

FIJI'S INDENTURED LABOURERS

1864 - 1920

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A THESIS

in

The Department

of

History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Canada

April, 1975



Priyambada Singh 1975

ABSTRACT

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FIJI'S INDENTURED LABOURERS: 1864-1920

The indentured labour system of Fiji is interesting in that it not only played an important role in the history of Fiji but in the history of the British Empire as well. While the gross abuse connected with the Pacific Islands labour trade forced Great Britain to annex Fiji in 1874, labour abuse on Fiji plantations once again provided the focus for Britain's abandoning the Indian indenture system in 1920.

The establishment of the cotton industry in 1864 brought white planters to Fiji and, together with a plantation economy, it firmly established the immigrant indentured labour system. Sugar in the second stage of economic development helped to introduce Indians, an entirely new element of people, into the Pacific. While Polynesians and Indians were essentially immigrant indentured labourers, most Fijians were also hired to distant plantations and had to sign contracts.

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Preface

While there are a good number of valuable works on the employment of Fijians, Polynesians and Indians on Fiji plantations; no work has yet been done on the indentured labourers of the Colony as a whole. The indentured labour system of Fiji is interesting in that it played its own significant role in the history of the British Empire. While Island labour abuse in the Pacific forced Great Britain to annex Fiji in 1874, Indian labour abuse on Fiji plantations once again provided the focus for Britain's abandoning the entire Indian indenture system in 1920.

The two stages of economic developments brought profound changes to Fijian life itself. The cotton period in pre-session days, while a short-lived one, approximately 1864 to 1873, brought white planters, and together with a plantation economy, it firmly established the immigrant indentured labour system. Sugar in the second stage of economic development, played no less an important role in that it brought Indian labourers into the Colony. While Polynesians and Indians were essentially immigrant-labourers, most Fijians were also included in this category since the planters preferred hiring Fijians from the distant groups of the Fiji Islands. Also, all the three groups, Fijians, Polynesians and Indians, signed contracts and were called 'indentured labourers'.

While the recruitment of the Polynesians has been covered at some length, no effort has been made to deal with the Indian

indenture system, its abolition, or the free Indians of Fiji. Other issues, such as the Cakobau Government and the cession of the Fiji Islands to Great Britain, have been dealt with only in so far as it related to the labour problems. The explanation of some terms are also in order. "Polynesians" and "Island labour" apply specifically to immigrant labour from the other Pacific groups, while "Fijians" and "natives" are used only to signify the indigenous population of Fiji.

Thanks are due to Karen Hill for her material assistance. And also to George Burna of the Scott Paper Company, Philadelphia, for obtaining rare books from Harvard and University of Pennsylvania libraries.

I am grateful to John Hill for his guidance and constructive criticism. And to my husband, Rudra Singh, for his support, assistance and encouragement.

P.S.

Chapter I

COTTON PLANTING AND THE SEARCH FOR CHEAP LABOUR

When the cotton industry reached the Fiji Islands in the early 1860's, Fiji was still outside the boundaries of 'modern civilization' and presented a picture of what was described by European visitors as a land of "cannibals and savages".¹ Of the native population of Fiji, Col. Smythe,² the British Commissioner to Fiji in 1861, reported that less than one-third of the natives professed the Christian religion, while the remainder practiced "cannibalism, strangulation of widows, 'infanticide,' and other enormities "to a frightful extent".³ And in 1865, referring to Fijian conditions, the Rev. F. Langham, a missionary in Fiji wrote; "Alas! Fiji is not saved - wars, murders, strangling, cannibalism and polygamy are still the sins of many parts of Fiji, and in close proximity to some of the mission stations."⁴ The Fijians lived in a constant fear of being killed and eaten and the tribesmen dared not cross their boundaries. Politically, the country

¹Stephen H. Roberts, Population Problems Of The Pacific. First American Edition, 1969. (First published in London, 1927), p. 39.

²Col. W. J. Smythe was sent to Fiji by the British Government to investigate the possibilities of Fiji as a colony at the offer of cession by Chief Cakobau. However, Britain refused the offer.

³Report of Col. Smythe to Colonial Office, May 1861. Parliamentary Papers, 1862 XXXVI (742), p. 32.

⁴Rev. Frederick Langham, quoted by John W. Burton and Wallace Deane, A Hundred Years In Fiji. (London: 1936), p. 54. Missionary work in Fiji began in 1835.

was divided among numerous warring Chiefs. Other than the two dominant Chiefs, Cakobau and Ma'afu, it was estimated in 1860 that there were twelve other major Chiefs who influenced the governing of the Islands, while the total number of rulers included no less than forty petty Chiefs.¹ Interestingly enough, among these 'savage' natives there also lived a handful of Europeans, some of whom were escaped convicts from the surrounding British Colonies, and others who had left or ran away from vessels visiting the Islands. The number of these permanent white residents in 1860 amounted to less than 200. And as reported by Col. Smythe, these Europeans did nothing to improve the lot of the natives themselves. Most of these Europeans were 'beachcombers' who, whenever they could obtain spirits, drank to excess.² This primitive picture of Fiji, however, was to change with a rapid pace and within a very short period of time. One Englishman most responsible for bringing about this change was Pritchard, who went as the first British Consul to the Fiji Islands in 1858. It was Pritchard's actions—his efforts to promote cotton production and at the same time to get the Islands ceded to the British Crown³—that brought Fiji into the world picture and particularly to the attention of British commercial enterprisers. And with the coming of the British commercial

¹Report of Col. W. J. Smythe to Colonial Office, May 1861. Parliamentary Papers, 1862 XXXVI (740), p. 30.

²Report of Col. W. J. Smythe in Mrs. Sarah Maria Smythe, Ten Months In Fiji Islands. (London, 1864) Appendix, pp. 203-204. Introduction and Appendix by Col. W. J. Smythe.

³Apparently at the request of Chief Cakobau.

enterprisers--the ever pioneers of British influence throughout the world--Fiji was never to be the same again.

When Pritchard arrived in Fiji in 1858, he found cotton plants growing in abundance in the Islands without any attention to its cultivation either from the natives or the white residents.¹ Pritchard saw the significance of cotton cultivation in the Islands and immediately sought its promotion not only by encouraging the Chiefs to plant cotton in their gardens but by personally taking cotton samples to England to win the interests of the English merchants.² Pritchard's interests in the Islands, however, coincided with other world events and conditions which gave a further stimulus to cotton cultivation in Fiji. The shortage of cotton in the world market created by the American Civil War which broke out about the same time was the most important factor.³ It was also about this time that the Australian Colonies were experiencing a period of economic depression. A succession of bad seasons, a sudden fall in the wool prices, and over speculation in Sydney and Melbourne markets all contributed to the bad conditions.⁴ And now when the offer by Chief Cakobau to cede the

¹The seeds were believed to have been introduced by visiting vessels some twenty years earlier.

²Berthold Seeman, Viti - An Account Of A Government Mission To The Vitian Or Fijian Islands In The Years 1860-1861, (London, 1862), pp. 52-53. Dr. Seeman, a Botanist, was a member of W. J. Smythe's mission to Fiji.

³"Fiji Times", Oct. 9, 1970, p. II. This issue of the "Fiji Times" was published as an Independence Souvenir which printed a short history of Fiji.

⁴Litton, Forbes, Two Years In Fiji, (London, 1875), pp. 1-2. Forbes was a doctor from Melbourne who went to Fiji in 1871 to begin a cotton plantation, p. 2.

Islands to Britain, but more important, when the increased interest in cotton cultivation in Fiji became known, a 'rush' at once began from Australia.¹ "Shiploads of passengers, and cargoes of odd-looking wares, fit for savage buyers, were dispatched in quick succession from Melbourne, and Sydney, and Auckland."² And finally in 1871, according to Forbes, "There was a grand stampede of all restless whites from Australia and New Zealand to Fiji."³ From 200 in 1860, 300 in 1865, their number increased to 2,000 in 1871.⁴ Hitherto, the number of white residents in Fiji had been small. Their presence in the Islands was insignificant and their role in the economic and political development of the country was negligible. Now, however, both the number and the nature of the Europeans in Fiji changed rapidly, which brought drastic consequences on all walks of Fijian life.

The newcomers, ninety percent of whom were British,⁵ came with the idea of cotton cultivation, but with little money, little knowledge of tropical agriculture,⁶ and even less knowledge and understanding of the native social order. They proceeded to settle themselves where there was no authority to control their activity and began to establish a new relationship between themselves and the natives - the natives

¹ Forbes, p. 2.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴ "Fiji Times", Oct. 9, 1970, p. 11.

⁵ Consul March to Earl of Clarendon, March 21, 1870: Parliamentary Papers, 1871 XLVIII (399), p. 97.

⁶ C. Harvey, "Early Accounts of Planting Enterprises in Fiji," Fiji Society of Sciences and Industry, Vol. 3, p. 92.

whose land and labour now became essential. The natives on the other hand understood even less of the ways of the white men. The result was that the next ten to twelve years saw continuous internal disorder, lawlessness, and struggle between the natives and the colonists. In the absence of any effective government, a situation not unlike the American "frontier" days was created.

The fact that the native Fijians had a complex social and political organization whereby they owned and cultivated all the land further complicated the settlement of the pioneer planters. Although the individual Fijians had the right to cultivate particular pieces of land, they had no authority to sell those lands. Even the Chief, as the joint owner of the land, had no such rights.² In his report Col. Smythe had correctly stated that,

The cultivation of cotton by white settlers is principally a question of land and labour. In a general way it may be said that there is not an acre of land in Fiji which is not private property, the ownership resting either in families or individuals.³

However, this did not deter the settlers. Between 1860 and 1870 large tracts were purchased for plantations, their sizes varying from 10 to 300 acres.⁴ These land transactions were often made under fraudulent

¹ Sir Arthur Gordon, "Native Councils In Fiji". Contemporary Review. (May: 1883), p. 173. See also George Kingsley Roth, Fijian Way Of Life. (London: 1953), p. 51. Sir Arthur Gordon was the first Governor of Fiji, 1874-1880. Before going to Fiji he had governed New Brunswick, 1861-6; Trinidad, 1866-70; and Mauritius, 1870-1874.

² Roth, pp. 88-89.

³ Report of Col. W. J. Smythe in Ten Months In Fiji, Appendix, p. 207.

⁴ John Horne, A Year In Fiji, (London: 1881). Horne was the director of the Botanical Gardens in Mauritius. He visited Fiji in 1876 at the invitation of the Fijian Government.

conditions and land occupied forcibly.¹ To cite just one such outstanding instance, a case was reported in 1869 when two men from Melbourne suddenly arrived in Viti Levu and, without any foundation, ordered some native people to "clear out" because they had purchased the land where their village stood. When the natives refused, the "Melbourne speculators" burned down the entire village.² However, even when the land was not acquired under dubious conditions, the natives often failed to comprehend the concept of new owner's sole rights over the land. In many instances they believed that they were simply allowing the settlers to live and to cultivate with and among them.³ Under such circumstances conflict between the natives and the planters was inevitable.

The most important problem that occupied the attention of the planters, however, was the lack of a "cheap labour" supply. And, indeed, 'labour' was to remain the most important question and the most talked about problem in Fiji until well after the Indian labour immigration began. It is to be pointed out that white-labour in Fiji was out of the question from the beginning not only because their number was small or that the theory that they were unsuitable for tropical labour prevailed, but also because as one prospector in Fiji explained,

¹ Sylvester Maxwell Lambert, East Indian And Fijian In Fiji: Their Changing Numerical Relations. (Honolulu: 1938), p. 3.

² George Palmer, Kidnapping In The South Seas. (Edinburgh; Edmonston and Douglas, 1871) p. 79. Captain Palmer was the Commander of the H.M.S. "Rosario" in 1869 that patrolled the Pacific Islands. In his book Palmer pointed out the glaring mistreatment of the Islanders by the Europeans.

³ Roth, p. 51.

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It must be at once understood that European labour is not to be thought of. The superior strength and energy of white men is wasted when the competition with their coloured brethren is merely as to who can best scrape a hole in the ground and drop a few seeds therein. Nor does the peculiar kind of field labour offer any opportunity for superior skill, while white men could not live with the food, clothing, and wages which make a native comparatively comfortable and wealthy.¹

Thus, and not unnaturally, the planters turned first to the natives for labour supply.

Initially, the colonists obtained labour from among the Fijians living on their plantations. However, when disputes arose over the ownership of land, the settlers often burned the villages and forcibly expelled the natives from the land.² After depriving themselves of the available men, they then turned and bribed the nearest local Chief for labourers.³ The result was that what little labour was to be had was "through the instrumentality of the Chiefs" who sent a group of their men to perform the tasks agreed upon. Payments were then made to the Chiefs who distributed them at their pleasure.⁴ This system, however, had its disadvantages. Being closer to home the men could always appeal to their Chiefs in the case of any abuse on the

¹Frederick J. Moss, A Month In Fiji - By A Recent Visitor. (Melbourne: 1868) p. 20. Moss went to Fiji from New Zealand in 1868 as a prospector to look into the conditions and prospects in Fiji, stayed as a planter in 1868, and revisited the Islands in 1886.

²Gordon to Carnarvon, March 12, 1877. Parliamentary Papers, 1884-5 LIII (311), p. 1.

³Ibid., (311), p. 1. See also W. Crisp Pechey, Fijian Cotton Culture And Planters' Guide To The Islands. (London: 1870), p. 45. Pechey was also a doctor who went to Fiji to begin a cotton plantation.

⁴Gordon, Contemporary Review, p. 713.

plantations. Furthermore, the men tended to stay home and work in their gardens rather than labour on plantations. There was an additional inconvenience. If a planter offended a Chief, he became "tabooed" and lost all hopes of acquiring labourers.¹ Though this type of labour, when available, was cheap—the pay being one shilling and sixpence to two shillings a week² and no food, clothing or shelter to provide for—it could not be relied upon. The fact was that the Fijian's way of life, his mode of living, his natural temperament and his society rendered him quite unfitted for any form of long, hard hours of labour. The same was generally true of most of the Pacific Islanders as was observed in the case of the New Hebrides men. They objected to work and could not be persuaded to regular work on their own islands.³ However, they became good enough labourers when taken to distant lands because, then, they became "dependent on their employers for food, pay, and means of returning home."⁴ And, in the case of the Fijians, Consul March in his report rightly pointed out that a Fijian did not work with consistency, and he generally became a

¹Moss, p. 21.

²Ibid., p. 20.

³Report of Commodore Goodenough and Mr. Consul Layard on the Offer of the Cession of the Fiji Islands to the British Crown, April 13, 1874. Parliamentary Papers, 1874 XLV (334), p. 10. Hereafter cited as Goodenough and Layard Report.

⁴Palmer, p. 80. See also William T. Wawn. The South Sea Islands And The Queensland Labour Trade: A Record Of Voyages And Experiences In The Western Pacific, From 1875 To 1891. (London: 1893), pp. 23-24. Wawn wrote this book in defense of the labour trade. As a master of various labour ships for 16 years, Wawn made all his trips to Queensland with Island labour and one trip to Fiji.

defaulter at the moment when his services were most required.¹ And the planters themselves found the natives "lazy" and "unreliable" and some at least felt that,

The Fijian, like his nigger cousin, "the man and his brother," in his emancipated state, will only work to gratify some pressing desire or immediate want which, having satisfied, he speedily relapses into his normal state of idle dignity.²

And, in any case, it is also true that the great majority of the estimated 200,000 natives in 1860 were still "ferocious cannibals" and, as pointed out by Palmer, it was impossible to penetrate the mountainous country inhabited by the 'Devil Chiefs' and their people³, let alone getting them as labourers. Nevertheless, as already pointed out, the planters' first efforts were directed towards obtaining native labourers. For a time important Fijian labour was obtained from the Ra coast. The Ra coast Chiefs needed firearms to defend themselves against their enemies, the cannibal mountain races.⁴ Therefore, in exchange for firearms, muskets, powder and bullets, these Chiefs allowed their men to work on plantations on yearly contracts. At the end of the year the labourers were also paid three pounds sterling in goods, again, mostly in firearms.⁵ However, like the other natives, Ra Fijians were also considered to be "fat, lazy, insubordinate fellows

¹ Consul March to Earl of Clarendon, Dec. 15, 1869. Parliamentary Papers, 1871 XLVIII (399), p. 97.

² James Herman DeRicci, Fiji Our New Province In The South Seas, (London: 1875), p. 170. DeRicci was Attorney General in Fiji in the 1870's.

³ Palmer, p. 80.

⁴ Moss, p. 80.

⁵ Ibid., p. 80.

whose work scarcely paid for food they ate."¹ Thus, the planters soon discovered that native labour, however much required by them, was neither dependable nor forthcoming. It therefore became obvious that if plantation economy was to become viable foreign labour was to be employed. And with rapid development of cotton industry, and in their search for cheap labour, the Fiji planters were not slow to follow the Queensland example.²

During this period Queensland was also going through the same stages of economic development where large numbers of Pacific Islanders from the New Hebrides and other Pacific groups were employed on sugar plantations.³ The recruiting of these people; "niggers" and "Blackbirds", as they were called, had begun for Queensland in 1863.⁴ This was where Fiji now turned its attention and in 1864 the first ship with thirty-five foreign labourers reached the Islands.⁵ This marked the beginning of the infamous Pacific Islands labour trade, at least for Fiji, which was to last until the turn of the century. During the sixties and the seventies both Queensland and Fiji competed with each other for Island labour,⁶ while at the same time each accused the other

¹ Moss, p. 197.

² Myra Willard, History Of White Australia Policy To 1920. (London: 1967 ; first published in 1923), p. 137.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Mr. P. A. Taylor, in the House Of Commons, June 28, 1869. Hansard 3rd Series; CXC VII (June 17, 1869 to July 15, 1869), 638.

⁵ Ronald Albert Derrick, A History Of Fiji. (Suva: 1946), I, p. 167.

⁶ Ibid., p. 168.

of "kidnapping" and "slavery".¹ Palmer aptly described the situation by saying that,

...the importers of 'voluntary' immigrants drive a roaring trade and, while the planters in this group [Fiji] gnash their teeth at Queenslanders, the latter do not hesitate to accuse the former of countenancing slavery, which is the old story of pot calling the kettle black.²

And when the cotton boom ended, sugar plantation was begun making the demand for cheap labour even more pressing. This rush for Polynesian labourers soon depopulated the Islands through recruiting, kidnapping, by introducing new diseases among them, and by placing firearms in their hands.³ For these specific reasons the Pacific Islands labour trade became objectionable from the very beginning. Furthermore, the absence of any 'civilized' government in the recruiting grounds gave the recruiters a free hand to employ fair and cruel methods alike to gather labourers. Demand for cheap labour and the profits to be made thereby attracted the attention of the lowest class of men in the business as was observed by the Rev. MacNair from the New Hebrides who noted that there was a,

...real Slave Traffic carried on amongst these Islands by a parcel of ruffians of the lowest type, sailing, as the case may be, from Queensland, Fiji, or New Caledonia, and employing as agents old sandalwooders who have acquired a smattering of New Hebrides languages, and who have at the same time distinguished themselves for their treachery, and foul murders, and gross immorality.⁴

¹For instance, Wawn.

²Palmer, p. 80.

³Derrick, p. 168.

⁴Rev. J. MacNair to Commodore Lambert, Oct. 22, 1862. Enclosed in from Governor Blackall of Brisbane to Earl of Granville, April 16, 1869. Parliamentary Papers, 1871 XLVIII (306), p. 4.

