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The people who emigrated from India to distant plantation settlements 'under the aegis of the capitalist mode of production, constituted a new phenomenon in the world.' However these people did not belong to a monolithic human stock. They represented enormous diversity in their compositional characteristics and essentials, i.e. regional origin, socio-economic background, gender, age, raison-d'etre for mobility etc. This has led to much debate among the social scientists especially historians who try to analyse the different aspects and attributes of this diversity according to the historiographical affiliations. This chapter attempts to explore the three essential questions related to the study of people who migrated. First, who were they? their regional, socio-economic belonging and patterns of gender and family migration; second, why they migrated, and the factors for emigration; and finally, how they migrated – recruitment and strategy of labour mobilization. The purpose of this exploration would be to make some departure from the existing historiography which offers a rather simplistic analysis of these complex issues in terms of reductionist alternatives.

Factors for Migration: Push-Pull debate revisited

Motivational factors for migration remain an overarching question and intractable issue for scholars of diverse academic disciplines dealing with human migration. As an answer to why certain people choose to migrate, the existing historiography offers two alternative sets of responsible factors – 'push' factors and 'pull' factors. This binary alternative explanation of mobility is primarily based on the

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emphasising the economic dimensions. However, some scholars have been arguing for inclusion of considerable sociological dimensions in explaining the migratory patterns of societies or individuals.²

Subsistence oriented ‘push factors alternative’ explains migration in terms of ‘push’ – emigrants were pushed out of localities to seek opportunities outside because of survival crisis – extreme poverty, debt trap, population pressure, unemployment, political subversion, etc. However the emphasis reamins on economic dimensions. This explanation of overseas emigration of Indian labourers was first propounded by the colonial officials and the plantation lobby who blamed the ‘superabundance of population’ for the famines and economic crisis the Indian people had to face. They conceived this as the only way out for the Indian people.

‘In the vast population of India, poverty and distress but too often appear in the most appalling forms. Among the few resources open to the sufferers for escaping these calamities, one is emigration to Mauritius where a constant and large demand for their labour exists’.³

R. Brenan, who visited Indigo plantation sites in Bengal representing planter’s interests, wrote a letter to Government of Mauritius in which he compared the situation of Indian labourers in Bengal and Mauritius and concluded that Indian labourers who live in a destitute state throughout Bengal and other Indian provinces, perish from want, absence of employment or scarcity of provision and they improve their lot by migrating to Mauritius, where they get regular employment and work in a

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³ Letter from Secretary of State for Colonies, dt. 22 January 1842, *Further Papers Respecting East Indian Labourers*, No. XXXI, OIOC.
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protective environment. He reinforced his arguments for emigration by contrasting the physical appearance of Indian labourers before and after emigration ‘from poor, sickly, emaciated to the state of healthy, form filled out and muscles developed’. This official attitude continued till the last years of indentured emigration. In 1910, Sanderson Committee observed that they (Indian labourers) go because they are uncomfortable at home and welcome any change of circumstances. Push alternatives attribution of distressed situation of Indian population as the raison-d-âtre for migration has been adopted by a plethora of scholars, who have tried to explain the factors for emigration by establishing links between migration statistics and famine, de-industrialisation, de-peasantisation, forced commercialization, political instability etc. However, unlike the colonial supporters of the push theory, most of these scholars put the responsibility on colonial rule for creating a crisis situation in which people were forced to migrate. Saha has eloquently evaluated the figures of migration and crop failures or famine and concludes that ‘during the years of famine or subfamine colonial emigration was heavy’. This conclusion is echoed by another great scholar of indentured immigration, Hugh Tinker. He observes,

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4 Report of Committee appointed for the purpose of enquiry into and reporting upon the causes of insufficiency of the labouring population after so large on introduction of immigrants, pp. 104-05.
5 ibid, p. 105.
7 Hugh Tinker, New System of Slavery, pp. 118-119.
9 Saha has very eloquently linked the negative effects of British rule in India both economic and political, to the migration of India labourers overseas, Saha, Emigration of Indian Labour, p. 74.
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'So emigration relied mainly upon the need of people to obtain relief from a situation which was no longer tolerable. The emigrants came mainly from the most overcrowded agricultural districts of India, where crop failure would plunge sections of the village community into near starvation. There was a clear correlation between the years when the departures were heavy and times when the harvest was poor, conversely, in good years, recruits were hard to find.\(^\text{10}\)

