forcefully restored by police intervention. The Protector of Immigrants (in Calcutta), Dr. J. Grant referred to 'unfavourable circumstances':

A further unfavourable circumstance, common to every new Immigration, was that the East Indian emigrants being the First whoever were brought over to Surinam, did not find any of their countrymen who could give them advice about the best mode of living and cheer them up. The medical men too in the country were probably not yet familiar with the peculiar diseases of East Indian emigrants.

But in 1876 a strike was again organised by these pioneers because the popular Hindostani *Sardaar* (headman) Matadin was fired. They also complained that tasks were too heavy and the payment too low. When after some days of strike the police arrested six ringleaders and the District Commissioner brought them to (*the mobile*) court they were escorted by a large group of dissatisfied labourers. The *visiting* judge postponed his decision because he feared escalation. The next day the District Commissioner arrived with 50 military men, but the labourers were already at work. They had reached an agreement (80 cents for the daily task) with the management of the plantation. Still the District Commissioner wanted to arrest the six ringleaders and punish them. The military succeeded in arresting them after resistance and some skirmishes (one Hindostani labourer wounded a corporal with a dagger). The British Consul A. Cohen wrote about the arrested Hindostanis and the severe sentences:

That on seeing them conveyed to the boat as prisoners and handcuffed for no other reason than, as stated, that they owed obedience to the Commissary, he representing the authority, it can easily be conceived that an unusual amount of clamouring and excitement ensued, and it is possible that some altercation occurred...I suggest that, in order to check the recurrence of such arbitrary treatment of the Indian immigrants, which seems more like military discipline, than having extended to them the rights and privileges they enjoy equally with all citizens of the Colony...It will be

indentureship period and their experiences. They have suppressed the horrible and nasty memories.

observed also that many of the sentences involve a period of imprisonment in irons which consists of shackled on the ankle a chain of a sufficient length to allow a heavy ball attached to the end of it being swung over the shoulder while engaged at work. (Bhagwanbali 2011: 46, 47, 58).

The *Agent Generaal* Cateau van Roosevelt concluded later that the Hindostani labourers did not receive the wages according to Government Ordinance. What they received was on an average 20-25% less.

After all the NHM abandoned plantation de Resolutie also because of the bad climate (it was surrounded by marsh land with plenty of mosquitoes) and bought the large plantation Mariënborg in 1878. On Mariënborg the second largest sugar plant in the world was erected. On the plantation and the plant around 3 000 labourers were employed along with labourers of the former sugar plantation De Resolutie. The Manager of sugar plantation Rose Hall in Guyana, the Scotsman James Mavor, was appointed as Director of Mariënborg and settled in Suriname. Mariënborg became a sugar plantation with the state of the art equipment (railways and electricity). In particular, indentured Hindostani and Javanese indentured labourers were employed in Mariënborg. Moreover, Mariënborg became a very successful sugar industry company and contributed a huge amount of income for the Surinamese government by taxes. The Director Mavor acquired a powerful position against Surinamese government and plantation Mariënborg was then like a 'state in a state' (Hoeft 1998). But it was also in Mariënborg that the largest uprising of Hindostanis took place in 1902 that ended in bloodshed. Before we elaborate on the Mariënborg uprising we give attention to another uprising that took place in 1884 and also ended in bloodshed.

Zorg en Hoop 1884

The sugar plantation Zorg en Hoop belonged to A. Pearson and Co based in Glasgow. Some 300-400 labourers, most of them Hindostanis were employed on this plantation in the district Commewijne. On 24 September 1884 Hindostani labourers complained massively against the severe tasks and the low payments. One of the overseers (Knott) was hated by the labourers; he assessed in the field that the tasks had not fulfilled well and that the labourers had to work harder. He was then seized, beaten and severely wounded by four Hindostani labourers. After some warrants the District Commissioner went with 8 military policemen and a brigadier to the *coolie lines* to arrest the four perpetrators. Some 100 Hindostanis awaited them armed with cutlasses and sticks. When the District Commissioner assessed that the angry labourers under the leadership of fearless Ramjaneer would use violence, he decided to retreat. He gave the insurgents 24 hours to hand over the perpetrators and went to Paramaribo to report to the Governor. The Governor decided to send 50 military men and a lieutenant to help the police in arresting the perpetrators. They arrived at Zorg en Hoop two days later. . When they reached the *coolie lines* military drummers started drumming to intimidate

