Chapter One
Nineteenth century was a century of 'men moving', as it marked gigantic human displacements, primarily of the labouring class across regions, nations and continents. This century also witnessed a unique blending of commercial interests and political power which got manifested in the setting up of 'empire' and creating colonies across the Africa and Asia, primarily by the industrialising European powers – the Dutch, French and British. This novel phenomenon of territorial expansion with capitalist intent as it’s mainstay, has been studied under the rubric of 'imperialism'. Both these essential markers of the nineteenth century – large scale migration and imperialist expansion did not ensue by themselves, but had an inter-dependent causal relationship, each one facilitating the advancement of the other. Subsequently, a new era of ‘capitalist world-economy’ began in which ‘industrialisation and the introduction of large-scale cash cropping in agriculture went apace’ and to smooth the progress of this new order, ‘political economies were refashioned, social ties rent and rearranged, and people moved from areas of supply to areas of demand.’

The Need for New Labourers

The expansion of the capitalist world economy under the aegis of imperialism necessitated a colossal demand for labour, especially for labour intensive plantation

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2 Term originally used by Immanuel Wallerstein.
work, which could not be fulfilled by the locally available labour force in the regions of expansion. The problem of labour scarcity was further augmented by the abolition of slavery throughout the empire. Slavery in the British empire was abolished on 1 August 1834 through an Act of Parliament. However, slave owners were being protected against the immediate labour crisis in the wake of slave emancipation through the provision of mandatory apprenticeship under which all ex-slave labourers had to work for four to five years. Despite this immediate respite, the abolition of slavery created a sense of insecurity and anxiety among the planters and necessitated the search for alternative sources of labour because the ex-slaves just refused to work. The newly acquired freedom was perceived by the ex-slave population not only as a respite from the repression of slavery but also as a great emotional triumph. They just refused to work even under the new free system because it had remnants of their slave past and they did not want to be associated with anything which would remind them of their disgraced past. However, it would be worth underlining here that the degree to which the abolition of slavery had an adverse impact on capitalist production varied according to the locations. On the locations where capitalist enterprises had already made significant progress depending upon slave labourers as in the Caribbean colonies, the brunt of abolition was more severely felt than in the newly expanding regions like Mauritius which had just started expanding sugar plantation for capitalist needs. In the latter the pre-existent slave labour supply had already proved to be inadequate to meet the massive demand of labourers for the labour intensive sugar plantation and Mauritian planters were already looking for alternative sources of labour.

\(^5\) In French and Dutch colonies, the emancipation of slaves came later. Slavery was abolished in French and Dutch colonies in 1848 and 1873 respectively and therefore they joined the process of importing labourers under indenture system much later.
To meet this increased demand for labourers which was required for the growth of the capitalist production system, a ‘new labour regime was inaugurated’ in which ‘labour began to flow from regions where people were unemployed, or displaced from agriculture or cottage industries, towards regions of heightened industrial or agricultural activity.’ For the development of this new capitalist order in the 19th century, Eric Wolf, in his seminal study of the rise of the modern world order around European capitalist expansion, has traced three waves of migration, ‘each a response to the critical changes in the demand for labour, each creating a new working class’. Another distinguished scholar Stanley Engerman, however, discerns only two streams. According to Wolf, the first wave of migration began in England and labourers started to migrate short distance industrial towns like Lancashire, Preston, etc. This initial wave soon also took off in the industrial and agricultural regions of other European countries like Belgium, Prussia, and Germany but it was limited to the initial years of industrialisation and within the European region. In the second wave of migration, an estimated fifty million people left the European region for various parts of America, especially the United States between 1800 and 1914. This wave was voluntary in nature and these emigrant labourers were free, without any legal obligation for entering into any contract or specific work. While some of the destinations had a traditional slave labouring class like in the coffee plantations in Brazil, for many other destinations, the demand for these labourers was created by the recent expansion of industries and agriculture and not by the slaves abandoning the

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6 Wolf, Eric, R., Europe and the People Without History, pp. 356, 361.
9 Wolf, Eric, R., Europe and the People Without History, pp. 362-363. (for Engerman it was the first stream)
work in the post emancipation era. In the third wave of migration, labourers from underdeveloped, 'low income' regions, primarily European colonies, went mainly to labour intensive tropical plantation or mining, such as Indian indentured labourers to Mauritius, Trinidad, and Fiji; Chinese and Japanese contract labourers to Peru, Guiana, Hawaii, etc. These settlements were developed by the imperial powers essentially to facilitate the further growth of the capitalist metropolis by producing raw materials for industrial or human consumption. Emigration under this stream was conducted under a well structured state regulated system and the emigrants' passages were sponsored. Emigrants were tied to a contract of service, often entered into at the source of origin itself, for a fixed tenure and type of work to be performed and they were legally compelled to observe the terms and conditions of the contracts.