The other important factor which pushed Indian population out of country was 'deindustrialization' or decline of traditional industries and manufacturing like weaving due to the negative policies of colonial rule which prohibited the growth of indigenous industries by various methods of taxation including unfair countervailing duties and which promoted the penetration of machine made cheaper products into the village communities.\(^\text{11}\) This rampant deindustrialization created a massive unemployed workforce which had no other means of subsistence but to emigrate to locations outside India. In eastern districts of North Western Provinces, (later United Provinces) 'the weavers had taken themselves to agriculture or other labour, to menial services, emigration to Mauritius, and even elsewhere and even to begging'.\(^\text{12}\) Similar was the fate of weavers from South where having lost their means of livelihood, weavers were going to Bourbon and Mauritius in large numbers.\(^\text{13}\)

In addition to these economic determinants of push alternative, there are some political and social push factors as well which contributed to the indentured migration. The significance of the political push factor is confined to just one

\(^{10}\) Tinker Hugh, \textit{New System of Slavery}, pp. 118-119.

\(^{11}\) 'They (mills of Paisley and Manchester) were created by the sacrifice of the Indian manufacturers. British goods were forced upon her without paying any duty, and the foreign manufacture employed the arm of political injustice to keep down and ultimately strangle a competitor.' Desai, A.R., \textit{Social Background of Indian Nationalism}, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1976, p. 82.


\(^{13}\) Collector of Godavari district to Board of Revenue, dt. 14 April 1834, quoted in Dharma Kumar, \textit{Land and Caste in South India}, CUP, Cambridge, 1965, p. 130.
occasion (Revolt of 1857) in the historiography of indenture emigration and that too in a limited manner with very moderate implications. The revolt of 1857 and the subsequent suppressive activities of British government created situation of turmoil in Northern India. After the 1857 revolt, there was a massive political and economic dislocation and thousands of people lost their jobs as they were working in army and allied services which were major source of employment and livelihood for people in these regions. This created a vulnerable work force which had no choice but to look out for other means for survival and emigration to plantation settlements came as an obvious choice for them as there was hardly any other option available at home. Many people chose to emigrate as an escape from impending punishment in severe post mutiny suppression by the British authorities. In this backdrop, emigration from India reached its all time peak. The figure for Emigration to Mauritius from Calcutta in 1856-57 was 3334, which increased for five times to 15,980 in the year 1858-59. This pushed the quantum of emigration from other Indian ports as well, where emigrants mainly from the dismantled army units which used to be one of the major sectors employing the young Indian population.

14 For this unprecedented in figures of emigration, Tinker (p97) attributes to the enormous demand of Mauritian in planters for which post 1857 disruption worked only as supply factors. Saha, who otherwise attributes the emigration to the negative effects of colonial Rule, cites it as incidental and indirect impetus (p. 75). Only Cumpston analyses this spurt in terms of ‘British rule pushing people to emigrate’, Cumpston, I.M., Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834-1854, OUP, London, 1953, P. 66.
16 Geoghegan Report.
17 Statistical Abstract relating to British India, First Number, 1840 to 1865, No. 36, HMSO, London, 1867. (I have accessed these in digital from on http://dsal.uchicago.edu/statistics)
Table 3.1

Indian Emigration from British India to Various Destinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year (Ending 30 April)</th>
<th>From Bengal (Calcutta)</th>
<th>From Madras</th>
<th>From Bombay</th>
<th>Total Emigration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>West Indies</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Mauritius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>8325</td>
<td>1617</td>
<td>9942</td>
<td>6343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>3334</td>
<td>3908</td>
<td>7242</td>
<td>4100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>9804</td>
<td>2667</td>
<td>12531</td>
<td>5894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>15980</td>
<td>7332</td>
<td>23312</td>
<td>13636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>17606</td>
<td>7984</td>
<td>25590</td>
<td>10751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>5418</td>
<td>7662</td>
<td>14533*</td>
<td>4252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 1453 emigrants migrated to Natal, ** 984 emigrated to Natal.