In Fiji for a number of years the English Consul at Levuka made efforts to supervise the labour trade unofficially.¹ All British owned ships² were required to take out licenses from the office of the Consul before sailing out on recruiting trips. However, this 'assumed authority' of the Consul was limited. If the 'blackbirders' refused to obey there was nothing the Consul could do.³ Furthermore, with no authority to enforce laws in recruiting areas, supervision and power of the Consul in Levuka meant little. When rumours of gross abuses began to be heard, the Imperial Government instituted a regular patrol of warships in the Islands to seek out and to punish the guilty parties.⁴ However, this, too, had little success for the recruiters continued to play 'hide and seek' with the Naval Commanders:

The recruiters for Fiji worked over a wide area. The New Hebrides group - Tanna, Vate or Sandwich Island, Espiritu, Santo and Engmai - a distance of 550 miles from Fiji - supplied the greatest number of labourers. The voyage from Fiji to the New Hebrides group was generally performed in four to six days; whilst the return journey, because of the North East Trade Winds, extended over two or three

¹ Acting Consul Thurston to the Earl of Belmore, New South Wales, March 30, 1869. Enclosed in from Belmore to Granville, May 18, 1869. Parliamentary Papers, 1868-69 XLIII (1078), p. 70.

² With a few exceptions, all ships engaged in labour-trade were British owned. Consul March to Earl of Clarendon, Dec. 15, 1869. Parliamentary Papers, 1871 XLVIII (398), p. 96.

³ Owen Parnaby, "The Regulation Of Indentured Labour To Fiji 1864-1868." Journal Of The Polynesian Society. (Wellington, New Zealand, March 1956), p. 57. See also, Derrick, p. 174.

⁴ Derrick, p. 174. The patrolling of the Islands began in 1867

times that period.¹ Labourers were also brought from Solomon or Line Islands which included the Kingsmill and Gilbert group.² The labour vessels were of various sizes, from a 40 ton cutter to a 160 ton schooner. Most of these ships set out from the ports of New Zealand and New South Wales and after discharging their cargo at Fiji, they sailed out on labour-hunting trips.³ These recruiting ships carried a well-armed crew and a native decoy.⁴ One of the ships, "Daphne", engaged in the trade is described by Captain Palmer,

We found her a small schooner of four-light tons register, filled up precisely like an African Slaver, minus the irons, with 100 natives on board, who had been brought here from the New Hebrides... they were stark naked,⁵ and had not even a mat to lie upon: the shelves were just the same as might be knocked up for a lot of pigs, no bunks, or partitions of any sort being fitted, and yet the vessel was inspected by a Government Officer at Queensland.⁶

The recruiting methods for the labourers were many and varied. In theory, the adventurous sea-captains went around the Islands inviting men to work on distant plantations. The men came 'voluntarily' and no pressure was applied. The emigrating Islanders were called 'contract labourers' who supposedly entered into agreements

¹Consul March to Earl of Clarendon, Dec. 17, 1869. Parliamentary Papers, 1871 XLVIII (394), p. 98.

²Gilbert Islands, a distance of 1200 miles from Fiji, supplied about one-eighth of the labourers. Ibid., (394), p. 98.

³Willard, p. 151.

⁴Wawn, p. 81.

⁵Many of the Islanders lived naked on their Islands.

⁶Palmer, p. 108.

with the masters of the vessels to work for so many "yam years" on plantations.¹ The skippers usually had a piece of paper for each labourer setting forth the terms of their contracts.² This pretense of legality was maintained throughout by unscrupulous captains while the actual method of acquiring labour degenerated into outright piracy, and kidnapping, "into slave hunting and slave trading."³ The earliest and the most commonly used method of acquiring men was through the bribing of the Chiefs and the relatives or, as was known, "the custom of making presents to the recruits' friends."⁴ The recruiting boats carried a "trade box" containing such gifts as tobacco, gunpowder, coloured beads, cheap print calico, knives, blades, tomahawks, and mirrors.⁵ For each recruit of either sex a knife, tomahawk, some beads, calico, tobacco and pipes were regarded as sufficient gifts.⁶ But as the Chiefs grew more sophisticated, so did their demands. Soon there came a time when arms and ammunitions had to be given before a recruit was allowed to board a labour vessel. However, it was not long when foul methods began to be employed. In 1867, the New Hebrides mission reported that many of the Islanders were taken away

¹DeRicci, p. 171.

²Harry L. Foster, A Vagabond In Fiji. (New York: 1927), p. 193. Foster visited Fiji probably in early 1920's and interviewed some of the surviving Islanders.

³Mr. P. A. Taylor in the House Of Commons, June 28, 1869. Hansard, 3rd Series, CXCVII (June 26, 1869 to July 15, 1869), p. 639.

⁴Wawn, p. 10.

⁵Ibid., p. 10. See also Forbes, p. 217.

⁶Wawn, pp. 8-10.

"fraudulently and by force" from their native villages to Fiji and to Queensland. Many were welcomed on board to trade, only to be stolen away.¹ Many were enticed on board to see new and strange things and, when time came to leave, they found land miles behind them.²

Numerous other tricks were employed to deceive the Polynesians. Recruiters reversed their collars and, with black books under their arms, went ashore disguised as missionaries. The listening congregation was then herded into the holds of the ships at gunpoint.³ In one case some blackbirders painted their boat white, like the mission schooner, and went around the Islands at about the same time as Bishop Patteson⁴ would be making his rounds. On anchoring, the Islanders were invited on board the vessel to see Bishop Patteson 'who had a broken leg and could not go ashore.' No sooner were they on board and down the hold when the hatches closed and the ship sailed.⁵ And yet another ruthless and common method was to overturn the natives' canoes or sink them with heavy iron weights dropped from the ship and then

¹Commander Palmer to Earl of Belmore, May 25, 1869. Enclosed in from Belmore to Granville May 27, 1869. Parliamentary Papers, 1871 XLVIII (320), p. 18.

²Constance F. Gordon Cumming. At Home In Fiji. (New York: 1882). Gordon Cumming accompanied Lady Gordon to Fiji, 1876-1880 and talked with some of the Islanders on the plantations.

³Forbes, p. 259. See also James A. Michener and Grove A. Day. Rascals In Paradise. (New York: 1957), p. 226.

⁴Bishop Patteson was the missionary Bishop of Melanesia who was murdered in 1871 by the natives of Santa Cruz as a direct result of blackbirding. Earl of Belmore, N.S.W., to Earl of Kimberley, Nov. 22, 1871. Parliamentary Papers, 1872 XLIII (744), p. 26.

⁵Palmer, pp. 186-188.

capture the swimming natives.¹ If a native was injured with a falling weight, "he was allowed to drown, or even struck over the head with an oar so that he might not swim back to the shore"² and inform the villagers. (Then there were those blackbirders such as the notorious "Bully Hayes"³ who stole ships, violently abducted women, and "swooped down" on lonely and isolated villages of small Islands and carried away the entire inhabitants—men, women and children—all to be sold in slavery.⁴ Ben Pease, a friend of Hayes was another notorious and cruel blackbirder who became known as the first man to introduce stolen labour into the Fiji Islands.⁵ There is ample evidence to show that men like Hayes were also involved in the repulsive affair of head-hunting with certain tribes.⁶ The blackbirders did this in order to secure favour with the Chiefs who then gave them men for sale elsewhere. According to Commodore Sterling's report, the "worst atrocities, including kidnapping and skull-hunting, occurred when Kanakas were being recruited."⁷ And Commander Markham reported that

¹Wawn, p. 12. See also, Gordon Cumming, p. 160.

²Michener and Day, p. 227.

³Bully Hayes was born in Cleveland, Ohio. He was murdered by one of his own crew members at sea in 1878. Wawn, pp. 119-120.

⁴Edward Reeves. Brown Men And Women. (London: 1898), pp. 1-2. Reeves, a citizen of New Zealand, visited many of these Islands including Fiji in 1896 and 1897.

⁵Ben Pease was also an American who was engaged in Opium trade on the China Coast prior to his blackbirding business.

⁶Michener and Day, pp. 230-231.

⁷Guy H. Scholefield. The Pacific, It's Past And Future. (London: 1920), pp. 59-60. According to Wawn this same Scholefield was a Government Agent on recruiting ships and spent some time in prison in Australia because of illegal recruiting.

"blood was shed in a most wanton manner" and "the diabolical practice of head-hunting was practiced."¹

If the recruiting methods were atrocious, then the sea-voyage of the Polynesian labourers was no less gruesome. The conditions under which they were transported to their destinations were in many cases "shockingly insanitary and uncomfortable."² Large numbers were cramped together and closely guarded.³ One member of a crew was reminded of Dante's "Inferno" as he looked down the fore-hatch and saw the Polynesians sprawling about in the dark,⁴ while Captain Wawn described another scene of dark and closed hold of the ship;

The smell arising from 404 "nigs" would not be pleasant at any time. When jammed together as these were, on a warm night in tropics, on board a steamer with furnaces at full blast, the smell of that lower deck was something that no man would revel in.⁵

Under such conditions many Islanders also suffered severe hardships and privation. There were no proper provisions of food and water on the labour vessels and consequently the Polynesians were often starved.⁶ In 1867 a small ship bound for Fiji was two weeks at sea. When she arrived at the harbour of Aneiteum, the captain admitted that many of the Islanders were "reduced by famine and that they could not come out

¹Scholefield, pp. 59-60.

²Ibid., p. 53.

³Foster, p. 193.

⁴Wawn, p. 175.

⁵Wawn, p. 374. This was in 1875 when the conditions had supposedly improved.

⁶Michener and Day, p. 227.

of the hold."¹

Other than being starved, the recruits suffered other forms of cruelties. It was not unusual to put the Islanders under hatches to prevent their escape.² In 1870, when a Queensland vessel with 150 men for Fiji was captured, it was discovered that "sixty had died as a result of having been kept under hatches for unduly long periods."³ And in cases when the Polynesians became too troublesome, they were simply shot and thrown overboard. Such was the case of "Young Australia" in 1869. The ship chartered by a Sydney firm was recruiting in the New Hebrides group when three men were forced aboard. The kidnapped Islanders broke down the hold and while trying to escape were shot dead.⁴ But most mournful is the account of the "Carl". "Carl" obtained a full cargo of about 80 men by the common practice of overturning the canoes in the Solomon Islands and left for Fiji.⁵ A disturbance broke out among the kidnapped and restless men who began to fight among themselves. When the crew fired in the dark hold in order to quell the disturbance, it had the adverse effect of making the confined men more delirious. The more noisy the men became, the

¹Report of the New Hebrides Mission, Sept. 7, 1867. Enclosed in from Acting Consul Thurston to Belmore, N.S.W., to Granville. Parliamentary Papers XLIII 1868-69 (1081), p. 73.

²Palmer, p. 8.

³Roberts, p. 209.

⁴Quoted from the Sydney Correspondent of The Times by Mr. P. A. Taylor in the House Of Commons, June 28, 1869. Hansard 3rd Series, CXCVII (June 26, 1869 to July 15, 1869), 637.

⁵Derrick, p. 175. See also Michener and Day, p. 226.

more firing there was — the shooting lasting eight hours.¹ When all was quiet, over fifty were counted dead, twenty-five wounded, and only five were able to walk on their own. To complete the gruesome performance of the day, sixteen wounded but alive men were thrown overboard together with the dead.² James Patrick Murray, a doctor from Melbourne and the owner of the "Carl" was deeply involved in the murder of the Polynesians. However, because he turned Queen's evidence, he went unpunished.³

It may also be pointed out that the proportion of female to male emigrants was generally very low. For instance the "Young Australia" in 1868 delivered 235 New Hebrideans to Fiji, among whom the females numbered six.⁴ Another vessel to Fiji in 1869 carried sixty to seventy emigrants of whom fifteen were females.⁵ Since men, women and youngsters were all grabbed indiscriminately; and it was the number of the recruits that mattered, who was to worry about the sex proportion of the labourers. Furthermore, it was believed that since polygamy existed in many of the Islands, sex proportion of the emigrants meant little anyway. It was also not unusual for most of the labour-vessels to put men and women together in the same holds.

¹Derrick, p. 175.

²Derrick, p. 175. See also Michener and Day, pp. 227-228.

³Derrick, p. 175. See also Michener and Day, p. 228.

⁴Quoted from the Sydney Correspondent of The Times by Mr. P. A. Taylor, House Of Commons, on June 28, 1869. Hansard 3rd Series, CXC VII (June 26, 1869 to July 15, 1869), 637.

⁵Palmer, p. 82. Name of the ship not mentioned.

And as for the morality of these vessels, as explained by Thomas, "labour vessels did not pretend to be equal to missionary ships. They took the natives as they found them."¹ And, "As it was, on the "Lizzie" the natives simply had their liberty allowed them."²

However, so far as the labour trade itself was concerned, while it was profitable, it was equally dangerous. When the Polynesians suffered severe bodily injuries and even death at the hands of those who stole them away, they naturally cherished the feelings of revenge. They retaliated at every opportunity by murdering innocent and guilty white men alike. Every so often an European was killed and eaten. As late as 1880, and in that year alone, at least seven different incidences of massacres of white men, some of whom were not recruiters, took place in the Solomon Group.³ On occasions the Islanders murdered their own men who had acted as interpreters or decoys and had misled the men.⁴ And there were times when the Fiji planters had to pay a high price for the atrocities committed by the recruiters. For instance in 1871 a small cutter 'Meva' was taking some Solomon Islanders from Levuka to Taveuni when the Islanders tomahawked each member of the crew as they emerged from the only hatch through which one man could pass at a time.⁵ In another such case,

¹Julian Thomas, Cannibals And Convicts; Notes Of Personal Experience In The Western Pacific, (London, New York, 1886), p. 332. Thomas spent 34 days on-board the labour vessel "Lizzie".

²Ibid., p. 335.

³Wawn, pp. 209-212.

⁴Ibid., p., 212.

⁵Derrick, p. 172. There were 3 or 4 white men on the 'Meva'.

the crew of the "Peri", a 25-ton schooner, met the same fate shortly after the "Meva" crew. In both these cases, the vessels were carrying labourers who had been kidnapped from their Islands.¹ It is believed that very few Polynesians would have "willingly" and "knowingly" agreed to work far away from their own country or, for that matter, closer to their homes for more than a few months.² Had they had a chance, many would have deserted,³ while many never failed to make attempts at escaping. Those few who expatriated themselves did so mainly because of "quarrels, cruel intertribal wars, and above all to obtain fire-arms."⁴ In majority of the cases, however, it appeared that "they had been grabbed from the stone age and hauled unwillingly into the dollar economy" of the day.⁵ They seldom had any idea as to where they were going, for what purpose, or for how long. Grabbed thus and closely guarded and, more likely than not, beaten and half-starved on board the vessels, the Polynesian labourers arrived at Levuka where more uncertainties awaited them. For Fiji planters, however, the search for cheap labour had ended for a while at least.

¹Mr. Thurston to Earl of Kimberly, Oct. 19, 1872. Parliamentary Papers, 1874 XLV (307), p. 11. This time 3 white men and 3 others were killed.

²Quoted by Mr. P. A. Taylor from the Correspondence between the Board of Admiralty and the Colonial Office, House Of Commons, June 28, 1869. Hansard, 3rd Series, CXCVII (June 26, 1869 to July 15, 1869), 639.

³Wawn, p. 212.

⁴Horne, p. 186.

⁵Michener and Day, p. 225.

Chapter II

THE INDENTURED LABOURERS: THE POLYNESIANS AND THE FIJIANS

1864-1874

The Polynesians were brought to Fiji by the agents of the employers, often the captains of the ships acting as agents. However, there were others who engaged themselves independently, bringing in labourers and supplying to the highest bidders. These labourers, as already pointed out, were introduced into Fiji for the express purpose of cotton cultivation.¹ It was said that the Polynesians were to the cotton planters of Fiji what the coolies of Malabar Coast were to the sugar planters of Mauritius or Damerara.²

On arrival of the labour vessels, the men were "mustered" before the Consul "as far as possible" to be examined whether they had come voluntarily and understood "the purpose of which their services" were required.³ After the examination each planter paid a price called "passage money" of three to six pounds or at times up to eight to ten pounds, depending on how keen the bidding was, for each "head, like so many cattle."⁴ The labourers then entered into contracts

¹Consul March to Earl of Clarendon, Dec. 15, 1869. Parliamentary Papers, 1871 XLVIII (394) p. 95.

²Forbes, p. 249.

³Acting Consul Thurston to Earl of Belmore, N.S.W., March 30, 1869. Enclosed in from Belmore to Earl of Granville, May 8, 1869. Parliamentary Papers, 1868-69 XLIII (1078) p. 70.

⁴Rev. MacNair to Commodore Lambert, Oct. 22, 1862. Enclosed in from Governor Blackall, Brisbane, to Earl of Granville, April 16, 1869. Parliamentary Papers, 1871 XLVIII (320) p. 18.

with the planters agreeing to work for so many 'yam seasons', or a period of 3 to 5 years. The planters on their part agreed to provide the labourers with food, clothing, housing, medical care, wages of two to three pounds per annum, and on expiration of their terms a free trip to home.¹ The terms of agreement were explained to the labourers through interpreters. While this procedure may have worked in but a few instances, in the majority of the cases there was no means of finding out whether the "untaught savages" ever understood the terms of their contracts. The raising of three fingers to mean '3 yams' or 3 years and a nod by the Polynesian were often the limit of explanation of the contract. Where interpreters were used, whether they themselves understood the terms of the contact was also doubtful. In 1869, James Row testifying before the Royal Commission at Sydney said,

I question very much whether the interpreter himself even could explain to them what 3 years, or thirty-six moons, meant, for they can count only as far as five at many of the Islands.²

To this end Bishop Patteson also warned that the dialects spoken in the Islands of the Pacific were innumerable. There were no interpreters there who could communicate with the Islanders freely. A few sentences of broken English, with a native word here and there "imperfectly understood and badly pronounced," were supposed to convey to the native mind an intelligent idea of what was called a contract.³

¹Derrick, p. 170.

²Quoted by Palmer, p. 192.

³Bishop Patteson to Sir G. Bowen, [New Zealand], July 4, 1870. Enclosed in from Bowen to Earl of Granville, July 24, 1870. Parliamentary Papers, 1871 XLVIII (462), p. 160.

However, after the 'passage money' was paid and the contracts explained, the immigrants were then taken away by their employers to plantations which were generally situated far removed from towns and main centres.¹

In Fiji, the plantations themselves differed greatly, from rich and large, to middle class, to poor and small. However, even the very best of the Fiji cotton-plantations fell far short of those great estates which were "once the glory of Virginia or South Carolina."²

The few rich planters who had about 200 acres under cultivation lived in wood houses and had all the luxuries. They had native servants in the house, and a white engineer, carpenter and overseer employed on the plantation together with the labourers.³ The largest plantation about this time employed 200 foreign labourers together with some fifty Fijians.⁴ The majority of the other planters who had about 80 acres⁵ of land, however, lived a hard life. Their houses were built of reeds and coconut leaves such as those of the natives. Their diet consisted mainly of "salt beef, as salt and tough as beef" could have been, and "that had been several years in cask---, ship biscuits swarming with weevils, a boiled taro or yam, and a few bananas" were

¹Goodenough and Layard Report. Parliamentary Papers, 1874 XLV (380), p. 66.

²Forbes, p. 55.

³Ibid., pp. 57-58.

⁴Ibid., p. 197.

⁵Average area of plantation was 80 acres. March to Clarendon, Dec. 15, 1869. Parliamentary Papers, 1871 XLVIII (399), p. 97. However, there were many smaller planters.

their usual fare.¹ These planters had no servants or overseers and their labourers numbered usually about a dozen men or so.² Between these two extremes of the two varying types of plantations described above, there were others with different degrees of comfort or discomfort, acres under cultivation and number of labourers employed. And accordingly, the labourers on these various plantations received varying types of treatment.