Since the subject of this work, i.e. emigration of Indian labourers to work on the sugar plantations of Mauritius under the indenture system, falls under the purview of this third stream of migration, I shall discuss the emigration of labourers under contract system in a more descriptive manner in order to situate my work in a comparative setting.

**Labour Migration under Contract System**

To ensure the availability of migrant labourers in abundance, the plantation lobby preferred the contract system against the free labour because it ensured the availability of labourers for a fixed period and also had the possibility of further extension. To obtain the labourers under contract system, the first obvious choice of planters was the African region because it had supplied the largest numbers of slave-labourers. They tried to rope in the liberated African population under contracts but

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soon it proved to be inadequate. Not many liberated Africans were willing to migrate to unknown destinations under a system which appeared to be very close to slavery, which was the most hated term in their lexicon. After the African experiment, the next target of the planters of the new imperial economy were European labourers whom they believed had superior work habits and 'whose presence would “whiten” the population'. Despite a massive outflow of emigrants from European regions during the same time, colonial planters could not secure sufficient supplies of Europeans to migrate and work on rigorous plantations under contracts. These European emigrants had better alternatives available in North American regions and that too as free labourers without entering into any contractual obligation. They also had a strong antipathy to the chores and rigours of plantation work and therefore, this experiment also failed to meet the mammoth demand for contract labourers for the rapidly growing plantation system, especially sugar plantations which witnessed rapid expansion beyond the Caribbean into Hawaii, Cuba, Mauritius, and some regions in South-East Asia.

The regions towards which the planters could look for the supply of contract labourers as a last resort were the ‘densely populated’ regions of Asia – China, Japan, India and few a Pacific Islands; and in the course of history, these regions did satisfy the demands from the rapidly growing plantation settlements. Following table shows the volumes, regions of supply, and destinations of contract labour migration in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

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Table 1.1

Immigration of Labourers under Contract System during the 19th and early 20th Centuries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions of Origin</th>
<th>Destinations</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Number of Immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>British Guiana</td>
<td>1852-1879</td>
<td>13,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>1841-1880</td>
<td>138,156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>1841-1880</td>
<td>117,432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transvaal</td>
<td>1901-1910</td>
<td>63,938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>1851-1900</td>
<td>34,309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>1891-1920</td>
<td>20,168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>1868-1900</td>
<td>65,034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islands</td>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>1861-1910</td>
<td>62,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>1861-1920</td>
<td>27,334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>British Caribbean</td>
<td>1831-1870</td>
<td>39,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reunion</td>
<td>1941-1860</td>
<td>37,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>French Caribbean</td>
<td>1851-1870</td>
<td>19,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>British Caribbean</td>
<td>1831-1860</td>
<td>40,966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>1871-1900</td>
<td>13,401</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* for figures of Indian indentured emigration to different destinations see section iii.

i). Emigration from China

China was one of the most populated regions of the world (it has the highest population in world even today) and had an established tradition of migration. However the more important inducement for the massive out migration of Chinese labour under contract system in the nineteenth century was closely associated with the deteriorating socio-economic conditions. The Chinese economic and political order was completely disrupted by periodic natural disasters like floods and droughts, wars and rebellions, like the Taiping rebellion etc., which resulted in a severe regional