Some historians have pointed to the correlation between the 'widespread disruption associated with rebellion of 1857' and unprecedented rise in emigration in 1858-60 but what remains unexplored is to study this correlation in terms of emigration of Indian labourers as 'safety valve' by the British rule—disgorge 'surplus population' created through the large scale socio-economic and political dislocation under the colonial order, which had the potential to articulate their discontent against the colonial rule by disrupting the political-economic order, aiming towards overthrowing it away ultimately. For Hugh Tinker, the principal cause of the rise in...

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18 I intend to develop this argument in my further research on the indentured emigration and the role of colonial state.
numbers was the enormous, almost insatiable demand of the Mauritian planters. But this does not explain the reasons for similar increase in the emigration figures for West Indies. Though quantum of emigration was much less for West Indies, the proportional increase was very similar (more than three times) to the emigration pattern for Mauritius (see table). Another factor which substantiates this argument about using emigration as safety valve is the deeper concern and greater involvement among the British official circles in regulating, promoting and facilitating the emigration process from 1860s onwards.  

The Push theory counts some sociological factors as well which pushed people out of their homes to distant locations. These could be family feuds, social boycott, suppressive societal restrictions, deplorable living condition (for widows, single women). However, these factors contributed in the making of the choice of certain individuals, and not the larger migratory patterns, and remained incidental factors.

The other approach is that of the ‘pull alternative’ which tries to explain the emigration in terms of better opportunities available at destinations which pulled emigrants. This alternative, often characterized as ‘revisionist’, and ‘neo-imperialist’, portrays potential emigrants as ‘rational income maximisers’ who will move to new environments whenever the anticipated gains of moving are sufficiently high. The essential rationale of this alternative is the availability of better opportunities for distressed Indians which official narratives try to put forward by underlining the

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20 This goes against the usual of characterization of colonial governments’ involvement in the indentured emigration process as of ‘benevolent neutrality’. This argument is not tenable anymore as I have discussed later in this chapter.
striking contrast between the lives of Indians at home and of those who emigrated.\(^{23}\)

Dr. Comins, who was deputed by the Indian government to enquire about the
ccondition of Indians in the West Indies in 1891, had put forward this point by
illustrating the stark difference between the emigrants and their descendants born in
their adopted land. He wrote

‘No one who knows the Indian Cooly well can fail to be struck by the
great difference between the cooly in India and his children born in the
colony... The children born in the colony of Indian parents revert to a
higher type of civilization, and in appearance, manners and intelligence
are so much superior to their parents that it is difficult to believe they
belong to the same family’.\(^ {24}\)

Sanderson Committee uses an anecdote of an Indian emigrant to Trinidad who
became a landed proprietor and his son was called to the Bar at Lincoln’s Inn to
illustrate the remarkable improvement in the material condition of Lincoln’s Inn to
because of their emigration overseas.\(^ {25}\) Unlike the push alternative, which portrays
emigrants as victims of the situation, for the propounders of the pull alternative,
emigrants were conscious human beings who themselves chose to migrate to improve
their situation, as they usually considered indentured emigration an escape hatch his
economic and social problems.\(^ {26}\) As P.C. Emmer, a noted revisionist puts it,
‘indentured emigration from India to overseas colonies was the result of rational and
deliberate choice on the part of emigrants, prompted by hopes of bettering their

\(^ {24}\) Comins, *Note on Emigration to West-Indies*, p.8.
future'. In this view indentured emigration not only opened unsurpassed opportunities for intending emigrants but also provided greater economic gains in terms of higher wages, better working conditions, protection to the emigrants and their descendants. It also offered a permanent release from irksome and oppressive social customs, caste prejudices and general social degradation in India.