The majority of the immigrants themselves, when they first landed in Fiji, were "utter savages"³ with each tribe hostile to the other. The Solomon Islanders, however, were the fiercest and all others, of whatever nationality, feared them most.⁴ The Tanna men on the other hand were what could be described as the "martial race". While they readily attached themselves to the white men, the white men found them hardy workers and courageous. Other than providing labour, they were employed to fight the mountain races of Fiji⁵ and rendered invaluable services in the procuring of labourers from other Islands for "neither bullets, poisoned arrows, nor hostile savages" deterred them. They also went in as crews of labour-vessels, formed bodyguards for their employers, and in cases of any risings they were generally

¹Forbes, p. 88:

²Ibid., p. 88.

³Horne, p. 185.

⁴Forbes, pp. 61-71.

⁵Vice Admiral Erskine in the House Of Commons, June 28, 1869. Hansard 3rd Series, CXCVII (June 28, 1869 to July 5, 1869), 646.

entrusted with firearms.¹ However, all the tribes had to be taught as well as "tamed" first, which made the task of the planters not only difficult but dangerous as well. Fortunately for the planters, the hostility of each tribe to the other, was of tremendous advantage. The Islanders would scarcely have been driven by a handful of white employers had they felt they could depend on one another.² And as explained by one planter "were it not for this safeguard a planter's life" would not have been "worth a day's purchase."² While there was no uniformity in the type of treatment the labourers received on various plantations, the great majority of the immigrants nevertheless shared a common way of life. On most plantations each tribe of labourers built its own collection of huts separately, while there were others where all different tribes of men and women were herded together and locked up at nights.³ The Islanders built their huts on the same models as they did on their own Islands. They were placed close together "without any attempt at order or sanitary arrangement ---while the interiors were dark and squalid" and lacked all decency and comfort. A single hole in a wall served for both door and window.⁴ Again, on some plantations their huts were comfortable, large and airy, and better than those in their own lands.⁵ The diet of the labourers on plantations consisted mainly of yam, taro,

¹Forbes, pp. 67-68.

²Ibid., p. 61.

³Foster, p. 194.

⁴Forbes, p. 59.

⁵Palmer, p. 82.

coconut, breadfruit, banana, rice, and an occasional ration of pork.¹ And as a rule, the labourers were fed by their employers.

On a cotton plantation, while the work was fairly light, the hours were generally long. The work day on most plantations usually began early in the dawn and lasted till the evening. The work consisted of cutting down the heavier timber; clearing away the long grass and brushwood, preparing the ground for receiving cotton seed, weeding the land already planted, and cotton picking and cleaning. Since the planters generally anticipated on three crops a year, the labourers were kept busy ~~continuously~~ all the year round; from preparing the ground to weeding to cotton picking. Cotton picking months were the busiest and the most important and as an incentive to get the work done, it was not unusual for the planters to reward the man who had worked the hardest with a clay pipe and tobacco, or a boar's tusk.²

Since during this period there was no effective government to control the activities of the planters, the welfare of the labourers depended entirely on the humanity of each individual planter. There were some planters who were humane and generally treated their employees fairly; that is, if the Islanders did their work and did not attempt to 'murder their bosses'.³ In his report Consul March reported that upon the "whole, good faith had been kept with the immigrants." However, at the same time he also pointed out that with the limited available means the Consul had at his disposal, he could not possibly

¹Consul March to Earl of Clarendon, Dec. 17, 1869. Parliamentary Papers, 1871 XLVIII (394), p. 95.

²The above paragraph is based on Pechey, pp. 33-34. See also Forbes, pp. 55-120.

³Foster, p. 194.

"be acquainted with all that occurred in the various plantations."¹

In making his second statement the Consul was much closer to the truth for whether any abuse was brought to the notice of the Consul depended very much on the ability of the labourers and the means they had to make their grievances known. In fact, there was no adequate way of finding out if the system was free of abuse. It was not only the inability of the labourers that hindered reporting; the Consul himself had neither the authority nor the means of visiting and inspecting the outlying plantations. And according to other reports, only a few of the planters were "gentlemen" who were really concerned about the kidnappings and the brutalities and were willing to stamp out all abuses. The others were the "biggest scoundrels unhung" who had in their power to do virtually what they pleased.² Or, as was explained by one planter, "surrounded by his labourers, foreign or Fijian, the planter is a patriarch, with the power of life and death over his people and subject to no law."³ Another cotton planter in a letter to the Fiji Times, admitted that, "a cotton plantation without labour" was "enough to try any man's morality."⁴ And it followed that numberless cruelties, exhortions and villainies were committed on the

¹Consul March to Earl of Clarendon, Dec. 15, 1869. Parliamentary Papers, 1871 XLVIII (399), p. 97.

²Palmer, pp. 92-93.

³Anti Slavery Reporter, July 1, 1871, Vol. 17, No. 6. Quoted from J. Britton. Fiji In 1870 (Melbourne: 1870): Britton was a planter in Fiji.

⁴Quoted by J. D. Legge. Britain In Fiji 1858-1880. (London: 1958), pp. 56-57.

plantations¹ which were only rarely reported. "Nigger-driving" with "big sticks" to get the work done was not uncommon. And obedience that had to be insisted on to the letter was maintained through "floggings".² In one particular instance the two owners flogged their labourers, native Fijians in this case, regularly and then rubbed chilli pepper or nettle on their backs.³ On one occasion a Fijian woman who had been living with one of these same planters and who had displeased her "master" was tied to a tree and then her toes were cut off with hammer and chisel. Needless to say that her tribe was also displeased. They retaliated by destroying the plantation, machinery, and wined up with "killing and eating, not the two ruffians themselves unfortunately, but two of the half-caste children."⁴

Many of the immigrants who for the first time in their lives learned what labour really was, and plantation labour at that, were considered "stupid", "obstinate", and "lazy" when in all probability most of them simply could not cope with their new lives. There was always a considerable percentage of labourers who were sick.⁵ They suffered from eye diseases, skin diseases, and "a large number of imported labourers died annually of consumption which ran its course"

¹Reeves, p. 4.

²Anti Slavery Reporter, July 1, 1872, Vol. 17, No. 6, pp. 35-36. Quoted from the Article, "A Fijian Planter's Confessions", in the Otago Daily Times, Feb. 23, 1872.

³Palmer, p. 78.

⁴Ibid., p. 78.

⁵Forbes, p. III.

in many cases with extreme rapidity."¹ Another and most dreaded disease that affected the Islanders and the Europeans alike, was dysentery.² The disease in many cases proved fatal and the immigrants quickly lost courage and hope and died "without any effort or apparently even a wish to live."³ To cure many of these ills, the planters employed rough "doctoring" as is illustrated by this one planter,

By the bye, we have had some great doctoring here, with one Tanna man. One beggar died (£10 gone), and two or three more were bad, so we thought a dose of 'painkiller' with a good dose of chlorodyne and then a rattling good shock of the galvanic battery. (No humbugging). We pulled the thing out as far as we could, and then turned the handle as fast as possible. You should have seen the niggers twisting and screeching; it has done them good though, the beggars are all at work again with the exception of one.---, if you do not give it to them hot and strong, they would all take to their beds, and how would work be done?⁴

It is not clear as to what percentage of the Islanders died annually on Fiji cotton-plantations. According to Consular report of December 15, 1869; 32 labourers out of the total of 1,287 had died that year.⁵ However, taking Forbes' account into consideration, it would appear that the annual death rate of the immigrant-labourers was fairly high. Forbes also reported that suicide among these people was by no means

¹Forbes, pp. 60-61. Forbes as a doctor had examined some of these invalids on plantations in 1871.

²Ibid., p. 60 and p. 119.

³Ibid., p. 61.

⁴Anti Slavery Reporter, July 1, 1872, Vol. 17, No. 6, p. 36. Quoted from "A Fijian Planter's Confessions" in The Otago Daily Times, February 23, 1872.

⁵Consul March to Earl of Clarendon, Dec. 15, 1869. Parliamentary Papers, 1871 XLVIII (400), p. 98.

uncommon. Rather than facing numerous problems, they preferred to die.¹

Finally, many of the planters often abused the terms of the contracts. It was not uncommon to keep the Tabourers at work for a year or more beyond the time for which they thought they had contracted.² On one plantation the Polynesians were detained for 6 years while their contracts had expired in three.³ In another case a labourer had shot his master for "keeping the natives beyond the time specified in their agreements."⁴ Then there were those planters who cheated the labourers out of their wages. One such extreme case was reported when,

One cunning "Legree" --- who after working his poor slaves nearly to death ---, and at the expiry of their contracts sent them home 'with a dog each', in the full payment of their wages for the whole period.⁵

And if the labourers were paid their full wages the European shopkeepers often took advantage of their ignorance by selling them only damaged wares and clothes.⁶ In many cases, the term of free repatriation was also shamefully evaded. The unscrupulous captains of the labour vessels found it much cheaper to dump the returning

¹Forbes, p. 77.

²Scholefield, p. 53.

³Gordon Cumming, p. 149.

⁴Forbes, p. 67.

⁵Reeves, p. 44.

⁶Wawn, pp. 121-122.

Labourers to the first Island approached.¹ If it happened to be an enemy territory, the labourers were in all probability killed and eaten. Or if they had been paid in firearms, they were themselves the aggressors.²

It is estimated that between the years 1860 and 1877, about 8,500 Polynesian labourers had been introduced into Fiji and by 1877 most had been repatriated.³ However, it is to be pointed out that this is only an estimated figure. There is no way of knowing how many labourers were actually brought and how many actually died on plantations particularly in pre-cession period. It is also believed that the majority of the Polynesians in Fiji were generally unhappy. Many complained of being there by fraud and deception or had been kidnapped from their homes. It was rightly observed that the white men could not conceive what the poor 'savages' felt when caged and worked far away from their homes "not only week after week, but month after month, without intermission for five years."⁴ While some wished they were dead rather than being slaves, others like the Solomon Islanders did not fail to make daring attempts at escaping from the plantations.⁵

¹Derrick, p. 170.

²Scholefield, p. 53.

³Fiji Official Handbook Of The Colony. (Suva: 1937), p. 35.

⁴Reeves, p. 192.

⁵Forbes, p. 70.

The Fijians

It has been pointed out that the importation of foreign labour into Fiji began as a result of either the inability or the unwillingness of the Fijians to work. However, within a short period of time it became apparent that the plight of the Fijians was not going to be any better than the Polynesians. It was soon realized by the planters that the Fijians could be forced to work if the same system of transporting labourers could be applied to them as was being done in the case of the Polynesians. Consequently, there soon developed an "insular trade", a trade between one island or one portion of Fiji to another.¹ By transporting them from more distant parts, the natives were far removed from their surroundings. While it reduced the expense of labour, at the same time the Fijians were under complete control of their masters without any interference from the Chiefs. This insular trade soon fell almost entirely into the hands of men "styled recruiters, or blackbird catchers."² In short, the same system of acquiring labour was now applied to the Fijians as was being done in the case of the Polynesians, as Gordon explained,

--- there is within the limits of the Colony of Fiji itself a labour traffic, not very different in some respects from that which exists in the more remote regions of the Pacific.³

In the beginning, the Consul made an effort to issue licenses

¹Gordon to Carnarvon, March 12, 1877. Parliamentary Papers, 1884-5 LIII (311 and 312); pp. 1-2.

²Ibid., (312), p. 2.

³Gordon, Contemporary Review, p. 719.

to planters for the transportation of the natives. However, when the practice of acquiring native labour quickly deteriorated, Commodore Sterling issued a notice in 1873 that, "no fresh licenses would be issued to the British subjects for the conveyance of natives from one island to another."¹ The trade, nevertheless, continued secretly even well after the cession in 1874, which greatly distressed the natives. To this effect, the Native Councils wrote to the Queen of England in 1876;

One thing we wish to say about our own common people. It is the habit of your own people here to take them away from their homes to other provinces to work. The white man takes them and sells them to owners of plantations. They work their term of labour, but when time comes at which they ought to leave and return to their homes, they find no means of doing so, and are not then able to leave or return to their towns and, in consequence, their relatives, their wives, their children, and their old people are left in most pitiable condition. We tell this that you may know the distress that our people suffer from the ways of the natives of your land.²

Labour recruiters employed all manner of trickery to induce persons to leave homes. "Purchase-money" was given to the Chiefs. Vessels employed their own Fijians, trained as "under-recruiters", whose business it was to go among the towns and act as "decoy-ducks". The recruiters also as a rule had one or two Fijian women of their own on board the vessels who did "all in their power" to persuade the natives to engage. The natives were given glowing accounts of the quantity of food and the lightness of work. So as to make an impression on the

¹Fiji Times, August 9, 1873, quoted by Forbes, p. 272.

²"Ordinance Of The Native Councils Of Fiji," 1876, quoted by Gordon, Contemporary Review, p. 720.

natives, the personal importance of the recruiter himself was emphasized. Women and young girls were taken away with temptations of highly coloured accounts of "freedom" that was to be enjoyed and "total absence of restraint" put upon their actions "while under the protection of white man." This "total absence of restraint with the generality of Fiji (women," wrote the magistrate, A. Taylor, meant "license to indulge in any immorality without fear of consequences."¹ "Married men were induced to leave their homes, women their husbands and children, each misled by some tale of false promise."² The troubles of the native Fijians, however, did not end here. The coercive devices of the Cakobau Government was to prove even more disastrous for them.

While extending their plantations and seeking labour to work them, the colonists from about 1865 also made various efforts at establishing a government powerful enough to provide them with protection and security.³ More important of these efforts was the one made in 1871 when a government was set up under "king" Cakobau. How this government came to power and how it conducted its affairs, as far as the Fijians were concerned, is open to much criticism. At about the same time as this new government was being launched, a tribe of Fijian Mountaineers called Levonis had just submitted to Cakobau. As

¹The report of Stipendiary magistrate A. Taylor of Ba and Yasawas. Enclosed in from Gordon to Carnarvon, March 12, 1877. Parliamentary Papers, 1884-5 LIII (322), p. 12.

²Ibid., (322), p. 12.

³Goodenough and Layard Report, Parliamentary Papers, 1874 XLV (326), p. 3.

a punishment the Levonis were made subject to Bau,¹ were compelled to adopt Christianity (a political affair in Fiji), and finally their labour was sold to white planters for a space of five years.² This proved to be a timely success for Cakobau's government. It not only gained the planters' support, but by this means the government was able to make a profit of eleven hundred pounds, "a sum quite sufficient to launch the ministers fairly on their new career."³

It may be added at the outset that the new government was devised to carry out "the dictation and for the exclusive benefits of the superior race," and it was run by the "white ministers" of the king.⁴ At the opening of the first Parliament on November 3, 1871, Cakobau announced,

The labour question has had my serious consideration, ---.

My efforts have been directed to supply planters with Fijian labour upon terms beneficial equally to planter as well as labourer---.

By this measure the country will be relieved from the drain upon its resources, inseparable from the cost involved in the introduction of foreign labour.⁵

That efforts were made to supply the planters with labour is not doubtful; however, the phrase "terms beneficial equally to the labourer" was sadly forgotten.

¹Cakobau was Chief of Bau.

²Forbes, p. 290.

³Ibid., p. 290.

⁴Goodenough and Layard Report, Parliamentary Papers, 1874 XLV (327), p. 3. See also Gordon, Contemporary Review, p. 712.

⁵Frederick J. Moss, Through Atolls And Islands In The Great South Sea. (London: 1889), p. 303. It cost £10 to introduce a Polynesian and 5 for a Fijian labourer.

By early 1873 the government forces defeated and subdued another hill tribe - tribe of Nubutautau - whose members had murdered a Burns family in Ba. About a thousand of the captives, men, women and children, who had no connection with the murder whatsoever, "were sentenced to penal servitude for periods ranging from three to seven years."² And in accordance with the profitable precedent established two years before at Levoni, they were offered to the planters for hire to be paid to the government. The government also passed a regulation on August 24, 1873, allowing the natives imprisoned to over twelve months with hard labour to be hired out to private persons.³ By this Act, the government allowed the hiring of Fijian prisoners on a regular basis. A further Act of 1873 provided for the employment of Fijians convicted in areas under martial law. Supporting this Act, Premier Woods emphasized its importance in assisting the development of sugar industry. He urged that the government hoped to provide the planters with "an unlimited supply" of labour which would be beneficial to both the planters and the natives. However, the Bill failed to pass.⁴ Another Act, perhaps the one that showed most clearly the "evil of white domination," was the poll-tax system passed in July 1872.⁵

¹Legge, pp. 96-97.

²Goodenough and Layard Report, Parliamentary Papers, 1874 XLV (340), p. 16. However, Commodore Goodenough, who was present in the Islands at the time, saw the employment of such labour as equivalent to slavery and warned the British citizens accordingly. These prisoners remained in various districts living in temporary huts until after the cession in 1874. Ibid., (340), p. 16.

³Fiji Times, 19 November, 1873, quoted by Legge, p. 91.

⁴Legge, p. 91.

⁵Goodenough and Layard Report, Parliamentary Papers, 1874 XLV (328), p. 4.

The government imposed a uniform poll-tax of one pound per man and four shillings per woman knowing fully well that the Fijians had no coins and that they could not and would not pay the taxes. In fact, the main design of the native poll-tax was "that of furnishing through its instrumentality a large supply of labour to the plantations of the white settlers."¹ For the same Act had also authorized the terms of imprisonment for the non-payment of taxes. It further provided for these sentences to be served on the plantations of any settler who would pay to the government the amount of the defaulter's tax.² Extortionate charges for legal expenses were often added to the amount due. And though the legal penalty for default was six months "imprisonment on plantation," the Fijians were often made to work up to twelve or even eighteen months "under conditions that differed little from temporary slavery."³ While the government received its poll-tax and the planters their labour, the helpless Fijians suffered many hardships. With the tax-collector went the broker, when the Fijians could not pay the taxes their possessions were taken away-- "fishing-nets, sleeping-mats, axes and other useful or necessary articles."⁴ In many cases even their valuable articles could not

¹Report of Sir Arthur Gordon, quoted by Gordon Cumming, Appendix, p. 358.

²Goodenough and Layard Report, Parliamentary Papers, 1874 XLV (328), p. 4. See also extracts from the Fiji Times, Sept. 23, 1874. Enclosed in from Sir H. Robinson to Earl of Carnarvon, Oct. 9, 1874. Parliamentary Papers, 1875 LII (195), p. 39.

³Goodenough and Layard Report, Parliamentary Papers, 1874 XLV (328), p. 4. See also extracts from the Fiji Times, enclosed in from Sir H. Robinson to Earl of Carnarvon, Oct. 9, 1874. Parliamentary Papers, 1875 LII (199), p. 41.

⁴Derrick, p. 231. *D.*

make up for the taxes, and the Fijians - husbands and wives - found themselves in compulsory bondage. And when they returned, they faced new taxes.¹ Consequently, their homes and their family life was destroyed. From some districts and villages, most or even the entire male population was taken away and sold as labourers to the planters. The actual number of natives convicted under the poll-tax law and employed on plantations is not known. However, according to Sir Arthur Gordon, "thousands were swept away from their homes."²

The natives were further harassed by 'Matanitu', the equivalent to the Indian 'Sircar' (Government). The unknown consequences of the disobedience to Matanitu terrified the natives to such an extent that many of them gave the planters a year or more of "gratuitous service" in advance of their taxes.³ The unhappy people had also to put up with the demands of their own Chiefs and the bullying of the native soldiers who committed many cruel and outrageous acts especially against the women.⁴ The attitude of the entire constabulary was reflected in the view of one superior official when he declared that crime was in "human nature" and went on to say, however, "if a case is proved against one of my men I'll punish him, not for the crime, but for being found out."⁵ It is

¹Fiji Times, Sept. 19, 1874. Quoted by Gordon Cumming, Appendix, p. 358.