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imbalance and thus created a large surplus workforce especially in the coastal cities which lagged behind.\textsuperscript{15} Though the process of Chinese emigration under the indenture system began in 1843 when 582 Chinese were sent to Mauritius from Singapore, the large scale emigration of Chinese commenced only around 1847. The main ports of embarkation for Chinese indentured labourers were Amoy (Xiamen), Canton (Guangdong) and Hong Kong.\textsuperscript{16} The system was conducted primarily by two British firms who employed Chinese brokers or \textit{kheh-tau} and subordinate agents. These brokers and sub-agents received commission according to the number of emigrants supplied by them and therefore they used every possible trick – misrepresentation, deceit, kidnapping, debt trap, etc. to get the maximum numbers of recruits. There were very little efforts made by the Chinese government to regulate the emigration process and, in turn, the system became full of abuses. The vivid description of the registration process of intending emigrants provided by one of the finest scholars of Chinese indentured emigration, Robert Irick, reveals the humiliation which the recruits had to undergo at the time of registration:

‘The latter (Syme, Muir and Company, one of the British firms engaged in conducting the system) built a special barracoon or ‘pig pen’ (\textit{chu-tsai kuan}), as the Chinese called it, in front of their firm, where the potential emigrants were stripped naked, examined for defects, and , if approved, made to put their mark on labour contracts and then stamped or painted with the letter of their destination: C for Cuba, P for Peru and S for the Sandwich (Hawaiian) islands.’\textsuperscript{17}

The prevailing abuses earned an ill-repute for the entire system and it was termed as a new slave trade. Upon the shocking disclosures of the abuses associated

\textsuperscript{16} Northrup, \textit{Indentured Labour}, p.55.
with the emigration system, the first initiatives to regulate the system and to eliminate
the abuses associated with it came from the European and American governments
because commercial firms from these countries – Britain, America and Portugal were
deeply associated with the trade. The main target of almost all the reform initiatives
was the recruiting agents. A little late, but Chinese government also initiated several
regulatory measures to curb the powers of the recruiters and make the system free
from malpractices. Despite the continued reporting of the abuses and large scale
protests against it, Chinese indentured emigration continued till the 1920s and, in fact,
reached an unprecedented high in the first decade of the 20th century when around
sixty four thousand Chinese labourers were brought into the gold mines of Transvaal
under an Anglo-Chinese convention. The main destinations of the Chinese indentured
labourers were Cuba (138,156), Peru (117,432), Transvaal (63,938) and Hawaii
(34,309).

ii). Emigration from Japan

Emigration of Japanese labourers under indenture system began with the
departure of a small band of 147 men and 6 women to Hawaii in 1868 and by the
time this process came to an end in 1920s, about one million Japanese immigrated
under contract system to various destinations – Hawaii (65,034), Peru (20,168) and
Brazil (14,886). Unlike Chinese system of large companies involved in the
recruitment process, Japanese emigrants were recruited by the small recruiting
agencies called *Imin-Kaisha* who received requests from the planters of labour
importing destinations and subsequently recruited labourers in Japan to go to these

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18 Northrup, *Indentured Labour*, Table A.1, p.156-57.
destinations to work under specific conditions. The main regions of origin of Japanese indentured emigrants were Yokohama and other southern Japanese regions and the island of Okinawa.

Since the commencement of emigration, the reformist Meiji government of Japan played an active role of regulator for the system of indentured emigration and promulgated several directives for its smooth functioning and to remove the abuses. However, the recruiting agencies were involved in exaggeration of the prospects in the destinations, though less deliberately and more because of their ignorance. For Japanese emigrants, who reached their destinations with an illusion of better prospects and comfortable working conditions, the harsh working conditions of the plantations came as crude shock and in despair they tried to change their work frequently which led to their characterisation as an unreliable and 'unstable workforce'.

iii). Emigration from India

Emigration of Indian labourers under contract system began in 1834. Mauritius was the first British plantation settlement to receive Indian indentured labourers, followed by British Guiana, Trinidad, Natal, Reunion, Ceylon, Malaya, Burma, etc. Fiji was the last British colony to get indentured labourers from India in 1878. Emigration of Indian indentured labourers was not confined to the British settlements but following the abolition of slavery in French colonies in 1846 and in Dutch colonies in 1873, they also entered into agreements with the colonial government to labourers from India. Subsequently French Caribbean received 79,089 Indian labourers between 1851 and 1890s and Dutch Guiana (Suriname) received