The 'pull alternative' is based essentially on the notion of conscious choice of emigrants and propounders of this alternative use two quintessentials of the emigration process to make their argument. The first is related to the system of recruitment which they feel was free from deception and fraud and there was no forced recruitment. Therefore, it was emigrants' choice to go. Emmer explains this through figures of runaways of intending emigrants between recruitment and actual embarkation. The relatively low percentage of runaways between the moment of first registration and embarkation, in his view, indicate that the indentured emigration was usually the result of a choice made by the intending emigrant himself.

The second rationale used in support of the 'pull alternative' is the pre-existence of a displaced work force which had made the initial break from the localities in search of employment as Brij Lal puts it,

'a great deal of circulation for purposes of employment was under way in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries... The indentured migrants who were

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27 ibid.
31 ibid, pp. 187-188.
enlisted for the colonies came from the uprooted man of Indian peasants already in circulation'.

It was this uprooted population, which willingly decided to go to distinct settlements as they found it more lucrative than the opportunities available to them in localities. Recruitment in towns, markets and cities like Calcutta, Madras is used by scholars to substantiate this formulation.

Attempts to explain the factors for emigration through push-pull alternatives offer some useful insights, however there are certain issues which this alternative model fails to explain. Push alternative offers very valid explanations for the creation of a economically distressed work force and ‘overall incidence of migration’ but it fails to explain the migratory patterns for specific locations in the context of emigration to overseas locations. The overemphasis on economic factors in the push alternative – de-peasantisation, famines, forced commercialization etc. fails to explain why people chose to cross the ‘Kalapani’ and go to far flung destinations even at the risk of violating social restrictions against crossing the seas. It has limitations also in explaining the high quantum of emigration in supposedly normal years and emigration of non-agricultural sections of society – mochees (cobblers), dhobee (Washer man) etc.

Similarly ‘pull alternative’ also has its own limitations. It brings forth the migrants’ initiative in the colonial labour market very profoundly and portrays them as conscious human beings who had full control over the shaping of their destinies.

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33 Emmer, Meek Hindu, Lal, Brij V., Chalo Jahaji, p. 121-26. Brij Lal has very eloquently traced this process of spatial mobility in eastern UP and Bihar and linked it with his larger deliberation of deliberate choice of emigrants for indentured emigration.
34 ibid.
35 Carter, Marina, Servants, p. 38.
through emigration. Pull alternative assumes the recruitment system as free from any deception or forced inducement to assert the free choice of emigrants. This is a very optimistic and rather 'ought to be' description of the indentured recruitment system considering the continued reporting of frauds, kidnapping and use of other unlawful methods in recruiting emigrants for colonies in official narratives as well as anti-indenture literature right up to the end of system in the 1920s. This shows a disturbing and insensitivity to the plight of intending emigrants in the hands of recruiters.

The deliberate choice argument under the rubric of pull alternative also fails to prove the ability of intending emigrants to fully understand the terms and conditions of working in colonies, majority of whom were uneducated, unexposed and completely unaware of the technicalities of the indenture on which they put their 'thumb impression' as an expression of their consent. Betterment oriented 'pull alternative' has limitations in explaining the continued flow of emigration in later period when the initial depiction of Mauritius as a land of gold mines or land of opportunities was completely shattered by the harrowing tales of exploitation and extreme hardship of emigrants that permeated Indian localities.

The push alternative offers explanations for creation of a displaced workforce and Pull alternative explains the choice for emigration. Since both these factors are essential for emigration, it may be argued that neither of these alternatives are mono-causal and explain the factors for emigration in detail if used as 'isolated, independent' factors. Neither mere creation of a displaced working class is sufficient for the people to emigrate nor the availability of 'better opportunities' in some distant place will attract otherwise content people if there is no vulnerable class available to emigrate.

36 Some of propounders of pull initiative like Brij Lal are also sceptical about emigrants' ability to comprehend the technicalities of the contract.
Therefore, both the push and pull alternatives work in tandem. There has to be a push from one location and pull to another and these cannot be explored in isolation, as alternatives. Push and pull factors contribute to the emigration process not in an either/or fashion but work in concert and only an adequate balance of analytical emphasis on both these alternatives would provide a comprehensive explanation of factors for emigration.