the labourers. But the angry Hindostani labourers responded with: *Awa, Himat hai to awa!* (Come if you have courage). The ringleader Ramjaneer had mobilised the labourers and also a Hindostani woman, named Tetary. Tetary, the obstinate one who arrived in 1880 in Suriname was a single Muslim woman who had adopted a Hindu girl and was well known for her toughness against injustices. She was asked to mobilise the women to defend and to attack the military. The women had collected dry mud pieces, stones and bottles. Despite repeated warnings to hand over the perpetrators and solve this problem without violence (the Hindostani interpreters communicated these messages) the ringleaders refused. Then the military approached the *coolie lines*, but they were bombarded with stones, bottles and dry mud pieces. The military were startled by the fierceness of the insurgents. A real battle took place. Tetary was shot dead from behind and 6 other Hindostani labourers were gunned down while some military men were wounded. The leader Ramjaneer tried to commit suicide by jumping in the nearby Commewijne River, but he was seized. In total 30 insurgents were arrested and sentenced. The next day the Agent General van Rosevelt arrived at Zorg en Hoop. He played an important role to calm the situation because he was trusted by the Hindostanis. (Bhagwanbali 2011: 77-99).

Mariënborg 1902

The biggest resistance of Hindostanis was in 1902 in the last week of July on the sugar plantation Mariënborg. Mariënborg employed the most Hindostani and Javanese labourers. The aforementioned Director James Mavor and his overseers introduced a very stringent regime to guarantee maximal labour output. Labourers who were unwilling to work were severely sentenced and put in irons between their legs (*kromboei*). These severe sentences were criticized by *Agent Generaal* Cateau van Rosevelt in a secret report to Governor on 12 March 1891. And the British consul W. Wyndham wrote:

At Mariënborg I found a number of Immigrant prisoners notably Chumroo 300M, Matabadal 209L and Abdul 216R all of whom were suffering from large sores on their legs and hands, or wrists, in consequence of their punishment by confinement in Irons. (Bhagwanbali 2011: 106).

However, the Governor did not intervene because Mavor was a powerful man. At the same time Mavor was hated by many Hindostani labourers. They called him *Massa Mewa* (*Massa* was a corruption of the Sranan word *Masra* meaning boss). While *Hindustani* was the spoken language among the Hindostanis in Suriname many words in the Dutch language were for most of them quite difficult to pronounce. *Sranan* was the lingua franca. Hence, there was also a communication problem. The Hindustani interpreters were not always able to translate everything correctly, especially when there were emotions and aggression involved. One of the heaviest tasks was digging trenches far from the offices of the plant and the *coolie lines* (the dwellings of the indentured labourers). The labourers complained to overseers about very hard work and asked for an increase in payment. It was

task work and they were not able to earn 80 cents a day. They revolted and the digging work was stopped. On 23 July 1902 Mavor came on horseback to the digging area to make an assessment if an increase of the payment was justified. He was confronted with a group of labourers who were screaming. Mavor saw that tempers had risen. He decided to flee on his horse to make a telephone call at the main office to the police station nearby another plantation and to Paramaribo to send troops. But the labourers destroyed the telephone cables. The Labourers were aroused and some 200 with cutlasses and other equipment like *lathis* (sticks) ran behind Mavor to the office area of the plant. They seized Mavor and he was brutally murdered with cutlasses in 'the most barbaric way' (Colonial Report *Koloniaal verslag*) 1903). When the news about the brutal murder of Massa Mewa reached Paramaribo, the government send 81 military men with a lieutenant and some officials like the Attorney General to restore peace and arrest the murderers and ringleaders. They found the deformed corpse of Mavor and saw the destructions on offices of the plantation.

On 30 July 1903 at 5.30 a wake up (*reveille*) was ordered. Because huge problems were expected in arresting the perpetrators and the ringleaders, some officials and interpreters with a group of 20 military would be in charge, trying not to provoke the stressed labourers. More than 60 military men were kept waiting at a distance armed with their guns. When the arrests took place and around 8.45 the labourers were expected to go to the fields, the labourers -not only Hindostanis but also Javanese- approached the office area from different angles. They had sharpened cutlasses in their hand and demanded loudly to free the arrested persons. The officials with the assistance of the interpreters asked them repeatedly to leave and to return to the *coolie lines*. But the furious group approached from the street towards the bridge shouting *maro, maro* (beat, beat in Hindustani). On the other side of the bridge was the area of the office buildings where the military was standing in defence line with their guns. After repeated warnings not to approach the office area the lieutenant gave the order to fire. In total 16 Hindostanis were deadly hurt; 13 died at once, 2 died afterwards and 1 during his transport to the hospital. Later 8 Hindostanis died in military hospital in Paramaribo. Another 39 were wounded. In total 117 shots were fired by the military (Hira 1982: 210-212; Bhagwanbali 2011: 100-125). The ringleaders were sentenced for 12 years jail and 'hard labour.' The corpses of the "fallen Hindostani labourers" were buried with calcium oxide in a massive grave by the authorities. In order to fast disintegrate the bones. The *Agent Generaal* Barnet Lyon protested in vain against this 'burial method' that had not respected the tradition of Hindu and Muslim burial tradition. The authorities stated that they did not create a pilgrimage place. Barnet Lyon retired soon afterwards and was succeeded by *Agent Generaal* C. Van Drimmelen. Still to date the burial place is not known and found. At Mariënburg a monument has been erected to remember this uprising and their victims. It has been passed over to next generations that Mavor and also some overseers had forced sexual contacts and that they also abused Hindostani women. That was a