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22 Shimpo, Mitsuru, 'Indentured Migrants from Japan', p.48.
23 Northrup, Indentured Labour, p. 72.
24 Shimpo, Mitsuru, 'Indentured Migrants from Japan', p.50.
more than 34,000 Indian labourers during 1873-1916.\textsuperscript{25} Following table shows the main destinations of Indian emigration under the contract system during the colonial period:

Table 1.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Immigrants</th>
<th>Population\textsuperscript{@}</th>
<th>% of Indian Population to the Total Population\textsuperscript{@}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>1834-1912</td>
<td>453,063</td>
<td>269,885 (1938)*</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Guiana</td>
<td>1838-1917</td>
<td>238,909</td>
<td>142,978 (1937)</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natal</td>
<td>1860-1911</td>
<td>152,184</td>
<td>219,691 (1936)</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad</td>
<td>1845-1917</td>
<td>143,939</td>
<td>161,076 (1936)</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reunion</td>
<td>1829-1924</td>
<td>118,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>1879-1916</td>
<td>60,969</td>
<td>85,002 (1936)</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>1854-1885</td>
<td>36,420</td>
<td>19,669 (1936)</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suriname</td>
<td>1873-1916</td>
<td>34,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>1852-1937</td>
<td>2,500,000</td>
<td>1,017,825 (1931)</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaya</td>
<td>1852-1937</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>748,829 (1940)</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceylon</td>
<td>1852-1937</td>
<td>1,500,000</td>
<td>750,000 (1942)</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\textsuperscript{*} Figures within brackets show the year for which population of Indian immigrants is enumerated.

The recruitment of Indian labourers for emigration to overseas destinations was carried out through two systems. The first system of recruitment was more structured and formal and the recruitment operations were conducted by the formally appointed recruiting agents and sub-agents across the communities and regions. This system of recruitment was adopted for indentured emigration to Mauritius, British Guiana, Trinidad, Fiji, Suriname, etc. The second set of recruitment system was less structured and it involved two sub-systems: Maistry (for Burma) and Kangani (for Malaya and Ceylon) systems. These sub-systems of recruitment were essentially similar to each other, except some hierarchical differences in the Maistry recruitment. The recruitment of Indian labourers under the second system was based on informal ties of kinship and debt relationship in which Kangani or Maistries (headmen) mobilised labourers, mostly belonging to their own caste or kinship groups, and lent the money to the intending emigrants to meet the expenses of emigration. This system was adopted in the labour catchment areas in South India.\(^{26}\) Essentially on the basis of these differences in the system of recruitment, various scholars of Indian labour Diaspora have traced two streams of emigration of Indian labourers under contract system.\(^{27}\) This division also retains validity while considering the finer differences between the patterns of allocation of emigrant labourers in their destinations – bands recruited under Kangani/ Maistry system were allocated to the same estate as one group while the labourers recruited under the first system were treated as individuals and would be randomly allotted. The second difference between these two systems was the nature of contract – under Kangani/ Maistry system, contracts were relatively more flexible and often did not include severe punitive provisions for their violation.

\(^{26}\) Jain, R.K., *Indian Communities Abroad; Themes and Literature*, Manohar, Delhi, 1993, pp.8-9.

unlike the indenture system. However, since the Indian labourers emigrated under both the systems to work under ‘contract’, I have presented common overview of both the systems only for narrative ease and not to undermine the essential differences between the patterns of recruitment and allocation.

Emigration of Indian labourers was carried out under government regulation from three principal ports – Calcutta, Madras and Bombay; though some emigrants were illegally shipped from Pondicherry also which was under French possession. Indian emigrants who went to distant plantation settlements under contract system came from diverse regions. They came from tribal regions of Eastern India, Bihar, North West Provinces (present Uttar Pradesh), Madras Presidency and some from Western India. In the later period, many labourers from Northern regions – western parts of United Provinces and present day Haryana also emigrated. The main regions of labour supply were tribal regions of Chota Nagpur in eastern India, Saran, Chapra, Shahabad, Champaran, Gaya, and Patna in Bihar; Banaras, Ghazipur, Azamgarh, Gorakhpur, Basti, Bahraich, Jaunpur in the United Provinces; Chingalpet, Tanjore, Trichirapally, South and North Arcot, Salem, Coimbatore, Vizagapatam in the southern India; and Ratnagiri region in western India. In the initial period, a mixed lot of emigrants embarked for different colonies where emigrants came from diverse regions; however, in later period, a preferred pattern of emigration emerged in which emigrants from northern regions went to Natal, Guiana, Fiji, Suriname, while the emigrants from south India predominantly went to Ceylon, Malaya and Burma. For Mauritius, the highest number of emigrants came from north Indian regions, though a significant volume also came from the south.