The push/pull alternative model offers some vital insights to the factors for emigration. However indentured migration to Mauritius was not just a product of discrete and unconnected ‘push’ or ‘pull’ factors of sending and receiving sites. Indentured emigration during colonial period exhibits varied and complex patterns and attempts to explain this process in alternative terms of push or pull offer rather an overly simplistic analysis of a complex historical process. Brinley Thomas has very lucidly summed up the whole debate in the following words:

‘history shows the influence of the threat of starvation, political oppression, religious persecution, eviction, avoidance of military service, a sense of adventure, an urge to make a fortune, a desire to join relatives or to get away from those at home, or just a flight from boredom. It is not by making a catalogue of such ‘reasons’ that one can hope to understand the phenomenon of migration any more than an attempt to describe the manifold motives leading people to want to buy a commodity would constitute a demand. Nothing is easier than to draw up a list of factors labelled ‘push’ and ‘pull’ and then write a descriptive account in terms of these sets of influences. Such an approach, however, will not throw much light on the deeper problems posed by migration as part of the process of economic expansion’\(^{37}\).

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Portes and Walton also points out the problematic and limitations of attempts to theorize the factors for emigration based on push/pull model.

'The customary survey reporting percentages endorsing each such 'cause' might be useful as a sort of first approximation to the question of who, when migrates? In no way, however does it explain the structural factors leading to a patterned movement, of known size and direction, over an extensive period of time.' 38

A need has arise to shift focus of factors for migration from this excessive preoccupation with the push/pull from emigrants’ perspective towards the interlinked needs of the plantation system which led to the evolution of a well structured system where labourers were mobilised in a well structured manner to meet the requirements of the plantations. This work tries to examine the factors for emigration of Indians under the indenture system by situating the whole process of emigration in the broader context of the political economy of the empire and thus to argue that emigration was not fortuitous but strategic and systematic. As Herman Merivale writes;

‘they are not voluntary immigrants in the ordinary sense, led by the spontaneous desire of bettering their condition... They have been raised, not without effort, like recruits for the military service’ 39.

The nineteenth century emigration of Indian labourers to Mauritius under the indenture system was part of interconnected capitalist development under the aegis of imperialism in which labour was commodified and circulated from the extant reservoirs of cheap labour to the new settlements or to those regions which were facing labour crisis in the wake of emancipation of slave workforce; in order to

facilitate the capitalist development of the metropolis or the empire. To quote Richardson,

‘indentured labour migration in the 19th century was a part of a larger process of international circulation of capital and commodities, the ultimate aim of which was commodity production, under conditions of uneven and combined capitalist development. 40

For Karl Marx, immigrant labourer was ‘the light infantry of industrial capital’ which could be deployed at will to serve the needs of expanding commodity production. Gay Standing, in his study of migration and modes of exploitation, points out that ‘by virtue of commoditization under capitalist state, labour became invariably mobile and migration was necessary for the national and global extension of capitalism’. 41 This process of relocating labour was done in a strategic manner by the concerned colonial governments through well structured labour mobilisation strategies in which labourers were carefully mobilised according to the needs of the labour importing colonies. It was this strategy which was essential for migration. As Samir Amin highlights, ‘problem is to elucidate the reason for the basic choice: that of overall strategy because it is there that the ultimate cause of migration lies’ 42.

The conventional historiography based on push/pull alternative fails to recognise that the indentured emigration was a product of the ‘logic of capitalist development’ and completely ignores this vital strategy on part of the colonial state in explaining the factors for emigration. As Marina Carter has argued,

A central flow of both theories is their failure to analyse crucial changes in recruiting strategy which helped to maintain the dynamism of overseas labour mobilisation.\(^{43}\)

The strategy of labour mobilization described in this work is not a rigid mechanical concept. It has been conceived as fluid in nature, subject to modifications according to the compulsions related to the political and economic needs of the empire in historical process. For the specific location of this study Mauritius, I shall try to examine this strategy through two essentials – demand for labour in Mauritius and role of the colonial state.