²Gordon to Carnarvon, March 12, 1877. Parliamentary Papers 1884-5 LIII (312), p. 2.

³Gordon to Carnarvon, Feb. 16, 1876. Parliamentary Papers 1876 LIV (139), p. 69.

⁴Extract from the Fiji Times, Oct. 7, 1874. Enclosed in from Robinson to Carnarvon, Oct. 9, 1874. Parliamentary Papers 1875 LII (201), p. 43.

⁵Ibid.; (201), p. 43.

no wonder then that just before the cession in October 1874, an extract from the Fiji Times revealed that a "minor Chief proposed, and was with difficulty prevented from, the commission of suicide, simply because he and his people were deprived of liberty under most atrocious regulations."¹ Another correspondent of the Fiji Times wrote on October 7, 1874,

The vile atrocious wrongs which have been perpetrated in connection with the labour traffic and the collection of the taxes upon the helpless frightened natives - of both sexes - by a cowardly set of officials, assisted by a brutal, licentious soldiery, and connived at by the executive, because the money - blood money, with God's curse surely stamped upon every coin - flows into the treasury, are a foul blot, even upon the worse Government with which this unfortunate country has been afflicted; and yet, Sir, we are met on all sides with the canting cry, 'Oh! What a good thing for these poor natives to be taken away to cotton plantations. You must civilise them first, and christianise them.'²

...ers of labour, the Cakobau government had acted in accordance with the wishes of the planters. After all, the government existed with the support and for the sole benefit of the planters. However, it did pass a Bill in 1872 regulating the hiring of the Fijians. According to the Bill, the planters could only recruit under license. The recruits were to be presented to two magistrates, one of whom was to be a native, whose duty it was to see that the men had engaged voluntarily and understood the nature and the terms of the

¹Robinson to Carnarvon, Oct. 9, 1874. Parliamentary Papers 1875 LII (201), p. 43.

²Extract from the Fiji Times, Oct. 7, 1874. Enclosed in from Robinson to Carnarvon, Oct. 9, 1874. Parliamentary Papers 1875 LII (201), p. 43. This article was written by the Rev. Frederick Langham.

contract. The contract was then to be signed in the presence of the two magistrates. Twelve months was the maximum term of engagement, minimum scales of food were prescribed and the conditions of transport were also specified.¹ The government's desire to control and to regulate foreign labour was also there. An Act of 1872 gave the master of the vessel the responsibility of proving that the Islanders had engaged willingly, called for compulsory inspection of the labourers on arrival at Fiji by the minister of Native Affairs or his Deputy, limited contracts to five years, and stated that the immigrants were to enjoy the same rights as those enjoyed by the Fijian labourers.² However, as impressive as these Acts were, they were on paper only. The issue was not so much the content of the labour Acts as the ability of the government to enforce it, as the Secretary of the States for the Colonies, the Earl of Kimberly, later observed, "a law may look very plausible on paper but everything depends on the mode of its enforcement."³ While the government could supply native labourers to the planters, it could not protect their interests and, consequently, it soon became apparent that the Fijians were severely oppressed⁴ and at the same time the condition of the imported labourers deteriorated.⁵

¹Legge, p. 91.

²Ibid., p. 92.

³Minute by Kimberly on Thurston to Kimberly, 11 Sept. 1872, C.O. 83/2, quoted by Parnaby, p. 60. The Imperial Government was concerned over the situation in Fiji and therefore kept a watch on the progress of the Cakobau Government.

⁴Goodenough and Layard Report, Parliamentary Papers XLV (327), p. 3.

⁵Ibid., (328), p. 4.

The existence of the native was ignored except as a payer of poll-tax, a possible labourer, and a consumer of imported goods. Unfortunately, the government was unstable from the very beginning and, other than protecting the interests of the white constituents, it was too pre-occupied in guarding its own existence. The problems of the Cakobau government and why it failed to function are outside the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that in two years of its existence, the government expenses were three times as much as its revenue, and it incurred a debt of more than £87,000.¹ Almost all the debt had been contracted for the purposes of the white settlers and the amount set for the natives was used entirely for the benefit of the native Chiefs and principally, Cakobau.² At the same time, the authority of the government was being forcefully challenged by different sections of the white community and the rebellious mountain tribes. The country was in a state of anarchy. Coupled with this internal problem was the deep financial crisis of the cotton planters due to world conditions and the collapse of demand for cotton.

Before the year 1870 had ended, many of the planters faced ruin. The cotton prices fell drastically partly in consequence of the revival of American cotton supply but principally due to the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. The main crop of Fiji-planters was Sea Island cotton which, because of its texture, was used to mix with silk mainly in the factories of France and Italy.³ A good quality of Fijian Sea

¹Goodenough and Layard Report, Parliamentary Papers XLV (332), p. 8.

²Ibid., (332), p. 8.

³Forbes, p. 108.

Island cotton brought up to five shillings a pound, while American or Bombay cotton was worth from six-pence to nine-pence a pound.¹ When the Franco-Prussian war began and France collapsed, French factories closed down, crashing the market for Fijian cotton.² From four shillings and four-pence a pound in 1869, the price of cotton fell to one shilling and four-pence and remained there.³ The following table shows the importance of cotton in Fiji, the rapidity with which it grew, and finally its collapse. The only other major crop in Fiji at that time was coconut production.

Value Of Exports Of Coconut And Cotton In Pounds (£)
For The Following Years:⁴

Years	1863	1864	1865	1866	1867	1868	1869
Coconut	9,900	13,200	11,000	9,000	3,200	5,000	5,500
Cotton	400	3,000	9,200	19,800	34,004	30,975	45,000

Years	1870	1875	1876	1877	1879	1880
Coconut	4,950	-	-	-	109,000	109,000
Cotton	92,700	25,853	12,022	14,140	45,000	45,000

¹Forbes, p. 107.

²Ibid., p. 108; and Derrick, p. 197.

³Derrick, p. 197.

⁴Table compiled from Consular reports; Leggè, p. 45; Horne, p. 180; for the years 1875-1877. C. Harvey, 'Early Accounts Of Planting Enterprises In Fiji.' Fiji Society of Sciences and Industry, Vol. 3, p. 82, for the years 1879-1880.

The collapse of the cotton industry left many of the planters in a difficult financial position. Reviewing the agricultural development of the Islands, Handbook To Fiji, 1892, commented that "the majority of the planters were hopelessly bankrupt at the date of the cession of the Colony and for years subsequently they carried on from hand to mouth, on money borrowed at ten percent interest."¹

Such were the state of political, social and economical affairs in Fiji when another offer of annexation to Great Britain reached London on February 23, 1873.

¹Handbook To Fiji, 1892, p. 137.

Chapter III

LABOUR POLICIES OF SIR ARTHUR GORDON 1874-1880

To the Imperial Government, the labour traffic that had grown up in the South Seas appeared as the most important and the most undesirable consequence of uncontrolled English settlement in Fiji. In his argument for annexing the Islands, Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary, emphasized the labour traffic which was carried on with "utter iniquity and barbarity," and the need for the trade to be brought "within those wholesome and legitimate limits" within which it could become a "blessing instead of a curse." He summed up the situation of Fiji by saying that, "a place into which English capital has overflowed, in which English settlers are resident, in which it must be added, English lawlessness is going on," needed English protection.¹ Therefore, the strongest motive for annexation, when it came in October 1874, was the desire on the part of the Imperial Government to control the labour traffic. However, other factors favouring the annexation of the Islands were not overlooked. The "strong wish" of the surrounding colonies, Australian and New Zealand that the Islands be taken under the English sovereignty,² the strategic position of Fiji, Fiji as the home of the cotton-plant, and the cultivation of sugar which "sprang up" making Fiji the "Mauritius

¹The Earl of Carnarvon in the House Of Lords, July 17, 1874, Hansard 3rd Series CCXXI (15 July 1874 to 7 August 1874), 185.

²Ibid., 185.

of Southern Hemisphere" were all observed.¹ In any case, Fiji was ceded, it became a Crown Colony on October 10, 1874. And indeed, Fiji, as the "Mauritius of Southern Hemisphere", was to live up to its expectations in every sense.

Sir Hercules Robinson, the governor of the Colony of New South Wales who accepted the cession in the Queen's name, on assuming temporary administration of the new government, took immediate steps to curb labour abuse. The poll-tax system of the Cakobau Government was repealed. All defrauding native taxpayers were liberated and the planters compensated. Women were made exempt from the tax and every male Fijian between the ages of 16 and 60 was now required to contribute twenty days' labour upon the public works of his province in each year. They could, however, commute their services by certain amounts of cash payments.² However, when the poll-tax system was abolished and the planters could not obtain Fijian labour from the government, as was the practice under the Cakobau Government, they once again turned to the old system of purchasing men from the Chiefs.³ This led to the Ordinance II of 1875 passed by administrator Layard which forbade the sale of labour by the Chiefs. With the passage of this Ordinance, the sale of labour by the Chiefs practically disappeared; however, now the recruiters resorted to cajolery and

¹Mr. William McArthur in the House of Commons, August 4, 1874. Hansard 3rd Series CCXXI (15 July 1874 to 7 August 1874), 1268.

²Robinson to Carnarvon, October 3, 1874. Parliamentary Papers 1875 LII (172), p. 16.

³Gordon to Carnarvon, March 12, 1877. Parliamentary Papers 1884-5 LIII (311), p. 2.

falsehood. In many cases, they acquired labourers by posing as government agents and telling the natives that they were required to work on government plantations.¹ Thus, labour shortage and labour abuse was still very much the immediate problem² of the Colony when Sir Arthur Gordon arrived as the first Governor of Fiji in June of 1875. To solve these problems, the Governor revised both the immigrant and the native labour policies.

Under Colonial rule the importation and distribution of Island labour became the responsibility of the government. The basic structure of labour-recruitment remained the same though now armed with a series of regulations to ensure the rights and the protection of the Islanders. In practice, however, this safety of the labourers still depended on the humanity of the Government Agent and the recruiters in the recruiting grounds. Ordinance XXIV of 1876 was legislated to regulate and control the conveyance and recruiting of the Polynesians while Ordinance XI of 1877 laid down the conditions of their employment while in Fiji.³ Ordinance XXIV of 1876 ensured that the labourers received fair treatment at the time of recruitment and during their trip to Fiji. Masters of the labour-vessels were required to enter into a bond of £500, and only licensed British ships were to engage in the trade. The accommodation of each adult passenger - three adults to every two tons, of vessel's registered

¹Gordon to Carnarvon, March 12, 1877. Parliamentary Papers 1884-5 LIII (311), p. 2.

²Among numerous other problems.

³Gordon to Carnarvon, November 7, 1876, Encl. No. 1, Parliamentary Papers 1878 LV (243), p. 3.

tonnage - rations, medicines and a surgeon on board were all required. Above all, each ship was to carry a Government Agent whose duty it was to see that the prospective labourers understood the terms of contract and the conditions of work, that they engaged willingly, and to inspect and to report on the general state of the immigrants.¹

According to Ordinance XI of 1877, all planters desirous of obtaining allotments of immigrant-labour were to apply to the Agent General for Immigration by the first day of October in each year, specifying the number of workers required. The Ordinance further stated that, on arrival in Fiji, the immigrants were to be put in depots where every labourer was inspected by the Agent General for Immigration before allotting them to the employers. Families were to be kept together, daily adult ration, fuel to prepare food with, supply of pure water, cooking utensils, medicine and medical attendance, suitable lodging (one adult to every 300 cubic feet of space), four sulus² and two mats yearly to each adult were all to be supplied by the employers. Any plantation employing over fifty labourers was to have an infirmary on the plantation, though this regulation was not rigidly enforced. Hours of work were also laid down. Every indentured immigrant employed at "time work" was to work nine hours weekdays and five hours on Saturdays. Those employed at "task work"³ were to perform five and one-half tasks every week.

¹Gordon to Carnarvon, July 7, 1876. Encl. No. 1, Parliamentary Papers 1878 LV (243, 244, 245, 246), pp. 3 to 6.

²Sulus are pieces of material worn around the waist by the natives.

³"Task work" was as much work as an able bodied man could do in six hours working steadily.

Disorderly conduct while at work, absence from work except for such reason as ill-health, or refusal to work was punishable by fine or imprisonment. The maximum term of a contract was to be five years.¹ This appeared to be too long a period to the Colonial Office and Carnarvon requested an explanation. In fact, the term of five years allowed by the Ordinance had not been taken advantage of and no contract had been made for more than three years. The Colonial Office was informed accordingly.² Indentures could be extended to make up the time lost through imprisonment or desertion. Immigrants could re-engage for a period of from six to twelve months after the expiry of their original contract. And, finally, the Agent General for Immigration was given the power to enter the plantations to examine the accommodations and conditions of work.³

The employers on their part were required to meet the cost of introducing the labourers and repatriating the time-expired immigrants. Penalty was imposed on the employers for enforcing work beyond that specified in the Ordinance. Wages of not less than £3 per annum were to be paid to the labourers. In cases of breach of contract by the employer, the term of indenture could be cancelled by the Agent General for the Immigration with the Governor's consent, without any compensation. These labour Ordinances of Sir Arthur Gordon, with slight alterations, were based on the Immigration

¹ Gordon to Carnarvon, March 14, 1877, Parliamentary Papers, 1878 LV (265), p. 25.

² Legge, p. 264.

³ Gordon to Carnarvon, March 14, 1877, Parliamentary Papers, 1878 LV (258), p. 18.

Ordinances of Trinidad and British Guiana.¹ Since Gordon had seen the workings of the Indian indenture system in the West Indies, it is not surprising that he introduced the same system in Fiji. However, how free of abuse this system was under the supervision of the government is questionable. According to Scholefield, the state of the Islanders in 1881 was no better than it had been in 1871.² And Wawn, a devout defender of the Polynesian labour system, informs us that after annexation, abuses and kidnappings did not go away. In 1883, Joseph Griffith Davis, the captain of the vessel "Stanley", and A. McMurdo were charged with kidnapping of two Islanders, found guilty and sentenced to three months' imprisonment.³ However, they were both released a week later by the High Commissioner of the Western Pacific,⁴ Sir William Des Voeux. And in November 1884, Captain Shaw of the "Hopeful", Mr. Scholefield, Government Agent, Mr. McNeil, recruiter, and Mr. Williams, boatswain, were imprisoned for life while three other members of the crew had lesser terms for murder and kidnappings of the Islanders. Once again all these men were pardoned and liberated in 1890.⁵ And Wawn goes on to say that Scholefield, a Government Agent on board the labour vessel to protect

¹Gordon to Carnarvon, April 11, 1877, Parliamentary Papers, 1878 LV (275), p. 35.

²Scholefield, p. 65.

³Wawn, pp. 330-331. See also, Reeves, p. 192.

⁴Wawn, pp. 330-331. The Governors of Fiji also held the position of High Commissioner of the Western Pacific after 1876.

⁵Wawn, pp. 350-353. This was in Australia.

the rights of the labourers, "was an acknowledged drunkard."¹ Such Government Agents who were never sober and who more likely than not worked with the shipmasters rather than the government were expected to look after the welfare of the Islanders. It is no wonder, then, and no doubt in reprisals, that so many white men were massacred in the Islands right through the 1880's.² And another observer found the statement in the Fiji Blue Book that, "Prior to the annexation of the Islands the whole system was one of complete short-sentenced slavery,"³ so very misleading. The statement according to Reeves made one believe that, "after annexation, the system of 'legal kidnapping' was not slavery in a specious form, when the simple truth was that no laws devised by the wit of man could make the traffic humane." And shortly stated, Polynesian immigration was a wrong, "and no number of clauses of Acts or petty safeguards, such as 'husbands shall not be separated from their wives and children,' no amount of 'inspection' and 'registration'" could make it right.⁴ For Gordon, however, the issue of the employment of the native Fijians became the predominant concern and this is where he focused his attention.

The nature of the control which was exercised over the employment of the Fijians, while subject to separate legislation, worked in the same way as that of the immigrant labour. Ordinance XV of 1876 applied to hiring of any labour exceeding a period of one month and

¹Wawn, p. 348.

²Ibid., pp. 209-212.

³Quoted by Reeves, p. 191.

⁴Reeves, p. 192. Reeves was talking against both the Polynesian and the native Fijian labour system.

required that the contracts be made before and endorsed by the stipendiary magistrate to ensure that the natives understood the nature of contracts and were engaging willingly. Maximum term of contract allowed was one year. On expiry of the terms they were to be paid off before the stipendiary magistrate and the employer was to repatriate the labourers. And in case of any abuse on plantations, the contracts were subject to cancellation. The labourers on the other hand were subject to punishment by fine or imprisonment for neglect of work or damage to property. Penalty was also imposed for being absent from work without reasonable cause for more than five consecutive days.¹ This Ordinance, hopefully, was to remove the abuses which frequently occurred at the point of recruitment. As time went on, however, Gordon's native policy came to embody a far wider meaning than simply one of eliminating of abuses and securing fair treatment for the natives. This came about partly in consequence to the abuses that kept creeping up in the labour system and partly due to Gordon's own personal regard for the native Fijians.

When Gordon took Office he was faced with the task of ruling a new Colony of approximately 135,000² natives who were in a disillusioned mood because their experience with the Europeans had proved an unpleasant one. After losing some of their best land to the settlers,³ they also lost 40,000 of their population by the measles

¹ Legge, p. 254.

² Norma McArthur, Colony Of Fiji: Report On The Census Of The Population. Suva, 1958, p. 265.

³ Kingsley George Roth, "Native Administration In Fiji During The Past 75 Years," The Royal Anthropological Institute Of Great Britain and Ireland, Colonial Paper No. 10, 1951, p. 4.

epidemic of 1875.¹ Gordon realized that if the new government was to rule at all, it was to rule with the cooperation of the native Chiefs. However, his native policies did not stem merely out of these necessities. Even though in his Nasova speech on September 2, 1875 Gordon conceded; "I have no sympathy with those whose philanthropy demanded that they should think little of their own race and colour. My sympathy for the coloured races is strong, but my sympathy for my own race is stronger,"² he was nevertheless regarded a liberal, a philanthropist and one of the most progressive colonial governors of his time. In a time when natives of many countries were decreasing when they came under European influences,⁴ Gordon saw only too clearly and with some justification that it was only a matter of time before another chapter was added to this dark record of the triumph of European greed and selfishness.⁵ The fact was that the Fijian population showed a marked tendency to decrease over the years as the following figures indicate;

¹Gordon to Carnarvon, December 1875. Parliamentary Papers, 1876 LIV (130), p. 60.

²Gordon to Carnarvon, September 9, 1875. Parliamentary Papers, 1876 LIV (77), p. 7.

³Gillion, p. 5.

⁴Such as in South America.

⁵Gordon to Selbourne, 30 November 1881, Stanmore Papers, quoted by Gillion, p. 5.

Estimated population in 1860	200,000
Estimated population in 1875	135,000 ¹
Native population by the census of 1881	111,924
Native population by the census of 1891	105,000
Native population by the census of 1901	94,397 ²
Estimated native population of 1907	87,027

The saving of the Fijian race from extinction now became one paramount task of Gordon. Some of his main native policies were: the deliberate preservation of Fijian customs and social structure; the maintenance of the authority of the Chiefs which automatically preserved the existing village organization; and most of all the discouragement of employment of natives through a series of legislation.³

After the Ordinance XV of 1876 was passed, some grave recruiting offenses came to the notice of the Officials. The stipendiary magistrates, Alexander Eastgate of Tai Levu, and Achd. Taylor of Ba and Yasawas, reported that many of the hired recruiters were now as before the cession, in the same business of illegal recruiting.⁴ Between 1876 and March 1877, a period of approximately fifteen months, some eleven trips were made by different labour vessels in districts of Ba and Yasawas. The known number of labourers leaving these districts was 261, while 162 were engaged on plantations within the districts.⁵ Abuse of contracts by the planters was also

¹Gillion, p. 4.