The emigration of Indian labourers under contract was carried out under a well-structured system under complete control of the governments in India, Mauritius
and Britain. These governments regulated every aspect of the emigration – from recruitment to the allocation of labourers and their lives on the plantations. To remove the abuses which surfaced from time to time, Governments concerned appointed the Protectors of Emigrants and Medical Officers in India and the labour importing colonies, adopted various legislative measures and appointed committees to enquire about the functioning of the system and the conditions of the labourers in the colonies. In spite of all these preventive measures the system remained inherently flawed and continued to be plagued by various evils and remained oppressive.

The manner in which the system of importing and employing the labourers was implemented placed Indian immigrants completely under the control of the planters. Labourers’ movement off the plantation sites was severely curtailed, decisions about the work pattern, working hours, settlement etc. were made without any consideration for the traditions of labourers, and absenteeism from work for whatever reason was severely punished by double-cut of wages and/or imprisonment. All these oppressive measures made the system one of ‘near slavery’ in which Indian labourers were being cheated, ill-treated and exploited in every walk of their lives in the colonies. Apart from the economic exploitation, Indians were subject to racial discrimination and disabilities. Racially pejorative terms such as ‘coolies’ or ‘coolie slaves’ were used for them, they were housed in dingy shelters at plantation sites in complete isolation from the native population. Women were subjected to all kinds of exploitation and sexual abuse, they had no civic and political rights, and there were strict restrictions imposed on their acquiring property. The sordid tales of discrimination and disabilities were endless and full of sorrows, yet Indian labour Diaspora achieved phenomenal success and acquired prominent positions in the social, political and economic spheres in their adopted lands.
Plate II
Mauritius in Indian Ocean
Location

The study of Indian labour Diaspora in this work is confined to a particular location – Mauritius. The choice of Mauritius is influenced primarily by two reasons – first, the emigration of Indian labourers under indenture system started with Mauritius and thus it provided the ‘site of great experiment’ where various provisions of the system and regulations were experimented and subsequently adopted for the other labour importing colonies. The victims of this experiment were obviously the emigrants who had to bear the brunt of those measures and regulations which were later found to be inadequate or repressive and therefore discarded for other colonies. Mauritius was not only the first colony to receive Indian indentured labourers but it also received them for the longest duration and the maximum numbers. Apart from this obvious influencing factor, the other reason for the choice of Mauritius as the location of this study is the unique and distinct process of the mobility of indentured Diaspora in Mauritius which form the core of the second essential issue this work aspires to address. From 1870s onwards, the Indian labour Diaspora began to move from the confines of plantations and gradually acquired significant economic, social and political space. Due to the low population of other inhabitants and the massive inflow of Indian indentured labourers for more than eight decades, Indian labour Diaspora became the largest ethnic segment of the Mauritian population by the 1860s. This numeric dominance had very critical significance in the process of diasporic mobility and it makes the Mauritian experience historically distinct. Though this aspect does not come under the purview of this study, Mauritius was also one of the rare locations where a diasporic community spearheaded the anti-colonial hegemonic struggle.
To make the readers familiar with the setting of this work, I shall briefly describe the location and history of Mauritius. Geographically Mauritius is situated in the south-western Indian Ocean, around 2,900 miles away from the Bombay port. It is part of the Mascarene islands group along with Reunion and Rodrigues. Mauritius is marked as barely a pin point in the maps of the world which shows its small size – 39 miles from north to south and 28 miles from east to west, the total area being 720 square miles.