i. Demand from Colony

Demand from Mauritius was the most crucial factor in determining the quantum and pattern of emigration to Mauritius which was dependent on the size of cultivation and prices of sugar in the world market. To quote Metcalf;

‘...the crucial determinant (for emigration) was colonial demand, and this in turn was set...by the world demand for sugar. When sugar prices were depressed, plantation owner required less labour.\(^ {44}\)

The correlation between the demand from Mauritius and emigration from India can be explained in terms of two variables. First, the price of sugar and the production of sugar both as gross product and as percentage of world sugar production. Second, crisis in Mauritian economy because of a variety of reasons. Table below shows the correlation between annual average of sugar production, percentage share of Mauritius sugar production in total world production, and the


arrival of Indian emigrants. These provide a more convincing explanation for the patterns of emigration to Mauritius.

Table 3.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Annual average short tons Sugar production*</th>
<th>% of total world production**</th>
<th>Arrival of Indian emigrants***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1835-9</td>
<td>36367</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25,202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840-4</td>
<td>37596</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>46,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845-9</td>
<td>62466</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>36,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850-4</td>
<td>81588</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>68,163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855-9</td>
<td>133172</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>112,636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860-4</td>
<td>135503</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>49,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865-9</td>
<td>119743</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>30,609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870-4</td>
<td>120147</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>27,807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875-9</td>
<td>127175</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>13,513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880-4</td>
<td>125709</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>10,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885-9</td>
<td>130062</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>6,623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890-4</td>
<td>174802</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>5,527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895-9</td>
<td>167668</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2,961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900-4</td>
<td>182903</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>12,513</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*** Mauritius Almanac, 1913.
When the sugar economy was rising both in terms of price of sugar and its share in total sugar production, for the period between 1835 to 1860, the inflow of emigrants from India also increased. Especially during 1850s when Mauritian sugar industry witnessed a boom in the production and prices of sugar, the emigrants’ arrivals were buoyant. However, the correlation between the rising sugar prices and the number of emigrants also had occasional lapses. In 1858 and 59, the price of Mauritian sugar marked a very steep decline but the inflow of emigrants just doubled from the previous years. This could be possibly best explained in terms of the economic and political dislocation of vast population as an aftermath of the revolt of 1857 as underlined earlier in this chapter.

The second variable, i.e. incidental crisis in sugar based Mauritian economy because of financial constraints provide explanation for occasional reverses in the inflow. For example owing to the financial crisis of 1865 and natural disaster of 1866-68, annual arrivals of Indian emigrants fell from 20283 in 1865 to 313 in the year 1867.

Therefore the demand from colony was crucial in deciding the quantum of emigration.

ii. Role of the colonial state

Role of colonial state of both the locations – of recruitment (India) and of destination (Mauritius) was crucial for emigration of indentured labourers. On the basis of occasional stress on the idiom of laissez faire in the official prose, some historians have tried to reduce the role of colonial state in Indian indentured emigration to the level of benevolent neutrality.45 This argument does not hold much

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weight when we count the attempts and initiatives made by the Indian and Mauritian
governments in regulating every aspect and finer details of the entire process of
indenture emigration.\footnote{For a detailed account of Indian governments’ involvement in the indenture emigration, see Chapter I of this work.} Indian government actually tried to act as the regulator of the
entire business of labour mobilization, to secure a regular, uninterrupted supply of
labour to the colonies by ensuring the smooth functioning of the entire system.
Though in the language of official prose, it resorted to the classical discourse of
imperialism i.e. to protect the interests of the intending emigrants by making it free
from evils. It intervened actively and directly in the labour mobilization by enacting
extensive legislative measures related to recruitment, selection and transportation of
indentured labourers.\footnote{Bates, Crispin and Marina, Carter, ‘Tribal and Indented Migrants in Colonial India: Modes of
Recruitment and Forms of Incorporation’ in Robb, Peter, (ed.) Dalit Movements and the Meanings of Labour in India, OUP, Delhi. 1993, p.183.}
Indian government evolved a well structured administrative
machinery and legislative framework in collaboration with labour importing colonies
to regulate indentured emigration which in reality facilitated the labour mobilization
as per the requirements of the labour importing colonies.