major reason for the killing of Mavor.¹⁸ After 1902 no major uprising or labour strike took place in the indentured period. In 1910 a presumed putsch by the police Commissioner F. Killinger was detected and a Hindostani policeman Jatan (who arrived in 1878 in Suriname) seems to have been involved. The intention was that Jatan would mobilize Hindostani labourers from Mariënborg and with *lathis* (fighting sticks) they would conquer a military fort in Paramaribo. However, Jatan denied his involvement in the court, while many *lathis* were found on a yard in Paramaribo. The Hindostani labourers of Mariënborg had earned a fearsome reputation as *lathi* fighters.

Muharam clash 1891

There were also clashes among the Hindostani labourers. Rivalry and competition between plantations or *ganvs* (villages) were the main reason. Clashes in November 1878 in district Nickerie between Hindostani indentured labourers of the sugar plantations Waterloo and Hazard resulted in forty persons wounded (*Koloniaal Verslag* 1879; De Klerk 1953: 14). Another major clash was in 1891 in the (sugar) district Commewijne. In August 1891 there were riots between Hindostanis of two sugar plantations (Zoelen en Geertruidenburg) because they could not agree which *Tajiya/Tadjah* would pass first towards the river where it had to be laid to rest (*sarawe*).¹⁹ The next day the authorities and the police visited the plantation Zoelen for a surge, but faced strong resistance. They were attacked with '*cuds, sticks, burnt clay and stones*.' A riot broke out since the situation was not handled in a tactical manner. The police fired and nine Hindostanis were shot. Three of them died at once, while the two others died later in the hospital (De Klerk 1953: 140-141). On the next day the *Agent Generaal* Van Rosevelt arrived and calmed the labourers and peace was installed. But he was very frustrated handling this riot because on the same day the protector of Immigrants D.W. D. Comins was visiting Suriname. Van Rosevelt died not long after this riot. At his funeral many indentured labourers walked many miles to pay their respect to their *Koeliepapa* like it was also the case with the burial of Papa Krasbee in Guyana (Fontaine 1980:114).

In September 1891 Shaikh Abdul (a Hindostani indentured labourer) killed the director of the plantation Jaglust with a cutlass. He was sentenced to death but the acting *Agent Generaal* was against an execution of the death sentence.

¹⁸ There is still an endeavour by the Hindostani archaeologist B. Mitrasingh to find the burial site. Also there is no consensus about the right names of the victims who have been shot dead and are honoured on the plaque on the monument in Mariënborg. The Hindostani filmmaker Abdul Rahman had made a documentary film about the Mariënborg uprising. In 2014 it was broadcasted on television in Suriname and The Netherlands.

¹⁹ A *taziya/tadjah* is a huge pyramidal or canonical structure arranged in stages on a bamboo framework with a diameter of six to eight feet and a height of some twenty feet that was carried during the (Muslim) Muharam festival by the Hindostanis (Hindu and Muslim) in procession. In the procession women were lamenting and there were stick fights, drumming, wrestling and other performances that took place while the onlookers were watching (see also: Mangru 1993:13-24).

Another director at the plantation St. Barbara was also killed in November 1891 while sleeping. Also directors and administrators of other plantations were threatened and beaten or wounded by Hindostani indentured labourers (Hassankhan 2014: 225,229). These acts hastened the decision to bring Javanese indentured labourers to Suriname. In 1890 a first batch of Javanese labourers migrated to Suriname. From 1894 transports regularly arrived and in total 33 000 Javanese arrived in Suriname. Although it was more expensive to transport them to Suriname than the Hindostanis the Dutch planters feared that the British would stop the emigration to Suriname again.

Accommodation

Although there was exploitation and oppression retaliated by resistance, the majority of the Hindostani indentured labourers nevertheless aspired to have a better life for themselves in Suriname and for their offspring. This resulted in accommodating behaviour. That means their acts of omission or commission as a suppressed people was to survive the harsh situation. The majority survived indeed and could cope with the harsh climate conditions and low wages. Although the wages were low and not as high as promised in India (12 *anna's* a day against the 2 *anna's* in India) it was still far better income than in India. The Hindostani indentured labourers had the right to food rations the first three months, free housing, free medical help and free drinking water. Often they obtained during the indentured period a small piece of land of 100 meters (often 20 by 50 meters) to cultivate. They grew vegetables and some raised poultry and cows, not only for their own consumption but also to earn some extra money. Owing to their thrifty lifestyle many could even save money to send for their family in India. And almost one third returned back with money and jewels. A small minority returned as paupers, often to die in India.