There is no record of any indigenous settlement on Mauritius and the Portuguese were the first to reach the island in the early sixteenth century and it was called as Ilha do Cirne or the Island of Swan. However the Portuguese made no attempts to settle on the island as it had no vital importance for their trading interests. Mauritius was far off their usual trading route to India and had no important minerals or any other natural resources. Nearly after a century, a fleet of five Dutch ships accidentally reached Mauritius in 1598, and it was the admiral of this Dutch fleet who named this island Mauritius after the Dutch stadhouder Maurice of Nassau. The official Dutch annexation of Mauritius was done in May 1638 when Pieter de Gooyer was appointed as the first Governor. The purpose of appointing a Governor by the Dutch was clear – ‘cut ebony and collect ambergris for shipment to Europe, practise agriculture and supply ships’. To accomplish this work some slaves were imported by the Dutch. However the Dutch abandoned Mauritius in 1658 but only to return again in 1663 when few slaves and some free Europeans were brought to the island.

The main intention of this second settlement was once again the ebony cutting and


29 Teelock, Vijaya, Mauritian History; From its Beginnings to Modern Times, MGI, Mauritius, 2001, p.31.
Plate III

Map of Mauritius
they established the first saw mill in 1672-73. By the end of 17th century, there was
not much ebony left in the coastal regions to cut, prices of ebony fell sharply in
Holland, and the establishments of ebony cutting in Mauritius were almost destroyed
in cyclone and fire. All this made the Dutch colonisers realise the fact that
maintaining a settlement in Mauritius was no longer a profitable venture and finally
the Dutch decided to withdraw from Mauritius in 1710.

By the time the Dutch left Mauritius, they had completely ruined the ecology
and the natural resources of the island by indiscriminate cutting of forests, killings of
native creatures like Dodo which were being made extinct by them. Despite this
unfavourable setting, the next European power to try its hand at inhabiting Mauritius
was France which had already established a small settlement on neighbouring
Reunion. In June 1715, Captain Dufresne d' Arsel reached Port Louis and took
possession of the island in the name of the King of France and renamed it as Isle de
France. Finally the French government ceded the island to the French East India
Company in April 1721 with which began the systematic attempts to inhabit it as a
French colony. The efforts of establish Mauritius as a French settlement remained
scattered and unorganised till the arrival of Mahe de La Bourdonnais as Governor of
Mauritius and Reunion in 1734. La Bourdonnais took the task of making the island
inhabitable by building the port and city and developing other infrastructure and for
his remarkable contributions in the advancement of the island, he continues to be
counted among one of most towering figures of Mauritian history. La Bourdonnais
built the Port Louis harbour and developed the town. Quarters for the Company
officers were built and a Headquarters for the Company's operations was built in Port
Louis town. To connect the various parts of the island and to make the transportation
of timber to the port more convenient, roads were built in the interiors. Apart from
building the infrastructure, La Bourdonnais made several attempts to make the economy of Mauritius self-sustainable and grow in a manner that it could contribute to the commercial interests of the company. He promoted the expansion of agriculture by clearing of land and introduced the plantation of indigo and cotton. He introduced sugar plantation also, which later became the life line of Mauritian economy, and set up the first sugar mill in Mauritius. During La Bourdonnais' tenure and in subsequent years, French administrators in Mauritius introduced slaves from Mozambique, West Africa, East Indies to develop the land and promote agriculture. It was estimated that between 1735 and 1767, about 20,000 slaves were introduced in Mauritius. Because of La Bourdonnais' efforts, Mauritius became an important strategic location for French and they used it as a base for French fleets during the Anglo-French rivalry in the Indian Ocean. Due to the meagre financial condition of the French East India Company in the wake of Seven Years war (1756-63), the French government acquired Mauritius from the Company in 1767 and thus began the second phase of French colonialism in Mauritius which lasted till 1810 when the British took over.

During this period, Mauritius experienced phenomenal development in all the sectors – inhabitation, infrastructure and economy. There were two sections of the population, first, the French colonial administrators and officials and second, the slave population which was imported for the menial work and the expansion of agriculture from Madagascar and Mozambique. Kuczynski has estimated the following change in the population of different communities in Mauritius between 1767 and 1807: whites from 3,163 to 6,489; free coloreds from 587 to 5,912; and slaves from 18,777 to 77,768. Under the French Crown rule, Mauritius became one of the major ports of

French trading activities in the Indian Ocean region and as a result, the economy of island flourished enormously.