Since the sugar industry was the foremost source of the revenues for the
Mauritian government, it was an obvious necessity and obligation for the government
to protect the interests of the plantation lobby ‘...(an) obligation imposed upon the
government, both imperial and local, to support to the utmost of its ability at this
crisis’. Mauritian government’s primary concern was to secure an uninterrupted and
generous inflow of labourers from India and to ensure this inflow without any
hindrance, it took deep interest and involvement in the emigration process, ‘the
system of immigration in all its branches becomes of paramount consideration and its operation... demands the vigilant and increasing attention of the government'.

Mauritian government acted at the behest of planters in the negotiations around the indentured emigration and set the principles of selectivity and quantum of emigrants. It involved itself directly in the labour mobilization process through Emigration Agent who was its direct appointee, who in turn took every possible step to encourage emigration from India, regulated the conditions of indenture in terms of wages and duration; all in accordance with the requirements of the Mauritian planters and to ensure an abundant supply of cheap labour for sugar plantation.

These initiatives and activities of the Mauritanian government in the emigration process had significant contribution in determining the quantum and patterns of indentured emigration from India, which was ‘the sheet-anchor of colonial prosperity’.

The rationale of this section is to illustrate that the emigration of Indians to Mauritius was such a phenomenon in history for which it is impossible to find one responsible factor and using the push/pull alternatives model alone could not explain this complex process. A large scale human displacement like overseas emigration of Indian labourers under indentured system required two essentials, first, the creation of a vulnerable, volatile, available work force which was ready to dislocate itself to new locations and, second, a well structured system to facilitate this movement. In our case, the ready to move labourers was created by push, what can be termed as individuals choice for the maximization of opportunities, societal factors like family feuds, caste oppression, political upheavals (1857 revolt) etc. and their movement and volume was regulated and facilitated by a well structured system of labour.

\[48\] Higginson to Grey, dt. 16 May 1851, Minutes of Council of Government, 1851, MA.
mobilization evolved by the governments of India and Mauritius as per the requirements of colonial economic considerations. Therefore, a persuasive explanation of factors for emigration needs a careful analysis of both these essentials.

**Recruitment**

Recruitment of indentured labourers had a very profound and critical implication in the working of indentured emigration. It was also a subject of grave concern for the colonial governments primarily for two reasons: first, an effective recruitment system was essential for securing the required supply of labourers and second, the malpractices associated with recruitment such as kidnapping, deception etc. earned an ill repute for the indenture system which was articulated by the anti indenture lobby in their campaign for its abolition. Historiography of the indentured labour recruitment is again polarized between the two opinions – the ‘deception approach’ and the ‘free choice approach’. The *deception approach*, first promulgated by the anti indenture groups such as British and Foreign Anti Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society and Indian nationalists and later adopted by Tinker and many others, lay emphasise on the incidents of fraudulent methods, kidnapping in the recruitment system and question the recruits’ ability to understand the complexities of the contract.49 As an antithesis to the ‘deception approach’ which asserts that the emigrants were forced into indentured emigration, the *free choice approach*50 put emphasise on the ‘informed choice of emigrants’ and argue that there was no need of a labour mobilization strategy as ‘the colonial recruiting agencies only tapped the stream of migratory workers which already existed’51. The primary function of

recruiting mechanism, according to this approach, was only to facilitate and direct the stream of emigrants towards the specific locations.

Both these approaches essentially discuss the nature of recruitment and conceive it as a static structure regulated through government regulations. The recruitment of indentured labourers was conducted through a 'recruitment strategy' which evolved in a historical process as per the needs of the destinations and the circumstantial necessities to maintain the inflow of emigrants. The initial departure from studying recruitment as a 'system' (static) to study it as a strategy (dynamic) has been made by Marina Carter in a very suggestive manner.\(^5\) She argues for the need to investigate the crucial changes in the recruiting strategy that helped to maintain the dynamism of overseas labour mobilization\(^6\) and considers the returnee emigrants as the spearheads for the functioning of this strategy.\(^7\) However, her over-emphasis on the role of returnee emigrants in the every aspect of labour mobilization remains problematic as I have tried to argue later in this chapter.