²Report of the Committee on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates, Parliamentary Papers, 1910 (Cd. 5193), p. 85; hereafter cited as Sanderson Committee Report.

³Gillion, p. 6.

⁴Report of Stipendiary Magistrate of Ba and Yasawas, enclosed in from Gordon to Carnarvon, 12 March 1877, Parliamentary Papers, 1884-5 LIII (321), p. 11.

⁵Ibid., (327), p. 16.

very much in practice, for during that same period only 31 time-expired men were paid. And while the labourers received £2/10/- to £3 for 12 to 15 months' labour, the recruiters made just as much for each head at the time of delivery.¹

An attempt was made again by legislating Ordinance X of 1877 to stamp out illegal recruiting. Now the stipendiary magistrates were required to endorse on the contracts the following words, "I hereby certify that the parties to the within contract fully understand the nature and terms of said contract and entered into the same voluntarily of their own free will."² No contract was valid without such endorsement. Any recruiter recruiting for others had to produce a letter of agency stating the number of labourers required and signed by the person for whom he was recruiting. The Ordinance also provided that the natives were to be returned home on termination of their contracts. However, it neglected to specify the time within which they were to be returned after the expiry of the contracts, and imposed no penalty for its neglect. Consequently, some planters took advantage of this clause and held on to their labourers for a long period beyond the contract, "professing to intend to send them home but taking no steps to provide a vessel for the purpose."³ Ordinance XXIII of 1880 corrected this and provided that the Fijians were to be

¹Report of Stipendiary Magistrate of Ba and Yasawas, enclosed in from Gordon to Carnarvon, 12 March 1877, Parliamentary Papers, 1884-5 LIII (352), p. 14.

²Gordon to Carnarvon, 12 March 1877, Enclosure I, Parliamentary Papers, 1884-5 LIII (314), p. 4.

³Gordon to Carnarvon, November 15, 1880, Enclosure No. 3, Parliamentary Papers, 1884-5 LIII (333), p. 23.

returned within 14 days of the expiration of the contract and imposed penalty for the neglect of the same.¹ The fact was that no sooner was an Ordinance passed to cure an abuse than another was devised by the recruiters and the planters. Gordon's successors, governors Des Voeux and Thurston, supported the labour policies of Gordon in subsequent years by regulating series of labour Ordinances through the 1880's.² However, in 1883, some nine years after the cession and with a series of Ordinances, the Chiefs were still complaining, and with substantial justification, of the misery and suffering to the old, the women and the children of certain provinces, due to the withdrawal to distant plantations of a large proportion of the able bodied men.³

While Gordon's successors supported his native labour policies, the planters did not. They opposed all the policies vigorously from the beginning. The settlers had expected much from the Colonial Government. They felt that the communal obligations of the Fijians would be abolished and as free British subjects, they would be allowed to work where they chose to.⁴ But instead they were faced with labour policies which they saw as an unnecessary restriction. Attacks were made through the local press, charging that Gordon

¹Gordon to Carnarvon, November 15, 1880, Enclosure No. 3, Parliamentary Papers, 1884-5 LIII (333), p. 23.

²As was indicated by the message of Governor G. William Des Voeux to the Fiji Legislative Council. Des Voeux to Earl of Derby, Enclosure No. 5, January 18, 1883, Parliamentary Papers, 1884-5 LIII (355), p. 25.

³Ibid., (335), p. 25.

⁴Gillion, p. 10.

opposed the planter-interests and intended to keep the colony as a private 'utopia for the natives' and demanded that the natives be made to serve the Europeans. Direct representations were made to the Colonial Office requesting the removal of the Governor.¹ However, Gordon did not object to the employment of the natives as such; what he objected to was the 'inland labour traffic', or the transporting of the Fijians to distant areas as he explained to Carnarvon,

I need not tell your lordship---, that after the conquest of Spanish America no agency was found more certainly and rapidly destructive of the native races than the introduction of migratory habits among the male population.²

This "migratory habit" was nothing but an evil whereby family ties were broken, wives and children were left to become burden on others, natural increase of the population was retarded, and frequently entire villages were reduced to misery by the withdrawal of too large a portion of the male population.³ How true this was in the case of the Fijians has already been seen in the complaints of the Chiefs. Years later at the Sanderson Committee, Gordon testified again that he had nothing against the free engagement of the Fijians, rather it might have been a very good thing and might have been done advantageously had they been engaged "upon estates in the vicinity of the Fijians towns;--- but what the planters always insisted upon was having men removed to a great distance to another island where

¹Legge, pp. 247-249.

²Gordon to Carnarvon, March 12, 1877, Parliamentary Papers, 1884-5 LIII (313), p. 3.

³Ibid., (313), p. 3.

they had no connections, and no relations, and where they were completely under the control of the employer. That I did not like."¹

Exactly how many Fijians were employed on plantations at any one time is not too clear. One belief is that from the earliest days and even when at their best, Fijians had proved so unstable at sustained labour that not more than 1,000 had been employed on plantations at any one time.² Another estimation is that not more than 800 had ever been employed at any one time.³ And the following table, though incomplete, tends to affirm the above views:

Year	Total Number of Fijians	Year	Number Employed on Plantations
1860	200,000, estimated	1875	604, incomplete
1875	135,000, estimated	1876	1,213
1881	111,924, 1881 census	1877	926
1891	105,000, 1891 census	1878	1,249
		1879	1,493
		1880	1,001

If only 1,000 natives had been employed at any one time, then such great misery and distress of the entire population could not have been caused by the withdrawal of such a small percentage of the population.

A more acceptable explanation is that those recruited came from some

¹ Sanderson Committee Report, Part II, Cd. 5193, p. 348.

² Morgan I. Finucane, "The Islands And The People Of Fiji," Proceedings Of Royal Colonial Institute, XXXII, 1900-1, p. 43. Paper read on November 27, 1900. Finucane was a Provincial Inspector of the provinces of Tavalevu and Ra and Medical Officer of the Colony around the end of the century.

³ Roberts, p. 395.

⁴ Figures compiled from Sanderson Committee Report, Part II, Cd. 5193, p. 85, and Gillion, p. 12, footnote.

few small villages and districts thereby causing distress to these particular people rather than the entire population. However, it is quite conceivable that had Gordon not implemented his protective labour-policies, the Fijian race might very well have been eliminated. Gordon's native policies reflected an awareness of the social and economic evils apt to be created by migratory habits and over-recruitment of the natives.

While Gordon was busy pursuing his native-policies, the labour problems of the colony assumed a new importance. If cheap labour was the cry of the cotton-period - a period which was still the days of small things - now with the coming of the sugar industry it became acute and worse was yet to come. On August 9, 1877, Gordon wrote to Carnarvon, "Chief difficulties with which the settlers of Fiji have to contend, is the want of an adequate supply of agricultural labour, a want which becomes daily more sensibly felt."¹ According to Gordon, the Fijian labour supply had fallen off partly because the inducements held out to the natives were insufficient to tempt them to engage into long contracts, partly because the majority of them were busily occupied in industries² of their own, and partly because the population of the districts which supplied almost all the labour had diminished by nearly one-half during the measles epidemic.³

¹Gordon to Carnarvon, August 9, 1877, Parliamentary Papers, 1878 LV (284), p. 44.

²Another policy of Gordon whereby the native districts or provinces were taxed in produce by the government, which meant that the men had to work at home and had no time to engage elsewhere.

³Gordon to Carnarvon, August 9, 1877, Parliamentary Papers, 1878 LV (284), p. 44.

That the native population was on the decline is true; however, Fijian labour supply had not fallen off simply for that reason alone. The native labour Ordinances and the native administration system of the government were equally responsible. To solve the obvious contradiction in his policy - to preserve the natives - and at the same time to supply the urgently needed labour for the developing industries of the new colony, Gordon had to turn to imported labour.

Gordon had contemplated introducing Indian labourers into Fiji as early as 1875. In his speech given to Planters at Nasova on September 2, 1875, he indicated that among other things so plainly needed was a "want of a cheap, abundant, and certain supply of labour." He had nothing against Polynesian labourers, he said, but the supply was decreasing while the cost of it was increasing. And therefore, "Shall we attempt not to supplant but to supplement Polynesian labour by that of Indian Coolies." And he added that the supply of labour to be obtained from India was "practically boundless" and "the amount of wages ordinarily given to Indian coolies is well known."¹ The question proposed by Gordon regarding the introduction of coolies was unanimously approved by the planters at that meeting.² However, the plan to introduce Indian labourers was abandoned at the time partly because the planters now felt that the Indian Immigration Ordinance was too restricted and too costly, and partly because Gordon himself felt that neither the colony nor the planters could afford

¹Gordon to Carnarvon, September 9, 1875, Enclosure No. 2, Parliamentary Papers, 1876 LIV (74), p. 3.

²Ibid., (72), p. 2.

Indian immigration at that time.¹ Therefore, Gordon had to turn to Island labour first even though he believed that labour from this source would eventually diminish. Now a renewed effort was made to secure more Islanders. The government granted a sum of £5,000 to aid in the introduction of 1,000 Polynesians for the year 1877.² However, the population of the other Pacific Islands was also decreasing rapidly. During the year 1877, the introduction of a thousand Polynesians was contemplated, but up to the middle of August only 110 had been obtained. A labour vessel after four months' cruise brought back only twenty labourers.³ The following figures show the number of Islanders under service for the years 1875 to 1879:

Year.	Number of Islanders Employed
1875	3,835
1876	2,410
1877	1,697
1878	2,847
1879	3,863

Gordon outlined three causes for the difficulty of obtaining labour supply from this source: the diminution of population of the Islands which supplied labour; the Islanders' preference for going to Queensland where they were paid much higher wages; and finally, the great and in too many cases the unjustifiable delay in repatriating the time-expired

¹Gillion, p. 14.

²Gordon to Carnarvon, August 9, 1877, Parliamentary Papers, 1878 LV (289), p. 49.

³Ibid., (285), p. 45.

⁴Figures quoted by Gillion, p. 15, footnote.

labourers from Fiji.¹ At the time of cession, in 1874 about a thousand time-expired Islanders were waiting to be returned home while the contract of another 1,227 was due to expire in 1875.² About 600 were repatriated in 1875 at public expense; 600 were lost during the measles epidemic;³ and another 1,829 were sent home in 1876.⁴ However, in 1877 when the Island labour supply was at its lowest, commenting on the plight of the planters, Gordon again pointed out the need for Indian coolies and went on to say,

I must confess, moreover, that the consideration weighs not a little with me that unless labour is thus obtained, I fear it will be very difficult long to withstand the pressure which will be brought to bear upon the Government to consent to measures intended to coerce the native population of this colony into an involuntary servitude, or at all events to wink at practices not consistent with fair dealing.⁵

The preservation of the native population was still very much the concern of Gordon; therefore, he now pressed on for imported labour from India. The overall costs to be borne by the planters for both Polynesian and Indian labour was worked out in detail:

¹Gordon to Carnarvon, August 9, 1877, Parliamentary Papers, 1878 LV (285), p. 45.

²Mr. Layard, Administrator, to Sir H. Robinson, February 12, 1875. Enclosed in from Robinson to Carnarvon, March 18, 1875. Parliamentary Papers, 1875 LII (263), p. 31.

³Gordon to Colonial Office, 8 August 1877, C.O. 83/14, quoted by Legge, p. 265, footnote.

⁴Gordon to Carnarvon, April 11, 1877, Parliamentary Papers 1878 LV (277), p. 37.

⁵Gordon to Carnarvon, August 9, 1877, Parliamentary Papers 1878 LV (285), p. 45.

Cost of each Indian immigrant for contract of five years:

		£	s	d
Cost of introduction,	£20 for 5 yrs..	-----		
One-fifth of £20 =	£ 1 for 4 yr.	-----		
Two-thirds of £40 =	£ 2. 13. 4 to be paid by planter.	-----	2.	13. 4
Cost of return passage of				
25% of these introduced at £16 per adult,		-----		
One-fourth of £16 =	£ 4 for 5 yrs.	-----		
One-fifth of £ 4 =	16s. per annum	-----		
Two-thirds of 16s. =	10. 8d. payable by planter.	-----	0.	10. 8
Wages, average including rations per adult			10.	10. 0
The total amount to be paid by each planter for each Indian immigrant for a period of one year:			13.	4. 0

Cost of Polynesian labourer per adult per annum:

		£	s	d
On contract of three years				
Cost of introduction at £10 per adult		-----		
One-third of £10 =	£3. 6. 8 per annum	-----	3.	6. 8
Cost of return of 90% of those introduced at 3 per adult =	£2.14.0	-----		
One-third of £2,14.0 =	18s. per annum	-----	0.	18. 0
Wages at present [1877]			3.	0. 0
Rations 2,555 lbs. of yams, at £3 per ton,			3.	2. 6
4 sulus and 2 mats			0.	7. 6
Total cost of Polynesian immigrant per adult per annum on contract of five years.			£ 10.	14. 8 . 1

From the above calculations, an Indian labourer was to cost £2.19.4 more than the Polynesian, only if the Polynesian's wages were not raised. But the fact that the Indian had to spend ten years in the colony to the Islander's three years before repatriation more than made up the difference. However, if the wages of the Polynesian were raised to £6, as they were in Queensland, then the Indian would cost

¹ Calculations enclosed in from Gordon to Carnarvon, August 9, 1877, Parliamentary Papers, 1878 LV (288), p. 48.

the same as the Polynesian.¹ Charles Mitchell, the Agent General in Fiji, was told to make arrangements for the introduction of 1,000 Polynesians for the year 1878, while at the same time he was instructed by the Governor to proceed to Calcutta to meet with the Indian Government and to ascertain the conditions on which India would permit emigration of labourers to Fiji.² Four hundred to five hundred Indians were to be introduced in 1878 as a precautionary measure against the failure of obtaining Polynesians.³

The question of Asiatic labour for Fiji had been raised by planters long before the Islands were ceded to Great Britain. Upon inquiries in 1867, F. and W. Hennings were informed by the British Consul in Levuka that it was unlikely that the British Government would agree to their request.⁴ In 1868, F. J. Moss, when visiting Fiji as a prospective planter, had felt that Chinese or Indian coolies would undoubtedly be required to work the plantations.⁵ And in 1872, when the Cakobau Government made an official request for Indian labourers, the Indian Government "politely" refused the request.⁶ However, by 1877, many changes had taken place. Most of all, Fiji was now a British Crown Colony and Sir Arthur Gordon was its governor.

¹Gordon to Carnarvon, August 9, 1877, Parliamentary Papers, 1878 LV (289), p. 49.

²Ibid., (288), p. 48.

³Ibid., (288), p. 48.

⁴Gillion, p. 3.

⁵Moss, A Month In Fiji, p. 22.

⁶Gillion, p. 3.

And it was Sir Arthur Gordon who laid down the foundations of labour policies - native-protective policies - and the introduction of Indians into Fiji, thereby changing the course of Fiji's history. His policies, and most particularly the protective policies toward the natives, were carried on by all the governors throughout the years until Fiji became independent in 1970.

Chapter IV

TRANSITION TO SUGAR AND THE NEED FOR MORE CHEAP LABOUR

Berthold Seeman, the Botanist who went to Fiji as a member of the British Commission in 1860, reported that coffee, tamarind, tobacco and sugar-cane were all introduced into Fiji long ago and the plants flourished well. The sugar-cane, he reported, grew "as it were, wild in various parts of the group," but there was no sugar-making.¹ According to other reports, the wild sugar-cane was probably an indigenous plant called "dovu" by the natives. It was used by the Fijians for food in its natural state, and they also boiled its juice into a thick consistency for sweetening other foods.² However, what has been cultivated for sugar-making from the earliest days is an imported cane, mainly of a variety originally obtained from Honolulu Islands and bearing that name.³ Probably the earliest utilization of a sugar-cane plant in Fiji took place in 1862 when a Mr. Whippy erected a crude mill on Wakaya and boiled some syrup.⁴ However, his sugar-making venture ended when he failed to attract the attention of

¹Seeman, p. 280.

²Proceedings Of Royal Colonial Institute, XXI, 1889-90, "Agriculture In Fiji", by H. H. Thiele, p. 365. Thiele lived in Nausori, Fiji from the 1880's. See also Horne, p. 174.

³Thiele, p. 365. Some was also introduced from New Guinea.

⁴Swanston Papers, "quoted in the Fiji Society Of Sciences And Industry, Vol. III, p. 84. Swanston went to Fiji in 1857 as an agriculturist but served as a civil servant from 1871.

the merchants and the capitalists. The next step to sugar-producing came after the collapse of cotton in 1870 when the planters turned their attention to cane cultivation.¹ In 1872 Lester Smith, formerly a planter of Barbadoes, erected the first mill at Suva for Brewer and Joske. By 1875 when the soil of the Suva district proved unsuitable for cane-growing, the mill was abandoned.² However, in spite of these failures and while capital and labour was still scarce and land tenure not yet settled, other small mills began to appear. Between 1874 and the 1880's at least a dozen sugar-mills had been erected on different parts of the Island.³ Cane cultivation was now advancing with the same rapid pace as cotton had done some ten years earlier. The earlier mills, most of which were started as self-contained sugar estates,⁴ were small, with a capacity of from 14 to 40 tons of sugar production weekly. Those larger plants erected during the early eighties included the mill of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company on the Rewa River. However, scarcely had these mills commenced operations when subsidized European beet sugar appeared on the world market causing a direct and drastic fall in the value of sugar.⁵ Whereas in 1877 a ton of Fiji

¹Official Handbook To Fiji, 1892, p. 38. An effort was also made to grow coffee before sugar but it failed due to coffee-disease.

²Derrick, History Of Fiji, footnote, p. 220.

³Ronald Albert Derrick, The Fiji Islands, A Geographical Handbook, (Suva, 1951), footnote, pp. 168-169.

⁴Colony Of Fiji, published by the Fiji Times, 1911, p. 39.

⁵South Pacific Enterprise: The Colonial Sugar Refining Company Ltd., (Sydney, 1956). Edited by A. G. Lowndes. Appendix, p. 404.

sugar brought £ 28 in Auckland, New Zealand,¹ by 1884 the prices fell to £ 10 a ton.² A majority of the Fiji planters, who were already hard pressed, succumbed in this crisis and a number of mills closed. One of the survivors, however, was the Colonial Sugar Refining Company - a company which was to play a major role in the history of Fiji thenceforth.

The Colonial Sugar Refining Company was formed in January of 1855 in Australia and came to hold numerous sugar-mills in New South Wales and Queensland. In 1879, when sugar cultivation was making a good progress in Fiji, E. W. Knox,³ a superintendent of one of the mills in New South Wales at the time, made a perceptive observation. "Sugar will be produced in Fiji sooner or later, which will come into competition with ours," he wrote, "It is a question whether it will not be better for us to take a share in the development of the industry and the profits that will be realized,"⁴ The company thereupon wasted no time in sending a man to Fiji to evaluate the prospects and to look for a suitable site for a mill. When the report came back that during the year 1882 the planters could supply as much as 70,000 tons of cane to a mill, the board of the company decided to send "the machinery at

¹The London Times, April 4, 1877, p. 7.

²The Colony Of Fiji, 1874-1924. Official Handbook, (Suva, 1924), p. 67.