The island’s strategic location in the Indian Ocean region, especially with reference to the colonial expansion schemes in Asia, was realised by the British authorities during the Seven Years War and Anglo-French rivalry for the possessions on the Indian territories and therefore the British decided to capture Mauritius. They first captured the other two islands of Mascarene – Rodrigues and Reunion and then a 10,000 strong British force with a fleet of seventy ships reached Port Louis in late November 1810. The French administration in Mauritius capitulated to the British but the British got the ultimate possession of Mauritius only after the Treaty of Paris in 1814. With the British annexation, a new epoch of Mauritian history began in which Mauritius was carefully nurtured as ‘the garden of sugar’ under the British colonial scheme and essentially through the vital contributions of the Indian indentured labourers.

The origins of cane cultivation in Mauritius could be traced to the La Bourdonnais’ regime in early 1740s, who encouraged it as possible means to raise the economic resources within the island. However, the sugar industry did not grow much till the end of 18th century. In 1789 the total area under cane cultivation was only 1,000 arpents and the total number of sugar mills in Mauritius eight to ten which produced about 300 tons of sugar annually. In the early years of the 19th century the Mauritian sugar industry grew on a massive scale primarily because of the rise of sugar prices which encouraged the planters to expand the cane cultivation. Subsequently, the production of sugar between 1806 and 1810 increased to 3,000 to

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4,000 tons a year.  The inclusion of Mauritius in the British empire and abolition of preferential tariff for the West Indian sugar gave Mauritian sugar producers the access to the London market and further encouraged the cultivation of sugar cane and a ‘sugar revolution’ began in the political economy of the island. By the middle of 19th century the sugar industry reached its zenith and Mauritius became the leading sugar producing colony. During 1855-60, this tiny island produced an average of more than 120,000 tons of sugar per year which was about 7.4 percent of the total world sugar production.  Although this sugar revolution earned enormous economic prosperity for the island, it led to a sectoral imbalance in the agrarian structure of Mauritius – between 1806 and 1830, the percentage of cultivated land in food crops decreased from sixty five percent to nearly thirty percent with a simultaneous increase of area under cane cultivation from thirty five to nearly seventy percent.  This sectoral imbalance is still prevalent in the Mauritian economy and most of the substantial food stuff like rice, wheat, grains, fruits, spices etc. are still being imported.

The expansion of sugar plantation under the British rule began with the slave labour force already available in Mauritius. But when the sugar industry was still in a nascent stage, slavery was abolished throughout the British empire. In Mauritius, slavery was formally abolished on 1st February 1835 and more than sixty thousand slaves, most of whom were working on sugar plantations, were formally liberated, though the ex-slave population was not allowed to quit the plantation immediately and were further tied through the ‘apprenticeship’. The abolition of slavery created a severe labour crisis for the Mauritian sugar industry which had just started massive

33 ibid.
35 Bowman, Larry W., Mauritius, p.19.
36 ibid.
expansion of the sugar plantation because the ex-slave population looked at the plantation work with contempt since it was associated with their dark past as slaves and therefore they completely withdrew from the agricultural work. The only option left for the Mauritian planters, as discussed in the beginning of this introduction, was to search for alternative supplies of labourers and in this crisis situation, the immigrant labourers from India who were imported under indenture system came as the saviours of the fortune of Mauritius.

Following table shows the trajectories of growth of Mauritian sugar industry and its dependence upon the Indian immigrant labourers:

Table 1.3
Sugar Production in Mauritius, its Share in the World Market and Arrival of Indian Indentured Labourers, 1820-1919

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Average Annual Production (metric tons)</th>
<th>% of World % of Total</th>
<th>Arrival of Indian Immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1820-29</td>
<td>15,559</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830-39</td>
<td>33,443</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17,989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840-49</td>
<td>45,388</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>83,775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850-59</td>
<td>97,407</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>180,799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860-69</td>
<td>115,778</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>80,579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870-79</td>
<td>112,184</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>41,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880-89</td>
<td>116,016</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>16,752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890-99</td>
<td>132,663</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>8,488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900-09</td>
<td>182,848</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>14,437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-19</td>
<td>225,775</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The above table shows in no ambiguous terms that in the post emancipation era, the fortunes of Mauritian sugar industry were dependent upon the Indian immigrant labourers who played the most vital role in accomplishing the impending sugar revolution. The Sugar industry progressed along with the arrival of indentured labourers from India and it reached its pinnacle in the decade of the 1850s when the highest number of immigrant labourers arrived from India.