Cultural retention

The Hindostanis who settled in Suriname gradually became an ethnic group with a distinctive culture. Because the overwhelming majority of Hindostani indentured labourers in Suriname hailed from Western Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh they could retain their common culture easier. From *Hindi*, *Bhojpuri* and *Avadhi* (the Indian languages spoken) later the Sarnami Hind(ustan)i language evolved. Because it was very difficult to learn the Dutch language for Hind(ustan)i speaking persons (for example in Hindi and English one article exists for 'the' while in Dutch masculine, feminine and neuter articles are used) many did not learn Dutch. Hence, they could rarely communicate -officially-in Dutch and often (Hindostani) interpreters were consulted. But many Hindostani learned the (easier) lingua franca *Sranan tongo*. Hence, it was easier to retain the Hindustani language (Sarnami Hindustani), while in Guyana and Trinidad the Indians could easily switch to English and the Hindustani language faded away little by little. Furthermore,

very few *Madrassis* (South Indians) migrated to Suriname. It is remarkable that Sarnami Hind(ustan)i flourished and is still widely spoken in Suriname.

The Hindostanis lived mostly isolated on the plantations from the Creoles and later often also from the Javanese. Furthermore, the roads were very bad and travelling to the capital Paramaribo took days by rowing boats. The relative isolation of Hindostanis and their small numbers during the indentured period reinforced the mutual dependence and solidarity. We must bear in mind that most of the arrivals among the 70 per cent of indentured labourers in Suriname were between 16-35 years; nearly two third were between 20-30 years. A quarter was under 20 years, while a few of 2 per cent were 40 years and older (Hira 2000: 27). The indentured labourers had already their mutual bond of *Dipu Bhai* and *Bahin* (Depot Brother and Sister) *Jahaji Bhai* and *Bahin* (Ships Brother and Sister). Because most of them were single or did not have an extended family in Suriname solidarity and intensive relationships between the Hindostani plantation population developed. These *ganv ke nata* (village) relationships were very important. Besides a *panchayat* (village council) also moral codes developed to retain order. For example when somebody of the *ganv* did something morally wrong –like a man harassing a girl- he was expelled from the village and became *kujat* (expelled from the caste/casteless). After sometime he could return back and pay for his mistakes. The Hindus had 32 and Muslims 16 recognized religious holidays besides the national (Christian) holidays. On these days and on Sundays they were free. Numerous religious festivals (*Phagwa/Holi, Divali, Bhagwat, and Muharram*) were celebrated and Hindus and Muslims celebrated together. Because it was a small group the religious difference were less important and even marriages between Hindus and Muslim were contracted. Others were accepted as family (*palwar banawe*) i.e., as brother or sister for performing the (wedding) rituals. Children and orphans were adopted by childless partners. Through inter marriage within the Hindostani group new family relationships developed. In the initial phases the identity formation of the Hindostanis can be understood in the context of their nature of work and new social set up which was totally different from their experiences in India. They presented a unified Indian labour identity on the plantation. One such occasion was the public display of *Muharram* festival when a large number of Hindostanis, Hindus and Muslims participated in the processions like also in Trinidad and Guyana. Through collective performances, the Hindostani group showed its solidarity and sense of belonging. Although the culture was based on the cultural heritage of India, more Sarnami Hindostani style culture developed like *Baithak Gana*, a mix of Bhojpuri folk songs with other Caribbean influences. It is similar to *Chutney* music that originated in Trinidad.²⁰

²⁰In basic Baithak Gana there are three instruments (though there are other instruments that could be added to the ensemble), harmonium, dholak and the *dhantal*. The harmonium is a free-standing keyboard instrument similar to a reed organ. The dholak is a double headed drum that originated