³E. W. Knox was the son of E. Knox, one of the directors who did much to establish the company in 1855. E. W. Knox became the Manager of the company by the time it extended its interests to Fiji.

⁴South Pacific Enterprise, Chapter II, p. 31.

once for a factory equal to working that quantity."¹ The company also decided not to depend solely on "purchasing and crushing" the local planters' cane but to cultivate a proportion of it on its own plantations. Consequently, the company bought its first land in Fiji in 1880 and employed Pacific Islanders to clear it.² A plant was set up at Rewa which began operations in 1882 with an annual capacity of 10,000 tons of raw sugar.³ This was the Colonial Sugar Refining Company's entry into the sugar industry of Fiji. With its coming, the industry took a giant step forward and soon the name of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company became synonymous with the sugar industry of Fiji. Within 10 years sugar became the Colony's principle article of export as the following figures indicate:

Years	Sugar	Cotton	Copra	Green Fruit
1875	£ 3,245	£ 25,853		
1876	10,433	12,022		
1877	16,170	14,140	Not available	
1878	18,641	-		
1879-1880	26,000	-		
1886	187,456	6,125	£ 49,564	£ 22,623
1887	205,294	2,894	12,356	30,610
1888	270,678	342	41,064	42,279
1889	263,553	789	41,543	42,525
1890	244,655	2,443	42,901	57,525
1891	327,526	4,858	63,039	61,501

¹Ibid., pp. 31-33. However, according to Gillion, Thurston, an Official of the Fiji Government, was in Australia at the time and persuaded the Colonial Sugar Refining Company to extend its operations to Fiji. Gillion, pp. 69-70.

²South Pacific Enterprise, pp. 32-33.

³Colony Of Fiji, published by the Fiji Times, 1917, p. 39.

⁴The above figures have been compiled from Derrick, Geography of Fiji, pp. 168-169; Horne, p. 174; Official Handbook To Fiji, 1892, p. 16; and "Swanston Papers," The Fiji Society Of Sciences And Industry, Vol. 3, p. 82.

The coming of the sugar industry marked another important turning point in Fijian history. It ushered in the second stage of economic development and brought an economic boom to the Colony. It also had far-reaching impacts on agricultural, social and political life. Sugar was now the 'king' and the cane planters, and particularly the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, were in a position to exert influence on the labour policies of the government. Furthermore, sugar changed the nature of plantation-owners entirely within a short period of time. The small European planters with small plantations, so characteristic of the cotton period, now virtually disappeared. Large estates owned by large companies and absentee capitalists took their place. And, finally, though by no means least in importance, was the changed character of the indentured labourers themselves which coincided with the development of the sugar industry. The introduction of Indian labourers into Fiji brought an entirely new element of people into the Pacific Islands and, as the sugar industry extended and expanded, so did the numbers of the Indian labourers.

The sugar industry of Fiji today is just as synonymous with Indian labour as it is with the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. It may be said that sugar was to a great extent responsible for bringing the Indian to Fiji. The Sanderson Committee in 1910 also pointed out that it was entirely for the work on the sugar estates that Indian indentured labour had been introduced into the Islands.¹ Even before the cession of the Islands in 1874, Lord Carnarvon had not only

¹Sanderson Committee Report, Cd.5193. Part II: Evidence, p. 83.

anticipated the possibility of Fiji becoming the "Mauritius of Southern Hemisphere" but Sir Robert Herbert, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office, had also felt that the sugar industry in Fiji meant imported labour.¹ And since by 1874 the Indian indenture system had already been in existence for almost 50 years; it would not have been too difficult to foresee where the source of this imported labour lay. Consequently, when Fiji became a Crown Colony and experienced a shortage of labour in the 1870's, it quite naturally went to British India for labourers. But perhaps of even more importance is the fact that, since a large number of other immigrant-labourers introduced into Fiji to work the sugar-plantations died, the coming of the "hardy" Indian became even more urgent for the survival of the sugar industry.

When the Colonial Sugar Refining Company opened its interests in Fiji in 1880, it employed all the three groups of labourers - Polynesians, Indians and some Fijians. Where Fijian labour was used, it was mainly for heavy clearing of the ground for which the natives were judged "suitable".² However, native contribution to the development of the sugar industry remained negligible. They were not only discouraged by the government from engaging on distant plantations, but by the Native Lands Ordinance of 1880, the Fijians had also become

¹Gillion, p. 10.

²Morgan I. Finucane, "The Islands And The People Of Fiji," Proceedings Of Royal Colonial Institute, XXXII, 1900-1901. Paper read on November 27, 1900. Finucane was a Provincial Inspector of the Provinces of Tailevu and Ra and Medical Officer of the Colony around the end of the century.

"land-owners".¹ And, as explained by one planter, they were now the "aristocrats" and "property-owners", "far too prosperous and independent to work for a shilling a day, or for that matter to work at all, save when the spirit" moved him.² The native land-owners now lived in "peace and comfort" by leasing their lands extensively, initially to the sugar companies and later to individual Indian farmers.³ The employment of the Polynesians, meanwhile, continued even though Edward W. Knox, the General Manager of the company, deplored the Polynesian labour trade on the grounds that the trade was "a disagreeable one."

He welcomed the Fiji government's arrangements to bring more Indians. The Indian immigration, according to Knox, provided an opportunity to "have nothing more to do with Polynesians."⁴ For a time, however, the two systems of immigrant labour - Polynesian and Indian - continued side by side. The company took 587 Islanders during the last six months of 1881. However, when by September of 1882, 220 of the 587 Islanders died on the plantation,⁵ the Polynesian trade proved to be

¹This Ordinance granted about 400,000 acres of freehold titles to foreigners (Europeans), 30,000 acres which was not claimed by the natives went to the Crown, and the balance of approximately 3,900,000 acres remained the property of the Fijian landowning units. Kingsley G. Roth, Assistant Colonial Secretary, Fiji, "Native Administration Of Fiji During The Past 75 Years." The Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. Colonial Paper No. 10, 1951.

²As explained to Ralph Stock, Confessions Of A Tenderfoot. (London, 1913), p. 176. Stock traveled through Fiji around 1909-1910.

³Sanderson Committee Report, Cd.5193. Part II: Evidence, p. 65.

⁴South Pacific Enterprise, p. 33.

⁵Gillion, p. 71.

not only a "disagreeable" one but an unprofitable one as well. Consequently, the company decided not to employ the Islanders again, and it came to depend entirely on Indian labour. Island labour, in any case, had once again become scarce and by early 1883 the government partly abandoned the responsibility for introducing Polynesian labourers. The reasons given were their diminishing numbers and the great distances, from which they were brought involved expenses which the planters could not afford and the government could not change upon the revenue of the Colony.¹ However, those smaller planters of coconuts and fruits, who preferred Polynesians because they were "more tractable and pleasant" to work with, were permitted to charter their own recruiting ships, while the government continued to supervise the trade.² While the Fijians were being protected by the government policies, and the Polynesians not only proved to be unsatisfactory sugar plantation labourers but were in short supply as well, the number of Indian labourers continued to increase steadily. During the period 1878-1882, close to 9,223 Islanders were introduced,³ while the number of Indians for the same period was 1,364.⁴ The numbers had dramatically reversed by 1892, when there were approximately 10,000 Indians in the Colony to 2,400 Polynesians.⁵ And by 1899 there were only 103 Polynesians under

¹Administrator J. B. Thurston to Earl of Derby, March 18, 1884. C4434 of 1885. Parliamentary Papers, 1884-1885, LIII (385), p. 75.

²Ibid., p. 75.

³Parnaby, p. 65.

⁴Gillion, appendix, p. 213.

⁵Official Handbook To Fiji, 1892, pp. 17-18.

indenture while 18,780 Indians had come to Fiji to work the sugar plantations.¹

The acceptance of Indian labour in Fiji had not come about without planter opposition. When the first ship with 464 Indian immigrants arrived in May of 1879, approximately a year before the opening of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, the planters refused to apply for the labourers. They had "enormously opposed" Indian immigration,² and now in 1879, since the Island labour had once again become available, they would do without the Indian labourers at this time.³ Only one planter, a Mr. Hill with a coconut plantation on the Rabi Island, took about a hundred Indian labourers.⁴ A few went as house servants, while the government was obliged to employ the rest in the Public Works Department. In 1880, when the Colonial Sugar Refining Company opened, these same labourers were indentured to the company.⁵ In 1882 the company applied for 250 more Indian labourers, and in 1883 it even threatened to withdraw its interests from Fiji to Queensland if the government would not guarantee an adequate supply of Indian labour.⁶

¹Gillion, p. 76. Introduction of Islanders into Fiji ended in 1912.

²Sanderson Committee Report, Cd. 5193. Part II: Evidence, p. 348.

³Gillion, p. 69.

⁴Sir John Gorrie, "Fiji: Notes of A Vacation Tour," Contemporary Review, September 1880, Vol. XXXVIII, p. 506.

⁵Gillion, p. 76.

⁶Fairgrieve to Des Voeux, 15 February 1883, C.O. 384/143. Quoted by Parnaby, p. 65.

Thus it was the Colonial Sugar Refining Company that led the way in accepting Indian labour and from the earliest days it became the largest employer of Indian immigrants. By 1884, 3,995 Indians were employed in Fiji, and approximately 3,814 of these were indentured on sugar plantations. One thousand seven hundred twenty-three were with the Colonial Sugar Refining Company alone.¹ Although for all practical purposes the Indians had now become the labourers of Fiji, their acceptance was, nevertheless, not yet quite complete. While the smaller planters had their own reasons for wanting Polynesians, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company was not altogether satisfied with the Indian workers either. Constant complaints against the Indians were their "poor physique" and their "laziness". Another reason given was that a proportion of women had to come with the male labourers.² To solve these problems, the company decided to introduce Chinese or Japanese labour. The Chinese, however, were thought to be too expensive; moreover, they had not worked well in Queensland. However, the company did introduce 305 Japanese workers in April 1894, but when many of them died of beri beri, the rest had to be sent home within 10 months.³ And, as a matter of some interest, some Chinese labourers also went to Fiji some time before 1917.⁴ However, after examining the conditions on the plantations, the President of the Chinese National Association in Suva decided that the "terms offered were

¹Figures quoted by Gillion, p. 74.

²Gillion, p. 77.

³Sanderson Committee Report, Cd. 5193. Part II: Evidence, p. 43.

⁴Exact date not known.

degrading" and saw to it that his countrymen were repatriated immediately. The Chinese National Association then asked the Chinese government to prohibit indentured labour entirely. This incidence stirred up an intense feeling among the indentured Indian labourers. And, according to an account of one of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company managers, the Indians at the time "looked so ugly and threatening" that they could have murdered the lot of the Europeans.¹

Finally, as it turned out, it was the 'lazy', 'cunning' and 'much despised' Indian - and despised he was - or as the Reverend Burton termed it, "the lithe, sinewy, unkillable Indian," who came to survive the hard labour in Fiji.² It is not that they did not die since a good many lives were lost; but there was no repatriation for the British Indians as there was in the case of the Japanese or Chinese. And, since their supply was "boundless", they kept "coming" at the call of capital to "work in its hot dank" sugar plantations.

¹The above account is related by Charles Freer Andrews on his second visit to Fiji, "Indian Labour In Fiji," (1918 to 1919). Andrews, 1871-1940, went to India from Great Britain as a missionary; became very sympathetic to the Indian social cause; and wrote a number of books and articles on India and the Indians. As a social reformer, he devoted much time to the cause of indentured Indians in colonies and, particularly, Fiji. He visited Fiji three times and the grateful Indians of Fiji named him "Deenabandhu" - a friend of the poor.

²John Wear Burton, Our Indian Work In Fiji, (Suva, 1909), p. 10. Rev. Burton, a Methodist Minister, went to Fiji from Australia in 1902 and worked among the Indians for a number of years. He was also the author of a number of books on Fiji. His Fiji Of Today, (London, 1910) became a pioneer work in exposing the evils of the indenture system in Fiji.

Around the turn of the century, the planter-resistance to Indian labour not only completely disappeared but took quite the opposite turn. The cry now was, "We must have them, we could not go on as an Island without them." Whether the Islands could have gone on without Indian labour or not depends upon one's viewpoint. What is true, however, is that the sugar industry of Fiji at the time could not have survived without Indian labourers. The following table suggests that the rapid growth of the sugar industry coincided with the rapid growth of Indian labourers in the Colony and that the sugar industry could take 'a giant step forward' only because of these labourers.

Years	Number of Indian Labourers in the Colony	Sugar Export in £
1879-1880	463	26,000
1886	6,566	187,456
1887	6,566	205,294
1888	7,105	276,678
1889	7,782	263,553
1890	8,940	244,655
1891	9,978	327,526 ²

¹Sanderson Committee Report, Cd.5193. Part II: Evidence, p. 143.

²Figures for labourers compiled from Gillion, Appendix, p. 214; and for sugar from Derrick, Geography of Fiji, pp. 168-169; Horne, p. 174; Official Handbook To Fiji, 1892, p. 16.

Chapter V

INDIAN INDENTURED LABOURERS 1879-1900

When Fiji decided to import Indian labourers in 1877, she simply had to adopt the well-known Indian indenture system which had been in operation for approximately 50 years and under which some 323,877 Indians already lived in British colonies.¹ Charles Mitchell,² the Agent General of Immigration from Fiji to India, modeled his Immigration Ordinance on those of Trinidad and British Guiana.³ The main features of the Ordinance established indentured agricultural labour for 5 years at specified wages and working hours, a contract enforced by penal sanctions, 40 women to be recruited with every 100 men, return passage after 10 years' residence in the Colony, and permission for the labourers to settle in Fiji after five years of indentured service. The government also stipulated laws governing rations, medical care and housing.⁴ During the 37 years of recruitment - from May 1879 to November 1916 - 87 vessels arrived at Suva from

¹Mr. Geohagen's "Report On Coolie Emigration From India." India Office, 1874. Parliamentary Papers 1874, XLVII (498), p. 68.

²Mitchell had served the Trinidad Immigration Department for seven years before going to Fiji. Sanderson Committee Report, Appendix, p. 62.

³Gordon to Carnarvon, 11 April 1877; Parliamentary Papers 1878, LV (285), p. 45.

⁴Ibid., p. 62.

Calcutta with a total of 60,553 migrant labourers.¹ On arrival, and after the medical examination, the labourers were assigned and legally bound to employers to begin their five years of indentured life according to "very definite and somewhat stringent conditions."² For five years the great majority of the labourers shared a common way of life for, although there were differences on plantations, a certain uniformity was maintained by work conditions and governmental regulations. However, as in most such systems, while the government could lay out the general policies of the indentured labour system, it could exercise little control over their daily lives and over the treatment they received from their sardars and overseers. And, as it turned out in Fiji, the labourers not only found themselves in bondage with hard and heavy 'tasks', but also with low wages, scant food,³ and, above all, in 'lines'⁴ where they were forced to live by law, that were like "stables" where coolies were "herded together like so many penned cattle."⁵ It is not surprising, therefore, that the amount of satisfaction the coolies received on plantations in Fiji was very limited

¹Although the indenture system was not officially abolished until January 1, 1920, immigration was suspended after 1916 because of World War I. Karen R. Hill, "National Consciousness And Imperial Conscience: The Abolition of Indian Indentured Emigration": (Unpublished M. A. Thesis, McGill University, 1970), pp. 160 and 163.

²John Wear Burton, Fiji Of Today (London, 1910), p. 268.

³From the labourers' point of view. Burton, Fiji Of Today, pp. 270-271. See also, Totaram Sandhya, pp. 17-18.

⁴The dwellings of the labourers.

⁵Burton, Fiji Of Today, pp. 270-273. See also, Roberts, p. 305.

indeed and, according to the Andrews and Pearson report,¹ very few escaped hardships during their long five years in indenture.

A working day of the immigrants began at 3 or 4 a.m. After bathing and cooking breakfast and lunch, they walked up to two miles² to the fields with their tools.³ On arrival at the fields at 4 or 5 a.m., the labourers were assigned to their work for the day by the overseers and sardars. Male and female labourers usually worked in separate gangs under sardars, but their performance was individually assessed. On a sugar plantation the work consisted of clearing, digging, draining marsh, hoeing, planting, weeding, and cutting and loading cane. In the earlier years shovel-ploughing was also in practice which was an extremely heavy task. The system of "tasks" prevailed on the plantations / a "task" was defined as the amount of work an able-bodied male labourer could do in six hours' steady work, and in the case of a female, three-fourths of that work.⁴ Although 'time-work' was also allowed under the Immigration Ordinance, whereby the immigrants were to work 9 hours a day, the employers found that, whereas 'time-work' could be abused by the labourers, 'task' work could be adjusted to suit

¹C. F. Andrews and W. W. Pearson, Report On Indentured Labour In Fiji, (Calcutta, 1916), pp. 5 and 9. Hereafter cited as Andrews and Pearson Report.

²Two miles was the maximum distance they could be made to work.

³Totaram Sandhya, My 21 Years In Fiji, (Agra, 1915), p. 20. Totaram Sandhya was born in India in 1876. In 1893 he was misled to Fiji by a recruiter where he served 5 years' indenture. He recounted his experience in My 21 Years In Fiji, on his return to India.

⁴Sanderson Committee Report, Appendix, p. 64.

the interests of the planters. By extending the workload, the employers made the hours of 'task' work the same as those of 'time-work'.¹

Usual tasks on sugar plantations to be completed each day consisted of weeding and trashing 10-15 chains, 6-foot wide areas; draining 200-300 cubic feet; holing 150-200 holes; cutting cane, 3 tons per day; cane-loading, 36 cwt.; and shovel-ploughing, 7-10 chains. On a coconut plantation the 'tasks' usually consisted of cutting 380 lbs. of copra a day.² It should be pointed out that all the work required heavy manual labour: the land was dug with a spade, the field was mowed with a knife, loads were carried on shoulders, and lifting was done by hand.³ And at least one observer felt that these were "the tasks of beasts of burden and of machinery, and not of men."⁴ The labourers were required to complete 5-1/2 tasks a week, working from Monday through Friday and half a day on Saturday. The result of excessive heavy tasks was that only the very strongest labourers could complete their work in 6 hours. In the early years a system called "speed up" was also in operation on Colonial Sugar Refining Company's plantations. What happened was that in order to economize, one overseer was "speeded up" against another to get the maximum work done at the minimum cost. In order to achieve these results, "the very last ounce was taken out

¹In other words, the assigned workload which was to be finished in 6 hours was increased which meant the labourers now had to work 9 hours under 'task' work. Gillion, p. 83.

²Colonial Secretary's office, Fiji, 211/84; 443/87; 2315/88, quoted by Gillion, footnote, p. 109.

³W. A. Chapple, Fiji: Its Problems And Resources, (Auckland, 1921), p. 89. Chapple, a citizen of New Zealand, journeyed through Fiji in 1920.

⁴Ibid., p. 89.

of the Indian labourer by bullying, threatening and flogging."¹

In Fiji overtasking, heavy work and long hours became an integral part of the indenture system from the very early years. At the Colonial Office it was generally understood that the relations between the immigrants and the employers in Fiji were not as good as they were in the West Indies. And Fiji was 'no doubt rather worse than Mauritius and British Guiana.'² Knox, the General Manager of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company reported that, '---there can be no question that the "tasks" in Fiji are heavier than the West Indies, and I do not see any prospect of being able to get more work per day out of the labour than at the present.'³ Not surprisingly; overtasking frequently led to serious trouble. In February of 1886, for instance, 300 Indian labourers went on strike on Colonial Sugar Refining Company's Navuso plantation for being overtasked. Although the Stipendiary Magistrate, Walter Carew, considered that the labourers had been deliberately and continuously overtasked, he nevertheless felt obliged to imprison the ringleaders.⁴ In May of the same year, 130 labourers marched with their implements from the Rewa Company's Koronivia estate protesting against the extension of shovel-ploughing 'tasks' from seven to ten chains. While ordering the task back to its

¹As related to Andrews by overseers who participated in the system, Report Of Andrews' Second Visit To Fiji, (Calcutta, 1917), p. 15. See also Burton, Fiji Of Today, p. 287.