This work endeavours to study the emigration of Indian indentured labourers from the beginning in 1834 to the 1920s when the indenture system was formally abolished, all the Indian labourers became free from the contractual bindings and a process of socio-economic and political upward mobility began to concretise among the Indian labour Diaspora. The underlying intent of this study is to study the formation of Indian labour Diaspora in Mauritius and trace the genesis of an evolutionary process of human progress in a diasporic setting in which the diasporic community moved from the confines of repressive plantation regime to prominent positions in the social, economic and political realm. This process reached its symbolic zenith when at the time of independence, a member of this diasporic community became the premier of the independent Mauritian nation.

As a preliminary foray into the rubric of Diaspora studies, this work aspires to address two essential questions which are imperative for discerning the distinct diasporic experiences over diverse locations. These questions are - how was the Diaspora formed in a specific location and how did the process of its upward mobility start. This work is divided into five chapters: in the first chapter I have discussed the system of indentured immigration to argue against the 'laissez faire formulation' about the roles of colonial government in India and the British government. This chapter will look into the fact that the indentured emigration of Indian labourers to colonial plantation settlements was carried out under a well structured system in
which all the concerned governments, in my case of Mauritius, India and Britain, were actively involved in regulating the different aspects of it. The second part of this chapter describes the responses from the Indian masses and Indian nationalists to the entire indenture system and the reports of deplorable conditions of the Indian immigrants in the plantation settlements. Somehow a systematic study of this aspect has not received the adequate attention from the scholars of indentured Diaspora, though many scholars, from Hugh Tinker to Peter Emmer make passing references to it.

In the second chapter, I have discussed the emigrants — who were they, their socio-economic and regional belongings, patterns of emigration in terms of gender and family migrations and why they decided to go to such far-off destinations even at the cost of losing their religion or culture or knowing the harsh working conditions. The main focus of this chapter will be to discuss the social belonging of the emigrants and the factors for migration. I will try to go beyond the prevailing stereotypes which locate them necessarily from the socially and economically marginalised section of the society and discuss the factors for migration in a binary model of push/pull alternatives.

The third chapter describes the journey of indentured emigrants from the ports of embarkation in India to the ports of their destinations. This journey from Indian ports to Mauritius was short and lasted for six to ten weeks but the reasons to devote a full chapter could be ascribed to its vital significance in the future lives of the indentured emigrants in terms of experiencing the hardships they had to face in the coming phase, the breaking of many traditional values and beliefs related to eating, community behaviours, concepts of purity and touchability and also forging of new idioms of community ties like jahaji bhai.

In the fourth chapter I have tried to discuss the lives of Indian emigrant labourers on the sugar plantations in Mauritius till the 1870s. The main issues I have
addressed in this chapter are the harsh working conditions under which emigrant labourers had to work, the repressive and exploitative labour regulations, the near absence of any effective space for grievance readressal and the condition of women on plantations. The most crucial issue I have tried to explore in this chapter is the landscape of labourers' resistance on the plantations which has been overlooked by many scholars for being naïve and unorganised. By this exploration I shall try to argue that the indentured emigrants were not a passive agency in the capitalist production order who surrendered to their plight at the hands of planters but conscious human beings who were full of obvious human aspirations. They accepted their repression only till they had no space to articulate their angst and as and when they get opportunities, they protested against the repressive labour regime of the plantations through every possible mode – be it running away from the work, or attack on the symbols of planters' authority or in extreme distress even suicide. In the second part of this chapter, I have described the personal lives of emigrant labourers on the plantations but owing to my inability to collect adequate ethnographic sources, the scope of this section is severely limited and based on secondary literature.

The fifth and final chapter attempts to map the process of mobility of Indian labour Diaspora beyond the confines of plantations and their meticulous attempts to get entry into the socio-economic and political spaces of Mauritius. The diasporic community tried to accomplish their aspirations for upward mobility through three avenues – acquisition of landed property, education and political consciousness – which have been discussed at length in this chapter.