Hindustani Women

One of the main characteristics of the indentured period was the shortage of Indian women. The proportion of the arrivals in Suriname was in the order of 70 per cent men (23405) and 30 per cent women (10 232) which was slightly higher than the minimal required rate of 100 men and 40 women (28, 6 per cent). Among the children (4360, totalling 13 per cent) the gender balance was better (2458 boys and 1 902 girls). The shortage of Hindostani women and the aversion among Hindostani men to marry outside the Hindostani group or have sexual relationships resulted in strengthening the position of Hindostani women. Half of the adult women were married (Emmer 1984: 250). Especially the adult single women and widows were very assertive and 'survivors.' In Suriname they acquired more freedom. Furthermore, they could choose their own partner or sometimes switch from one partner to another. Some had more than one male partner. Also the girls had a strong bargaining position. Although they often were married at a very young age –sometimes even within 8-10 years age- and went to live with their in laws (*gauna*) their parents had a good bargaining position. In Suriname the men had then to pay a price for the bride. It also happened that fathers sold their daughter(s). Older men married younger women. These became widowed rather young. Sometimes they took a new partner or remained single, enjoying their freedom. Not all single Hindostani men succeeded in getting a bride. They remained single/unmarried (*muglisia*) and could often play the role of uncle for children on the plantations and settlement centres. Also in Suriname there have been some murders of women or suicides among Hindostanis related to the shortage of women, but comparatively the situation was not as bad as in Guyana (Bahadur 2013). The Hindostani women had a strong position and were very self-assured and assertive. They earned, smoked and drank alcohol and walked freely on the streets. But often their daughters had to become *izzatdar* (showing honoured behaviour) with all the limitations in public life. This '*izzatdar*' movement started massively after 1920s when the national religious organisations were founded and there was a more balanced proportion in gender (Choenni and Choenni 2012). Prior to ending of the indentured emigration the Hindostani leadership demanded from Colonial India to send more decent single women and families, continuing thus with emigration. They even went to India to plead to Mahatma Gandhi. However, their trip to India in 1920 after meeting Mahatma Gandhi was in vain and they decided that the British Indians in Suriname must become Dutch subjects in order for the Hindostani community to evolve.

The gender imbalance led to inter-caste marriages and caste was no longer relevant for all practical purposes. Nonetheless, certain high caste individuals were

in Northern India, however, it is still used in the folk songs from Pakistan or Nepal. The last instrument that is used in this style of music is the *dhantal* which serves as the rhythmic piece of the ensemble. It consists of a long steel rod which is then "struck" by a U-formed piece, and the origin of this device is unclear as it may have been brought by the Indian indentured labourers.

unwilling to work under lower caste *Sardaars* (headmen) and they also felt a loss in their social status. At the same time, despite all hardship, many Hindostanis, especially lower castes, experienced some improvement compared to life in India. In India they were often consigned to the fringes of rural Indian society as untouchables, tenants-at-will and landless labourers with little hope of betterment in life. In Suriname Brahmins were often addressed also as *Maharaj* and *Maharajin*, but almost nobody took that as a surname like in Trinidad (Roopnarine 2007: 67). Gradually the second generation became larger at the end of the emigration period. India became a distant land, but the cultural heritage remained the basis for a vibrant Hindostani culture.

Discrimination

Like in other Caribbean colonies the Indians were not welcomed by the Creole population. They were often perceived as intruders having a downward effect on the wages, hardworking and thrifty and had a 'strange' culture. *Koelie* meaning coolie became a derogatory word. But there was very little harassment and conflicts between Hindostanis and *black* Creoles. They lived mostly separated from each other and economically they were dependent on each other as agrarian producers and sellers (Hindostanis) and consumers (Creoles) (Choenni 2014b). Only one conflict between Hindostanis with a Creole group on plantation in Waterloo is reported during the indentured period (in District Nickerie). Also between the Javanese and the Hindostanis very few conflicts are reported (Hoeft 1998). Free Hindostanis experienced institutional discrimination because they could not be employed in the booming gold mining and balata or rubber industry. Given the shortage of Hindostani woman on the one side and a surplus of Hindostani men on the other side few had sexual relations and /or married with Creole women. There were some examples of mixed marriages (and mixed children) in this period but it was less than 3%. Intermixing with other groups was minimal because of the notion of purity and pollution that is deeply rooted in the Indian way of life.

In particular the Creole middle class (the coloured people) perceived Hindostanis as *fremdkörper* and temporary citizens. Although they perceived the Hindostanis as coolies and with contempt, the Hindostanis defined their own culture as superior. They remained aloof due to a psychological fear of losing religion and culture. The isolation and segregation policy of the Dutch Colonial Government turned out to be a large factor in uniting the Hindostani Indian community. They lived in the countryside, while the majority of the Creoles moved in the capital town Paramaribo.

Survivors

The free Hindostanis acquired a plot of land free and built their own dwellings (a *jopri* that was often a roof thatched hut with mud floor) and started to grow their own rice and other agricultural products. Others became dairy farmers. After

saving money they bought more land outside the settlement centres. Women also saved money and bought land independent of their spouses.²¹ Some Hindostanis became even big landowners and bought plantations (like Lutchman Singh, Cheddy Somaroo and K. Karamat Ali, Chairman respectively treasurer and board member of the SIV). During and after the indenture the Hindostanis stayed on the countryside and grew rice, vegetables and raised poultry and cattle, while the rivers, canals and polders were teeming with fish and fertile land was available. Their diet of rice (*bhat*) and lentils (*dahl*), vegetable (*bhanji*) and *chutney* was healthy. Many ate fish and also meat as *tarkari* (meal), while 14 per cent were vegetarians. But Suriname had a harsh climate and many diseases like leprosy, ankylostomiasis or hookworm disease, bilharzias or Yellow Fever that were lethal. Almost 16 per cent did not survive the plantation life and the harsh regime of the management (Bhagwanbali 2010:152). But the survivors had agency meaning that their ideals, beliefs and values and the activities to strive to realize them was crucial to build a future in Suriname. The group factors like their (work) ethos, strong ethnic identity and cultural heritage in interaction with the structural factors like the opportunities and the Dutch Colonial Government resulted in a specific style of integration later in Suriname. Many sent money to their family while others saved their money and /or invested in jewellery. The returnees took them to India.