²Fiji Government Emigration Agent, Calcutta to Colonial Office, 10 October 1869 (C.S.O.8/97), quoted by Gillion, p. 93.

³Colonial Sugar Refining Company's Notes on General Manager's Trip to Fiji, 1886, 14, quoted by Gillion, p. 89.

⁴Gillion, p. 83.

original scale, Carew once again, felt obliged to fine several of the labourers. The planters, who already felt that the Indians were "idle", "insubordinate" and even "dangerous", now saw Carew's actions as very sympathetic to the Indians.¹ Unfortunately for the labourers, the acting governor, John Thurston, who was ever sympathetic to the Fijian cause, not only failed to see the legitimate complaints of the labourers, but rather saw the Indians as 'a positive threatened danger to the Colony.'² In August of 1886, he enacted an Ordinance whereby the immigrants were now forbidden to march in large numbers. A group of only five could make complaints and they were not to carry their tools when doing so. And, above all, penalties for insufficient work were greatly increased. While the Fiji Times called this Ordinance 'an enactment positively unique in the history of Fiji,' Wingfield in the Colonial Office, saw it as a 'Draconian law'.³ While most of the Europeans in the Colony had very stereotyped views of the Indians, there were, nonetheless, a handful of officials in Fiji who did stand for justice and the rights of the labourers. Henry Anson, the Head of the Immigration Department in Fiji, for instance, produced a report in 1887 on Indian labourers for the year 1886 in which he

¹Gillion, p. 83.

²John Bates Thurston, later Sir John, was an interesting figure both before and after the cession of Fiji. He was wrecked in Rotumah, 300 miles north of Fiji, in 1864 for 8 months. He went to Levuka, Fiji, after rescue, where he became a planter. He began taking a keen interest in native affairs; became Acting British Consul 1867-1869; a leading influence in the Cakobau Government, 1871-1874; Colonial Secretary post cession; Acting Governor, 1886-1887; and then Governor of Fiji, 1888-1897. He died in Fiji in 1897. As a former planter, his obvious sympathy was for the planters and not the indentured Indian labourers.

³Quoted by Gillion, p. 83.

criticized 'excessive transfers, high mortality, the imprisonment of the immigrants physically incapable of performing the statutory task and needing hospital treatment as soon as they were admitted to goal.¹ The Stipendiary Magistrate, Carew, also pointed out in a private letter to William MacGregor that

the men are entirely at the mercy of the sardars and overseers in the matter of task work and it is perfectly useless for an immigrant to bring a change of overtasking: I believe they are pushed too hard and think a proper man should pass the greater part of his time on the river and go about constantly and examine all tasks and assist the Indians in prosecuting the employers.²

And yet for years there was not one prosecution for overtasking.

Instead, the condition of the labourers continued to deteriorate until over 25 percent of the immigrants were either dying or being repatriated as incapables within their five year terms of indenture as the following figures indicate:

Years	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895
Percent	26.72	30.76	28.95	29.58	19.75 ³

The causes of these anomalies according to Thurston, who was now the Governor of Fiji, were the large number of "incapable persons among the immigrants introduced into the Colony." However, Allen Stewart, the Fiji Government Emigration Agent in Calcutta, proved effectively

¹Quoted by Gillion, p. 84. Acting Governor Thurston was out of the country when this report was produced. Anson's sense of justice was obviously an embarrassment to Thurston, and significantly Thurston relieved Anson of his position in 1888.

²Sir William MacGregor was the Chief Medical Officer who was considered - even by the Colonial Sugar Refining Company itself - to be very sympathetic to the company's cause. Gillion, p. 87.

³Fiji Legislative Council Paper 28/01, quoted by Gillion, p. 91.

with medical support that the labourers sent to Fiji were not inferior to those sent to the other Colonies.' He went on to put the responsibility of excessive break-downs on bad conditions in Fiji.¹ And in his official minutes, John Forster, who was now the Sub Agent of Immigration in Fiji, attributed them "to insufficient food and excessive work."²

If overtasking was inherent in the plantation and overseer system, then abuse and brutality were not far removed. While some overseers and sardars treated the 'lazy' or the 'weak' ones severely, others were habitually brutal, beating both the men and the women at the slightest mistake. The labourers were flogged, whipped, or beaten up; often severe bodily injuries, and at times even death, resulted.³ McNeill and Chiman Lal, for instance, reported that in two such cases the deceased had been struck by a sardar a short time prior to their deaths.⁴ And relating the facts of brutalities on plantations; Burton describes this incident,

A coolie comes out of the mill with his face cut bleeding and some of his teeth knocked in. His blue dungaree clothes are heavily stained with blood. It looks like an accident caused by the machinery. It is not though. He is employed

¹Thurston to Colonial Office, No. 56, 16 June 1892; No. 35, 6 April 1894 I.R.R. Quoted by Gillion, pp. 89-90.

²C.S.O.2777/95, Gillion, p. 90.

³Totaram Sandhya, pp. 20-28. See also Burton, Fiji Of Today, p. 286; and Roberts, p. 306.

⁴"Report to the Government of India on the Conditions of Indian Immigrants in four British Colonies and Surinam," by Messrs. James McNeill and Chiman Lal, Parliamentary Papers, 1914-1916 LXVII, Cd.7744, p. 318. Hereafter cited as McNeill and Chiman Lal Report.

shoveling lime into a grinder and he has been careless enough [accidentally perhaps?] to spill some. This fell upon an Englishman below who came up in anger, and, with a piece of wood, did this. The coolie was a week before he went to work.¹

In another instance the same author tells us of an anxious mother whose child had fever. To keep an eye on the child, she brought him to work with her when a "big, burly Britisher" riding his chestnut horse sees her,

The woman turns in fear, and puts her hands together in entreaty. The whip comes down upon her half-naked back and legs. The child is struck also. Both are crying and screaming, and the mounted brute almost puts his horse's hoofs upon her.²

Alas! If only that overseer could have pictured his mother or his wife in place of that Indian mother! However, Burton goes on to say that "such cases could be multiplied ad nauseam." And according to Hannah Dudley, the case of women was sad indeed.

They are allotted to plantations like so many dumb animals. If they do not perform satisfactorily the work given them, they are punished by being struck or fined, or they are even sent to goal. The life on the plantations alters their demeanour and even their very faces. Some look crushed and broken-hearted, others sullen, others hard and evil.³

¹Burton, Fiji Of Today, pp. 286-287.

²Ibid., p. 286.

³Miss Hannah Dudley, in a letter to Modern Review, March 1913. Miss Dudley was an Australian missionary worker in India who was sent to Fiji in 1897 to work among the Indians there. She had lived in Fiji for 15 years when the letter was published.

While many employers took advantage of the penal clause, there were others who did not believe in governmental regulations as is obvious in one coconut planter's explanation, "If we had to do things exactly on government ordinance lines we might as well shut up shop. What do I mean by that? I mean the stick. Oh, yes we lick 'em."¹ This class of planters believed that the average Indian translated kindness into weakness² and, therefore, to be strong the planters had to be cruel. Abuse and brutality remained a part of the system until its closing years, as was explained in 1910 by Everard im Thurn, the Governor of Fiji, that there were "few cases of ill-treatment - but still there are fairly serious cases of ill-treatment."³ And so grave was the abuse that in 1912 it was recommended that the Agent General should have the power to transfer the labourers without the consent of the employers.⁴ However, this was never implemented.

The labourers on their part and not without reason distrusted the government and felt that there was no justice to be found in the courts. According to the Labour Ordinance, they could make their grievances known to the government inspector. However, since that 'gentleman' was not seen more than once or twice a year,⁵ that

¹Ralph Stock, Confessions Of A Tenderfoot, (London, 1913), p. 174.

²Ibid., p. 175.

³Sanderson Committee Report, Cd. 5193. Part II: Evidence, p. 76.

⁴Roberts, p. 306.

⁵Burton, Fiji Of Today, p. 269. Until 1897 inspectors visited twice a year. After that, at six-week intervals although only to the accessible plantations. Gillion, p. 110.

privilege turned out to be somewhat limited. Complaints could also be made to the magistrate at the court house, but in many instances the court houses were located 20-30 miles away from the plantations making it virtually impossible for the labourer to get there.¹ While there were some plantations where the labourers could and did make their grievances known, on the majority of the estates the Indians were too afraid to complain. The mere fact that the labourers had to work under the same sardars and overseers for five years, often discouraged them from making complaints.² Warnings from the overseers before the inspectors' rounds that the "inspector comes and goes, but you have to work under me for 5 years," were not uncommon.³ It is also significant to note that most of the inspectors were appointed from among the ranks of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company's overseers,⁴ and therefore it goes without saying that the inspectors and the employers often saw things from the same point of view. Furthermore, this small European community belonged to the same social circle and depended upon each other in daily life. This social intercourse between the employers and the inspectors did not go unnoticed by the labourers, and they rightly believed that even if they reported abuses, their complaints would go unheeded.⁵ There were times when beaten and badly bruised labourers would deny to the police that they had been assaulted, or would refuse

¹Burton, Fiji Of Today, p. 269.

²Totaram Sandhya, p. 23.

³Gillion, p. 112.

⁴Ibid., p. 111.

⁵Totaram Sandhya, p. 22.

to go to the court against their 'masters'.¹ They feared the retaliation of their employers far more than they trusted the law. In rare cases when the labourer did go to the court, he would then be unable to produce a witness to support his case. The same fear of retaliation and intimidation haunted the witness as the victim.² One such case occurred in 1893 on the Fiji Sugar Company's Tamanua Navua plantation when an assault was followed by intimidation of witnesses. Of the incidence, Forster,³ the Sub Agent of the Immigration Department in Fiji, wrote that it was 'only another instance that has come to light of the method adopted on this estate of enforcing discipline by terror and illegal violence rather than resort to the law.'⁴ On those occasions when the cases did go to the court, the planters were represented by their lawyers and could always call upon the sardars and overseers as witnesses, whereas the often illiterate labourers were left to defend themselves and more than likely blurted out the wrong things and ended up at the wrong end of the law.⁵ And, finally, when on rare instances convictions were obtained against the overseers, their sentences were so light that the immigrants came to resent the inequality of treatment as was explained by Forster in 1902:

¹Gillion, pp. 113-114.

²Totaram Sandhya, pp. 22-23.

³John Forster had served in the police in India before coming to Fiji. He worked untiringly for the justice of the Indians in Fiji; died in 1902.

⁴Colonial Secretary's office, Fiji Minute Paper 2555/93; 489/95, quoted by Gillion, pp. 114-115.

⁵It was not until 1912 that the government inspectors were allowed to defend the labourers in court.

I may add again what I have often said that the very different punishments meted out for acts of violence by Europeans or by Indians, respectively, do not escape the knowledge of the latter, and it is in human nature to resent them. They no doubt believe that 'what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.'

Another feature of the indenture, perhaps the one most degrading, at least from the labourers' point of view, was the penal clause.² While the clause was seen as important to maintain discipline because the planters could neither fine nor dismiss their labourers, the law nevertheless, made it possible to convict and to classify lazy and particularly weak men and women as criminals. The labourers could be prosecuted and, upon conviction, fined or imprisoned for a number of labour offenses such as desertion, unlawful absence from work, failure to complete a task, failure to show normal diligence, disobedience, and using insulting language. An extension of the indenture was also ordered by the court to make up the time lost through absence, incompleteness of the task, the time spent in court, and the term of imprisonment.³ And according to the records, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company made a liberal use of extensions of indenture and at one time the government was particularly concerned about the

¹Colonial Secretary's Office, Fiji Minute Paper 4411/02, quoted by Gillion, p. 114.

²It is significant to note that the penal clause was not mentioned in the agreements signed by the emigrants in India, but it was enforced in Fiji. This amounted to deliberate deception.

³Sanderson Committee Report, Part I, p. 88. See also Gillion, p. 118.

prosecutions on the Colonial Sugar Refining Company's plantations.¹

The figures below indicate the number of extensions of indenture for the following years:

Years	No. under Indenture	No. of Complaints	No. of Convictions	No. Convicted with Hard Labour	No. of Extensions of Indenture
1906	11,894	1,577	1,402	461	725
1907	11,409	2,291	2,091	408	922
1908	11,978	2,237	1,981	405	842
1909	11,988	1,924	1,747	510	567
1910	12,673	1,911	1,717	449	446
1911	15,352	1,520	1,372	446	447
1912	16,111	1,256	1,135	186	447 ²

According to the statistics above, 40 to 50 percent of those convicted under the breach of labour laws before 1912 had their indentures extended.³

The result of all the brutalities on the plantations, Thurston's repressive Ordinance of 1886, and the inequality of justice in the courts, was that the labourers took the law into their own hands. Or, as Burton put it, "he tried the edge of his cane-knife

¹Gillion, p. 119. There were 5½ tasks a week, and if a man did a full 5½ tasks he made 5s6d. If he completed only 4 tasks, he earned 4/-. On conviction for incompleting a task, he would be fined perhaps 2/- and his time extended 2½ days; 1½ days for the task that was not done, plus 1 day wasted at the court.

²Indentured Labourers (Crown Colonies), Return to an Address of the Honourable The House of Commons, dated 23 July 1912, (printed 5 May 1913, London).

³The law was changed in 1913 making the imprisonment or extension of indentures only in serious offenses.

upon the skull of the English overseer."¹ And, indeed, the crime rate - assaults, murder, and suicide - of the immigrants reached such proportions that the Indians came to be known as the 'criminals of Fiji'.² In 1899, for instance, there were 1,300 annual charges against the immigrants out of the total population of 18,780, and the proportion of conviction was 80 percent. It is significant to note, however, that in this actual number of charges for crime, "Breach of Labour Laws" are also included.³ While the majority of the Europeans in Fiji found it much simpler to believe that the Indians were of the "criminal" and "immoral" class, some few felt at least that the real answer to the problem was not far to seek. John Forster, for instance, pointed out that,

I have no doubt that rightly or wrongly the offenders in majority of the cases 'do' act under a 'sense of injustice' and I think it worthy of note that such offenses are almost invariably I think committed under circumstances which preclude the possibility of the perpetrators escaping the legal consequences. There is no firing through the windows or shooting from behind hedge or blowing up, and they are committed in broad daylight with generally available witnesses of them. Under any ordinary rules as a human conduct or motives these circumstances would be held to indicate a sense of injustice as a probable moving impulse -

¹Burton, Fiji Of Today, p. 270.

²Ralph Stock, The Chequered Cruise: A True And Intimate Record Of Strenuous Travel, (New York, 1916), p. 148. Stock's second trip. See also Harry L. Foster, A Vagabond In Fiji, (New York, 1927), pp. 246-251. And, Finucane, p. 42.

³Finucane, p. 42. It is not clear whether or not crimes under "Breach of Labour Laws" were always included in the annual list.

whether such feelings were logically based on facts or utterly unreasonable.¹

In any case, assaults upon the overseers were somewhat frequent and "often diabolical in design and execution."² The major causes of these attacks were retaliation for assaults on immigrants, excessive tasking, and misunderstanding or ignorance of the labourers' customs, character and language. However, the causes of the crimes were sometimes obscure and in many cases never came to light. And, while believing that in a large percentage of cases the victim himself was principally to be blamed, Burton goes on to say,

Sometimes - much too frequently - it is the white man's relations with Indian women which are cause of the assault. Some Englishmen seem to imagine that because a woman is brown she has, therefore, no rights of person, and there is a certain class, happily growing less in Fiji, to whom no woman is sacred, and who profess incredulity if either a woman or her husband are above selling virtue.³

And, indeed, there were times when wives, husbands and occasional sardars were beaten up and punished when they refused to serve the interests of the English overseers.⁴ The immigrants on their part took the only course of action they thought was open to them; that is, they retaliated by making violent attacks. Consequently, their crime rate continued to rise until 1914, when

¹Colonial Secretary's Office, Fiji, Minute Paper 3121/93, quoted by Gillion, p. 116.

²Burton, Fiji Of Today, p. 288. See also Stock, The Chequered Cruise, pp. 148-158. Stock gives an account of life on a coconut plantation. He also interviewed an ex-indentured labourer, a Buldi Maharaj.

³Burton, Fiji Of Today, pp. 288-290.

⁴Ibid., pp. 290-293. See also Totaram Sandhya, pp. 22-26.

Out of 15,603 indentured coolies in Fiji, eleven committed suicide, seven attempted to commit suicide, ten were convicted of committing murder, seven were murdered, twenty-seven were convicted of the violent crime of wounding, thirteen were wounded, two were convicted of man-slaughter and three were killed by man-slaughter. The number of coolies actually charged in court for committing these crimes, together with those who suffered with them, amounted to nearly one hundred persons. This means that one in every 140 of the adult indentured coolies in Fiji, during the year 1914, were involved in violent crime, ending in murder, man-slaughter, suicide, or violent assault.¹

It was not that the Indian was habitually criminal. The fact was that in the United Provinces and Madras, where the majority of the Fiji immigrants came from, there was "only one conviction for murder in every 250,000 people each year, or four per million per annum."

Whereas in Fiji, among the same stock of people, there was "one conviction for murder each year in every 3,000 persons, or 333 per million per annum." That is to say that the murder rate in Fiji was eighty times as high as that of India.²

Included in the high rate of serious assaults and murder was "the long, never-ending roll of these suicides," which shocked the government and the planters of Fiji alike.³ McNeill and Chiman Lal reported that during the five years, 1907-1912, the suicide rate among the indentured in Fiji was 926 per million. In the United Provinces

¹Andrews and Pearson Report, p. 29. This report is of 1914; the conditions supposedly had much improved by then. It is also significant to note that the crime was almost entirely confined to the indentured Indians in Fiji. It was not found among the free Indians.

²Ibid., p. 29.

³Ibid., p. 28.

the rate was 63 per million and in Madras, 45 per million.¹ And the report of Andrews and Pearson did not differ much when they reported that, whereas in India only one in twenty thousand, or 50 per million per year, committed suicide, in Fiji it was one in every 950, or over, one thousand per million per year.² The cause of suicides in Fiji was often explained as "sex disproportion" and "sex jealousy". The fact that there were only 40 adult females to every 100 males may have had some effect; although, according to McNeill and Chiman Lal, this, was not noticeable in the case of Surinam where the sex proportion of the immigrants was the same as that of Fiji. Moreover, from the record of inquiries they concluded that in 15 out of 109 cases sexual jealousy was recognized as responsible for all suicides; that is, approximately seven percent of all the cases. However, even when these cases were eliminated, a high rate remained to be explained and the report added that when all allowances were made it was impossible not to conclude that the conditions under which the labourers lived conduced to a high suicide rate.³ In his inquiries, Andrews found that suicides frequently took place out of "despair" during the days when 'speeding up' was in operation. These suicides were invariably committed between 3 a.m. and 4 a.m., soon after the labourers were awakened in the mornings by loud clangings of the gongs. The unending misery and the

¹McNeill and Chiman Lal Report, p. 318. In Trinidad, for the years 1903-1913, there were 400 suicides per year and in British Guiana the average annual rate was 100 per million. In Fiji, Madras immigrants were more prone to commit suicide than other Indians.

²Andrews and Pearson Report, p. 29.

³McNeill and Chiman Lal Report, p. 319.

hard labour year after year would swell the mind of the tired man and, consequently, one early morning he would be found hanging. Those who saw the bodies after death described one common feature, "the feet were drawn up tightly, whereas they could have easily been let down to touch the ground. The 'will to die' was much stronger than the 'will to live'."¹ In view of the above facts, it is difficult to conclude that the suicide rate of the Indians can simply be explained in terms of 'sex-jealousy'. Furthermore, while the records show the high percentage of crime rate among the immigrants, the explanation of their occurrence and the identification of the victims are obscure. And, above all, the records fail to shed any light on the crime rate of the overseers. If all the brutalities and abuses, including those committed against the Indian women, for instance, were reported and recorded, then their crime rate would no doubt be more than shocking. As it was, all the hospitals belonged to the planters themselves and they reported and recorded whatever served their interests best. It is not too difficult to conceive that when a labourer died after a severe blow, to avoid the law, the particular case was simply entered in the records as "suicide" thereby swelling the statistics of 'sex-jealousy' and 'suicide'. In their report, Andrews and Pearson pointed out the fact that, "it was to the interest of the planter to hush up serious crime on his plantation; and in the years when the indenture system itself was in danger, the temptation to hide facts, which might tell against

¹As described to Andrews by many overseers who had witnessed these. Report of Andrews' Second Visit to Fiji, 1917, p. 15.

the system, must have been very great indeed."¹ And more revealing is the report of Arthur Coates, the Agent General for Immigration, for, when referring to suicides in 1911, he recorded, "---and in five other cases immigrants were found dead after a lapse of time under circumstances which permitted of the theory of suicide but without sufficient evidence of the cause."² And, finally, there were no investigations or autopsies. The coolies died but no one actually knew or cared to know how they died.

The most uninviting nature of the immigrants' living quarters was another deplorable feature of the indenture system. The "lines", as they were called, were long rows of black buildings divided into cubicles of ten feet by seven feet³ and had no floors save the ones made by the Indians themselves of clay and cow-dung. The cubicles had doors but no windows and were divided with partitions. The partitions were topped with wire nets for the purpose of ventilation though not for privacy. Each shed was assigned to three single men or a family of husband and wife with two children. Here in these cubicles the immigrants cooked,⁴ ate, slept, stored their tools, utensils, firewood, clothes, and perhaps a goat, a dog, and a fowl or two, and lived "amid the most insanitary conditions in indescribable and disgusting filth."⁵

¹Andrews and Pearson Report, pp. 29-30.

²Quoted in McNeill and Chiman Lal Report, p. 318.

³The rooms were enlarged to 10'x12' in 1908.

⁴Separate kitchens were provided after 1908.

⁵The above paragraph is based on Burton, Fiji Of Today, pp. 271-273; Totaram Sandhya, pp. 16-17; Gillion, pp. 104-105; Andrews and Pearson Report, pp. 22-31; and Roberts, p. 305. See also Charles Freer Andrews, India And The Pacific. (London: 1937), p. 46.

And, most of all, these 'half-open' cubicles failed to provide the privacy of a decent family life. Perhaps the mud-huts of most of the immigrants in India were no better, but at least they did preserve the families' privacy and integrity. Of these living quarters of the immigrants, Burton wrote,

One of the saddest and most depressing sights a man could behold, if he have any soul at all, is a 'coolie line' in Fiji. There is a look of abjectness and misery on almost every face that haunts him. Dirt, filth, and vile stenches abound. Wickedness flaunts itself unshamedly. Loose, evil-faced women throw their jibes at criminal-looking men, or else quarrel with each other in high, strident voices made emphatic by wild angry gestures. The beholder turns away striving to discover whether pity or disgust is uppermost in his mind. There is much occasion for both.¹

Living as the labourers did, cut away from all family ties as well as moral, social and religious obligations, moral degradation up to some extent could be expected. However, the moral standards of the immigrants in Fiji deteriorated to such an extent that terms such as the "morals of the poultry yard" became applicable to the "lines".² Sadly, the system itself encouraged such debasement. One persistent feature of the indenture system was the low percentage of adult women to adult men. During the years 1879 to 1916, the percentages to the total number of emigrants from ages 10 to over 40 were: men, 65.0 percent; and women, 26.7 percent.³ While the Labour Ordinance called

¹John Hear Burton, Our Indian Work in Fiji, (Suva, Fiji, 1909), p. 17.

²Andrews and Pearson Report, p. 31.

³As given in Calcutta emigration reports, Gillion, Appendix E, p. 210.

for 40 women to 100 men, an undesirable proportion to begin with, the government and the planters of Fiji found even this proportion disadvantageous to maintain. And in 1883, the Colonial Secretary of Fiji commanded the Emigration Agent in Calcutta to "reduce the number of women in the future to 33 per 100 men."¹ Furthermore, with the method of recruiting of individuals in India, rather than families, it was found exceedingly difficult to obtain 40 single women without having to recruit from the prostitute class. Consequently, it was estimated that at least 30-40 'abandoned women' came out on each ship.² And ironically enough, the planters actually wanted this particular class of women to make the system work as they explained that "the system couldn't go on without" them.³ On some plantations the employers took advantage of the glaring fact, of a shortage of women on the one hand and available prostitutes on the other, and arranged for one single woman to serve three or four men.⁴ This practice of allotting three or four men to each single woman was reported in the Fiji Government Medical Report that "one indentured Indian woman has to serve three indentured men---."⁵ And Florence Garnham pointed out in her report

¹Quoted by Andrews, Andrews' Second Report on "Indian Labour In Fiji," p. 20.

²Andrews and Pearson Report, p. 4.

³As explained to Andrews and Pearson by the planters, Ibid., p. 27. These same planters opposed the immigration of whole families.

⁴Stock, Confessions Of A Tenderfoot, p. 179. See also Julian Thomas, Cannibals And Convicts: Notes Of Personal Experiences In The Western Pacific. (Melbourne: 1886), p. 335.

⁵Quoted in Andrews and Pearson Report, p. 13.

that "polyandary in lines was not uncommon."¹ Added to all these were the nature of the 'lines' where solicitation was always open to great temptation. The most pathetic irony of it all was that after encouraging and condoning such a system the Fiji planters turned around and justified their attitudes and actions by labeling the Indians an "immoral lot."² How inaccurate were the justifications of the planters was pointed out by Florence Garnham when she wrote,

European people seemed to be under the impression that the Indian immigrant had but brought an immoral mode of life with him into the colony. As a matter of fact, the home life of the village people in the United Provinces, the district from which most of the Indian people were recruited, is so safeguarded as to warrant the statement that they are more free from social evils than any other people in the world.³

And Burton also pointed out that, "The Indian race has had a unique history and that history has been preeminently religious. Perhaps they are the most religious people on the face of the earth."⁴ And, yet, these were the people who had now become the 'criminals' and the

¹Florence Garnham, Report On "Social And Moral Conditions Of Fiji Indians." Extract of the Report in Andrews' Second Report On "Indentured Labour In Fiji," Appendix, p. 30. Miss Garnham of the London Missionary Society, Calcutta, was sent to Fiji in 1909 by the Women's Organization in Australia and New Zealand to look into the social and moral conditions of Indians in Fiji. While she was less critical than Andrews, she nevertheless confirmed the existence of serious moral evils and recommended the cancellation of the indenture system.

²Thiele, op. cit., p. 377.

³Report of Florence Garnham in Andrews' Second Report, "Indentured Labour In Fiji," Appendix, p. 31.

⁴John Wear Burton, Our Indian Work in Fiji, p. 37.

'immorals' of the Colony. The Indians in Fiji knew that they had become a degraded people, but they could not understand how it happened. And it was not without reason that they called their entire indentured life 'narak', meaning 'hell'.

Another general grievance of the labourers was their low wages.¹ The economic betterment in Fiji, which the labourers had been led to expect, turned out to be another disappointment.² The wage of one shilling per day was specified in the Labour Ordinance, and a man could earn his one shilling if he completed his day's task. However, either because the labourers were inexperienced or the tasks were excessively heavy, they could seldom complete them and earn their shilling. Moreover, the planters' action in cutting the wages at the slightest opportunity, such as sickness, failure to complete the tasks, a day spent at the court or excessive rain, reduced the wages even further.³ The average wages of a male labourer in 1902 were 11.52d per working day, while that of a female was 5.14d. In earlier years the earnings were less, while there was an increase of less than 1d during 1902-1912.⁴ During the years 1912 to 1916, the male labourers

¹ Andrews and Pearson Report, p. 4. Also pointed out by Florence Garnham.

² When the 1890 annual report was disclosed, Allen Stewart, the Fiji Government Emigration Agent in Calcutta, who was highly critical of the conditions in Fiji, pointed out that the wages in Fiji were altogether too low. In 1894 the Colonial Office also reproved Governor Thurston for high mortality and low wages of the labourers. Gillion, pp. 90-91.

³ Andrews and Pearson Report, pp. 14-15.

⁴ Gillion, footnote, p. 110.

usually made their 1/- day as may be seen from the following:

Years	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916
Men	12.24d	12.29d	12.55d	12.52d	12.90d
Women	6.56d	6.54d	6.61d	6.54d	6.56d

Significantly, the wages remained at 1/- per work-day from 1879 to 1920. That the rate of living might have gone up in 41 years was not taken into consideration.² Furthermore, it was believed that the indentured Indians were 'dazzling in wealth'³ on 1/- a day and were much better off in Fiji than they were in India, when the truth of the matter was that with the rate of living three times as high in the Colony, sometimes they were worse off. And during these same years the Colonial Sugar Refining Company was busy monopolizing the sugar industry of Fiji. Its production of raw sugar multiplied five-fold within 20 years - from 11,859 tons in 1890, to 85,574 tons in 1900, and 62,776 tons in 1910.⁴ Also, by 1903 it was able to become the owner of the largest sugar-mill in the southern hemisphere. All this was achieved on the basis of cheap Indian labour. And yet, during the war years when the sugar companies, the planters, and the Fiji

¹Andrews' Second Report, "Indentured Labour In Fiji," p. 4.

²As it happened during World War I and the three-month great Australian strike in 1917 which greatly increased the price of food stuff.

³Stock, Confessions Of A Tenderfoot, p. 179.

⁴Gillion, p. 97.

Government realized enormous war profits,¹ the indentured coolies, with soaring prices, struggled to survive on 1/- a day.

The medical care of the labourers was generally satisfactory from the beginning, and those in charge of the hospitals made efforts to carry out the Government Regulations.² However, how many Indian indentured labourers lost their lives on plantations in Fiji is not clear. According to one estimate, many thousands must have died of 'debility' or 'dysentry' and 'ankylostomiasis' while countless numbers were left weakened and broken down.³ And because of the social conditions under which the labourers lived, venereal disease, sores, ulcers and tuberculosis also took their toll. While the real victims of the system were the sick and the weak, the women and the children suffered no less from neglect.⁴ The conditions on the plantations did improve towards the closing years of the indenture. The death rate of 52.8 per thousand in 1895,⁵ fell to 37.8 in 1910, and to 22.1 in 1912.⁶

As for recreation on the plantations, there was a break in the week from the drudgery of the daily routine. At a quarter past twelve each Saturday, the work stopped until 3 or 4 a.m. on Monday. During

¹Andrews' Second Report, "Fiji Indentured Labour," p. 4.

²Andrews and Pearson Report, p. 47.

³Gillion, pp. 106-107.

⁴Florence Garnham Report, p. 30. See also Burton, Our Indian Work In Fiji, pp. 16-17.

⁵The 1895 record showed that one in every nineteen labourers was dying. Gillion, p. 92.

⁶Ibid., p. 102.

this break, the labourers did their 'bazar', visited friends, attended weddings, played music, enjoyed their 'full fill of sleep,' and above all, for the first time in the week, they were not too tired 'to enjoy their meals.'¹ Other usual holidays on the plantations were Christmas Day, New Year's Day, Holi, Moharram and Easter Monday. The Hindus and the Muslims celebrated their religious festivals of Holi and Moharram. While there were but a few days of happiness on the plantations, the general life of the semi-servile imposed a hard lot. It had a demoralizing effect and during their long five years, many were broken down in body and in spirit. Even with many improvements after 1908, the lot of the labourers remained 'rather worse' in the Colony, and it is no wonder that when the abolition of the indenture system was being forcefully debated, the anti-indenture forces chose Fiji as their field of action.² By 1920, when the system was abolished, it had brought 60,553 Indians into the Colony. And, unlike the Polynesian labourers, 60 percent of the indentured Indians chose to settle in Fiji after the expiry of their contract. By the year 1921, out of the total number of 60,634 Indians, almost half (26,810) had been born in the Colony.³

¹Burton, Our Indian Work In Fiji, pp. 20-26.

²Karen R. Hill, pp. 136 and 144.

³Gillion, p. 188.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSIONS

The indenture system in Fiji, as in most other colonies, began in response to the need of planters for cheap labour. However, Fiji was different from most other British colonies in that it was neither a colony when the indenture system began nor did it have slavery prior to indenture. As the indenture system took hold in Fiji, however, it soon developed into a 'peculiar institution' of its own. The so-called 'indenture system' under which the 'indentured labourer' over whom the 'master' had the sole right of "life and death and subject to no law," was in fact a 'new slavery'.¹ In the pre-cession period, to promote the system, such theories as 'modernizing', 'Christianising' and 'economic betterment' were often advanced. Perhaps in their zeal for 'modernizing', 'Christianising' and 'economic betterment' the promoters of the system forgot to take into consideration that that enforced happiness for the Polynesians was acute misery. Nor did the situation improve much after the cession of the Islands. Too much still depended on the trust and the humanity of individual recruiters and planters. How much better the Indians were under the Imperial Government is also open to question. Their conditions have been described as 'akin to slavery'. And Burton at least felt that,

¹As described by Adamson in the case of the Guyanese indentured labour. Alan H. Adamson, Sugar Without Slaves: The Political Economy Of British Guiana, 1838-1904. (New Haven, London, 1972), p. 255..

"The difference between the state he [the Indian] finds himself in and absolute slavery is merely in the name and terms of years. The chances are that as a slave he would be both better housed and better fed than he is today."¹ The type of treatment the Indians received on plantations in Fiji, however, was not unique to Fiji. According to reports much the same took place in most other British Colonies where Indians had been indentured. While a full comparative study of the treatment the Indians received in various colonies is yet to be done, some reports do suggest that the Fijian conditions in some respects were somewhat worse. Since the Indian immigration to Fiji began some 50 years after the system was first established, the conditions both in recruiting areas and on plantations were expected to be better. The Sanderson Committee also reported that since in Fiji

immigration began at a comparatively recent date the Colony was enabled to profit by the experience of other Colonies and to avoid the abuses connected with the earlier attempts to introduce labour from India.²

But the fact was that the Colony did not profit anything by the experiences of other Colonies. Andrews and Pearson reported that at least 80% of the immigrants to Fiji were misled,³ thus confirming that abuse in recruiting areas was still very much in practice. And the conditions offered on Fiji plantations, poor housing, low wages and heavy tasks, were probably somewhat worse than in other Colonies. Perhaps one reason was because Fiji, a new Colony, was struggling for

¹ Burton, Fiji Of Today, p. 271.

² Sanderson Committee Report, cd. 5193, Part II. Evidence, p. 85.

³ Andrews and Pearson Report, p. 5.

economical survival and could not offer better conditions initially. When the sugar companies and the government were in a position to improve the lot of the labourers, improvements did not come; that is, not until the closing years of the indenture system. A good deal depended on the discretion of the governor in the Colony. A governor with a kinder disposition towards the immigrants might have helped. Furthermore, while the Imperial Government and British Indian Government could lay out the rules and regulations on paper, they could not safeguard the interests of the labourers in practice. When abuses were reported, the "protectors" of the indentured labourers failed to take any sterner steps besides issuing 'mild' warnings. Another important handicap the labourers experienced was the lack of any leaders to whom they could turn for help. Public opinion and the Press was dominated by the planters and the sugar companies. Strikes were illegal and the government courts could not be trusted. This led the labourers to take direct action into their own hands and in so doing they made themselves the 'criminals of the Colony'.

The planters, sugar companies, managers and overseers, themselves provide an interesting area of study. Their stereotyped views, and those of the European community as a whole, were a power to be reckoned with. It is not that they despised only the Indian, while enjoying his labour; Fijians were their targets long before the Indians arrived on the scene. The hostility felt by the white community to any form of native government, Gordon attributed to "the contemptuous disbelief in the capacity of the 'nigger' for anything but plantation work, which is strongly rooted in the average Australian

Colonist."¹ They saw all the natives regardless of their "hereditary ranks, high bred manners or however keen their intellect was, as the inferior of the meanest white vagabond in the group."² For their efforts to improve the lot of the natives, governors Gordon and Des Voeux were attacked in the Press and the Legislative Council and a request was sent to the Colonial Office asking the removal of Governor Gordon. And when Thurston had tried to champion the cause of the natives in the early 1870's, he was opposed and hated by almost all of his countrymen, as he wrote to Captain Hope, "I do not think, I have a white friend in the country."³ Ironically enough, it was under Thurston's governorship⁴ that the indentured Indians suffered most and it was Thurston who relieved Anson of his post in 1888 only because Anson stood for justice for the labourers. While there were such men as Thurston, MacGregor and the majority of the planters and overseers, there were still others such as Gordon, Forster, Anson, Wingfield and Carew who saw the injustices and attempted to correct them. And later, it was Burton who perceived the moral and social evils inherent in the system.

The 'indenture system' as it was on ~~paper~~ and perhaps with some modifications such as 'whole families to be recruited rather than individuals,' might have been acceptable. What made the system wrong was the inhumanity of the recruiters and the planters and the excessive.

¹Most Colonists in Fiji were from Australia.

²Gordon, Contemporary Review, p. 728.

³Quoted by Derrick, History Of Fiji, p. 230.

⁴From 1888 to 1897. He was also the acting governor between 1886-1887.

abuses connected with it, while at the same time the government was either unable or unwilling to enforce its own regulations. The condition of the indentured was best summed up in the testimony of Bechu before the West Indian Royal Commission in 1897, "The common lot of the immigrant was to be overworked, underpaid, robbed, and beaten by drivers, overseers, and managers alike."¹ And the feelings of the indentured was perhaps best perceived by Edward Jenkins when he wrote that the planters failed to "appreciate the sense of wrong, the feeling of being trampled on, which fills the mind even of a coolie, when deprived, not so much of his rice, as some of his rights."² It is, perhaps, just as well that human feelings cannot be measured and recorded. The economic betterment was purchased at a very high cost of moral and social degradation and social justice. And that, too, the economic betterment did not come to the average immigrant himself. True, his child has benefited the material advantages. But for him, too, in Fiji the social and political atmosphere has always been unstable and land acquisition is still a major problem.

Gordon's paramount policy of saving the Fijians from extinction has worked. Fijian population today is once again in the majority.³ The polynesians have long since disappeared and been forgotten.

¹Quoted from Adamson, Sugar Without Slaves, p. 265.

²Edward J. Jenkins, The Coolie - His Rights and Wrongs, (London: 1871), p. 360.

³Indians were in the majority for a number of years, thus causing an "Indian Problem". Some observers had felt that Fiji might even become a little 'India in the Pacific.'

The Indians, however, are making their presence felt. Fiji gained its independence in 1970. Power shifted from the British hands into Fijian hands. And whether the Indians can be as much a part of Fiji as Fijians are without losing their race, religion and cultural heritage is yet to be settled. Even though a fourth generation Fiji-born Indian is growing up today, he is still "too much Indian" for a Fijian. Racial, social and political frustrations of Indians in Fiji today are a continuing part of the problems of the indenture system of yesterday.

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