Three phases

The indentureship period in Suriname lasted almost 50 years (1873-1920). During this long period some changes occurred in the composition of the Hindostani group. It was a fluid situation with arrivals and returnees, while an increasing number settled in Suriname. In the beginning only Hindostani indentured labourers worked in Suriname, but after 1878/1879 the group of (time-expired) free Indians and also returnees emerged. Towards the end of the nineteenth century we see that the group of free Indians grew and after their settlement was actively promoted the free Indians became the largest group among the Hindostanis in the beginning of the twentieth century. At the same time the second generation (those born in Suriname) and later the third generation (their children) became a larger proportion of the Hindostani population. Hence, we can distinguish the indentured period in Suriname in three phases²²:

1. Pioneering phase 1873-1889: The indentured labourers were the majority and in the early years they were lonely without family. The bondage dipu bhai and bahin and of jahaj bhai and bahin was very important. It became a very fluid situation

²¹ For example my maternal grandmother (*paraji*) Dulmatia (1864-1946) bought a piece of Crown land in 1906 for 150 guilders. But she could buy this land after the consent from the governor about 'good behaviour'. Only with a written statement about 'good behaviour' one was allowed to buy Crown land.

²² In my publication of the indentureship period 1873-1920 in Suriname these phases are covered extensively (Choenni 2016).

after 1878 when the first batches started to return and new arrivals landed in Suriname. They were perceived as an exotic minority.²³

2. Identity formation phase 1890-1902: The composition of the Hindostani group started to change. Besides the indentured labourers the group of free Hindostanis (and time-expired persons waiting to return) became larger and started to settle in settlement centres. The formation of the ethnic identity and group became important and 'Cooly' schools were founded. The solidarity between ganv ke nata and also solidarity as Hindostanis became prominent.

3. Settlement phase 1903-1920: The group of free Hindostanis became the majority while new arrivals were taken care of. Also the gender balance became better and more children were born in Suriname. Hindostani (small) farmers settled on settlement centres, but gradually many settled beyond settlement centres, buying their own plot of land and becoming the dominant group among the Hindostanis. Furthermore, the SIV started to strive for total acceptance as subjects of Suriname i.c. the Royal Kingdom of The Netherlands.

After 1920 a new phase started: the *Community formation phase 1921-1960*. Key characteristics were an enormous demographic growth of the Hindostani group and a transformation in a self-assured community with a strong ethnic identity and cultural heritage (Choenni and Choenni 2012). The role of the former indentured labourers became less important (the majority died before 1960) while the second and third generation became more important. After Indian immigration had stopped and the last ships with Indian labourers returned to India, contact between India and Suriname weakened. Immigrants no longer arrived to bring fresh news of events/occurrences in India. Also the opportunities for return diminished. Contacts through letters that were administered by the Immigration department stopped after its liquidation. The changing of the name of the SIV in 1922 in Bharat Uday (Awakening India) indicates the rise of ethnic consciousness and a continuing linkage with India. Young Hindostani intellectuals founded their own organisation, the *Nawa Yuga Uday* (New age arising) in 1924 under the leadership of the Indian lawyer C.R. Biswamitre. When education in Hindi was removed from the primary schools in 1929, these organizations protested loudly in vain.

²³ A Hindostani economist wrote about this phase: "*An Indian pattern completely foreign to the existing one, found an opportunity to consolidate itself during the two decades before the arrival of Indonesian labour. In spite of the built-in separating forces of the Indian pattern (caste-system) the Indians developed an attitude of belonging together. The group as a whole became very soon closed for elements foreign to its pattern. Though this was conducive to the break-down of the caste-system yet it became completely closed as a group of its own....At any rate, the Indian group whose value system was largely influenced by practises of the homeland, had developed an additional attitude that is of belonging together.*" (Panday 1959: 152,153).

Conclusions

The Indian indentured labour (system) in Suriname between 1873 and 1920 was not a new form (*awatar*) of slavery as Bhagwanbali (2010) had labelled it and cannot be called a continuation of slavery in another form. Moreover, the Hindostani indentureship in Suriname succeeded the *black* slavery ten years after the abolition in 1873 and can't be compared in the sense they did not exist in the same period but succeeded each other. The horrible slavery experiences and atrocities against the *black* slaves differs tremendously from the treatment of the Hindostani indentured labourers. Indeed, some Hindostani were also chained in irons because they committed presumed 'criminal acts' like unwillingness to work because it was a breach of indentured agreement; others were severely maltreated. Furthermore, the labour conditions were often the same as slave labour and in the early years the provisions and arrangements were not better than that for the *black* slaves. But gradually life for Hindostani indentured labourers became better in Suriname through improvements in the medical care, housing and infrastructure. Moreover, the Hindostani indentured labourers were free and not chattel of their white masters. They had a contract with binding rules and after five years they could return to their homeland. They earned a wage for their labour although it was low, insufficient and not always paid correctly. Besides, they were protected by *Agent Generaals* and as her British 'Majesty's subjects' in addition also by British consuls. Perhaps they were treated better because they were not Dutch subjects but British subjects. If maltreatment occurred on a large scale the British Imperial Government would stop the emigration again as it happened in 1874.

After their willingness to settle in Suriname the Hindostani indentured labourers obtained a plot of Crown land free and 100 guilders and started their 'free' life (*khula*) and family life in this fertile land. Compared to their homeland India they had better life chances and opportunities in Suriname. Their ethos (aiming for advancement, diligence and thrift) and cultural heritage and the Dutch Colonial Government policy resulted in successful settlement in Suriname. The high population growth and retention of their Hindostani culture are indicators of their success. In due time they became prosperous as small farmers and also prospered in other economic fields. It is therefore understandable that their descendants celebrate the *Hindostani arrival (Immigratieviering)* day (5 June 1873), their integration and achievements and the formation of a Hindostani community far from India. But the so called *new slavery school* represented by Radjinder Bhagwanbali (2010), and the India centred historians Chaman Lal (2011) and Kapil Kumar (2014) focus primarily on oppression and exploitation. They put the blame of the Indian emigration solely on the British and Dutch imperialists and planters. They negate or deny the oppression by the *zamindars*, discrimination of the low castes and outcast people, abasement of widows, abject poverty, hindrances towards upward mobility at that time in Colonial India and such factors as natural disasters. In spite of all the hindrances and propaganda against

emigration the indentured labourers took the courageous step to emigrate and settle in the colonies. That the indentured Indian diaspora celebrates their *arrival day* and their settlement and achievements in remembrance of their ancestors and their sacrifices is comprehensible. They had *agency* and settled in a strange land and the overwhelming majority did not regret it.

The enormous population growth led to the making of the Hindostani group through intermarriage and the formation of a strong ethnic identity relying on their Indian cultural heritage. While in other Caribbean colonies the Indian language gradually became extinct, in Suriname the Hindostani language survived and flourished. While the elite Creoles and, to a less extent, the *black* Creoles had a constrained and ambiguous relationship with the Dutch government, the Hindostanis had a more positive attitude towards the Dutch Colonial Government. They perceived the Dutch government as the protector of their cultural identity and interests. This difference in attitude towards the Dutch played an important role in the political development of Suriname. Hence, there were special conditions in Suriname that resulted in what I had designated as their Integration Hindostani Style. Integration is defined as how and to what extent an immigrant group becomes part and parcel of the receiving society (Choenni 2011).

The case of Suriname as a non-British and French colony is unique in view of the huge population growth among the Hindostanis and the retention of their culture. As we have mentioned, there were cross cultural exchanges during the indentured period in the Caribbean, particularly between Guyana and Suriname.²⁴ Research is needed on these cross cultural exchanges between Indo Caribbeans. Furthermore, comparative research is also needed concerning 'the integration style' and the position of Indian women. For example, comparative studies like the integration of Indians in Jamaica and Suriname is recommendable. While in Suriname the Indians retained their culture and have a strong ethnic identity, in Jamaica the Indian group assimilated to a large extent. Obviously there are differences in structural factors like the Colonial Government policy and the large surrounding Creole population in Jamaica compared to Suriname. But further research can reveal the different integration styles in the indentured Indian diaspora.

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²⁴For example two prominent members of the Arya Samaj in Suriname travelled to Guyana in 1911 to meet the Arya Samaj missionary Bhai Parmanand who came from India to preach about 'the new Hindu faith.' His preachings were introduced in Suriname. When the Guyanese Arya Samaj pundit Kunj Bihari Tripathi visited Suriname in 1912 some prominent Sanatan Dharma personalities converted to the Arya Samaj (Mahabier and Choenni 2008: 14).

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Book Review by Sheetal Bhoola, Post-Doctoral Fellow at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

The Indian Diaspora: Hindus and Sikhs in Australia. Edited by Parushottama Bilimora, Jayant Bhalchandra Bapat & Philip Hughes. Delhi, India: DK Printworld, 2015, pp. i-xxx +466.

This book is an in-depth and detailed description of the history of the diaspora of Hindus and Sikhs residing Australia. It addresses the varying lifeways, practices and beliefs of both Hinduism and Sikhism in a diasporic environment. Yet general reflections on the Indian Diaspora in Australia merge these two religious sects, with a tangential reflection upon Muslims, placed under the rubric 'Indian'. Such discussions create a platform for additional analyses and comparisons both within Australia and other diasporic communities globally. The book consists of a compilation of fifteen comprehensive and varying chapters authored by twelve scholars which contribute to a description of these communities.

These chapters bring to the fore ideologies and beliefs that often pique the curiosity of onlookers, and scholars of diasporic communities. Reflections upon the process of migration and its negative impacts are discussed. All the chapters are woven together by the four dominant thematic segments in the book. Woven within these segments are the wider theoretical contexts of religious, postcolonial and trans-global lifestyles of Hindus and Sikhs in Australia. Their emphases provide a substantial peep into the adaptive modes that Australian government policies of immigration and localised community lifestyles have had on their integration into Australian society. At least three factors prevail in their chapters: their geographical dispersion, their class positions and the impact that these two factors have on their identity formations. Five chapters towards the latter part of the book gives the reader an insight into the general reflections on the Indian Diaspora in Australia with an emphasis on the issues of identity among women and students. This is demonstrated through the various comparative case studies that have been compiled within chapters eleven to fifteen. Special mention is made of how 'anomie' impacts the Indian women in their diasporic way of life.

Authors Lakha, Stevenson & Dhanji (2015: 215), aim to capture the expression of Indian identity in Melbourne, heterogeneity and its relevance in a diversified community. Within this context understanding identity becomes focal point within this chapter. The perception that well-educated and skilled Asian migrants are reluctant to retain their cultures and traditions is discussed and debated in their chapter titled, '*Diversity of Indian Identity in Multicultural Melbourne*'. Special reference is made to educated young Hindu migrants that engage in practices to establish and sustain their own cultures. However the authors suggest that according to the data the second generation of this migrant community choose not to engage in any religious practices and rituals indicating a lack of appreciation and continuation for their cultures. Such issues can be relevant to many other diasporic communities globally.

Both the religions, Hinduism and Sikhism, are outlined for the reader but it also incorporates a historical framework which makes it an interesting read. Comparisons of religious practices in India and Australia contribute to a refreshing insight into the lives of Hindus and Sikhs in Australia. An account of Sikh practices and life in rural Australia brings to the fore the existential diversity among the Sikh Diasporic community. The last chapter considers the future implications of the South Asian transnational presence and involvement in Australia. The possibility of the development of Australian multicultural hybridity within a pluralist religious society is discussed as this book emphasises the relevant challenges of this diasporic community.

Significant contributions of this book include the critical attention given to both Hindu and Sikh immigration, their demographic profiles, practices and cultural changes and a chapter which focused solely on the changing attitudes towards the Hindu and Sikh communities among Australians. Other significant chapters include, '*Hinduism and the Historical Roots of Hindus in Australia*', and '*Hindu Practices and Hindu Organisations in Australia*' both authored by Bilimoria & Bapat (2015). The authors have brilliantly depicted the beginning of these practices, and the way in which these practices were conducted a century ago since the arrival of Hindu migrants in Australia. It includes details of how lifeways, rituals and practices were influenced and modified within a new socio-economic setting, a new hometown. For instance, temples were built and community organisations were formed so that a community like lifestyle could develop outside of India for this migrant community. This chapter mentioned above in particular will be especially important to those whose fore fathers were integral to the development of temples, organisations in Australia during that time period. The sixth chapter titled, '*A Statistical Profile of the Hindu Community in Australia*' fills the wide lacuna of timely statistics of diasporic communities within studies on South Asian diaspora. This chapter authored by Hughes (2015) even identifies the varying religious sects of Indian-born people living in Australia since the year 2011. Tabulations indicate statistics on the birth place of Hindu immigrants living in Australia, and another tabulation indicates the years of immigration dating back to 1910 and the number of Hindus that immigrated. Such in-depth data plays a pivotal role in contributing to the history of diasporic communities and towards broader studies on South Asian Diaspora.

The book is well formatted and includes a segment on the themes and summaries within the book in its preface. Each chapter is well summarised so that the researcher or scholar can easily divert to their chapters of interest directly. This volume is the timeliest, most encompassing and detailed study of this diaspora in Australia in comparison to other similar publications. Previous publications on Hinduism in Australia date back to the years 1984, 1989 and 1996. Therefore a need for a recent and new publication such as this one was dire. The significant theoretical contributions which are supported with recent statistical data gives this book heightened importance and relevance. This book will play an important role in the world of Diaspora Studies and have a valuable place in the broader context of the study of societies.