\textbf{i. Working of Indentured Recruitment:}

In this section I shall be discussing the structure and problems of the recruitment of indentured labourers for emigration to Mauritius. Since the recruitment was one of the most controversial parts of the indenture system, almost all the legislations related to the indenture system addressed this aspect. Therefore, in this section we may find certain repetitions from the chapter one of this work in the description of certain legislations. This apparent repetition became imperative for me to make the description of the structure of recruitment coherent and comprehensive.

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\(^5\) Cater, Marina, \textit{Strategies}.

\(^6\) ibid, p. 229.

\(^7\) The importance of returnee emigrants in the labour mobilisation was suggested much earlier by Saha in a limited manner. Saha, \textit{Emigration of Indian Labour}, p. 74.
However, in this section, the discussion of various Acts is limited only to recruitment part and that too on the functional implications while in chapter one, I have discussed their implications for the indenture system as a whole. The system of indentured emigration began as a private initiative of Mauritian planters. These planters would send their requirements of labourers to the various firms located in port towns in India who would then procure labourers through local recruiters, known as arkatis, duffadars (in north India) and maistries (in South Western India). These recruiters were paid ‘per head’ or according to the numbers of emigrants recruited by them and their remuneration was drawn from the six months advance wages supposedly paid to the intending emigrants\(^{55}\) at the time of entering into the contract. From the very beginning, indentured labourers from India became the preferred choice of Mauritian planters, and within four years of the commencement of the system more than 25,000 Indian labourers entered Mauritius under the indentured system. Because of the heavy demands, the recruitment operation expanded manifold. Large number of firms set up operations\(^{56}\) to procure labourers through native recruiters and the primary motive of both the agencies of indentured recruitment, the recruiting firms and recruiters, were to meet the demand from the colony at any cost and by every possible means. There was no regulatory measure imposed upon the recruitment process by the Government of India except Act V of 1837 aimed at ascertaining that the emigrants are formally engaged, and that too was enacted only after three years of the commencement of system in 1834. Heavy demand of labourers and the peculiar mode of remuneration to the recruiters, which lured them to maximize their gains by recruiting maximum

\(^{55}\) Report of Dickens Committee, 1841, p. 16. Committee observed that ‘of the six months’ advance wage, to be paid to the labourers on entering into the contract, labours got little or nothing.

\(^{56}\) In Calcutta some of the prominent firms engaged in procuring labourers were – Gillanders, Arbuthnot & Co.; Chapman and Barelay Smith, Ewing and Co.; Honley Dowson and Bestel, Jardine, Lyall Matheson & Co., Scott and Co., etc. Report of Dickens Committee; Prog. No.46, Gen.(Emi.), dt. 17 March 1841, WBSA.
number of recruits, led to a number of malpractices in the recruitment process, including deception and kidnapping. These malpractices were further aggravated by the absence of any effective regulation by the Government and very soon the problems of recruitment began to blow up. T.P. Woodcock of Bengal Civil Services who visited Mauritius in 1836, reported the prevalence of misrepresentation by the recruiters.

'Island was described to them in glowing terms and advantage taken of their ignorance to provoke the belief that every necessity of life was cheap, labour light, and the voyage would only occupy ten days'57.

He concluded that 'the manner in which they (emigrants) are collected' is the chief abuse of the system.58 To bypass the police observation at ports, and despatch the recruits collected through force or kidnapping, it was a common practice to embark emigrants off-shore, in the river.59

The high mortality rate of emigrants during voyage also had its roots in the abuses associated with the recruitment. Since the recruiters were paid on the basis of the total numbers of recruits at the port of embarkation, irrespective of their physical fitness or ability to undertake such long voyages, recruiters induced many unfit and aged people to emigrate who in turn could not bear the vagaries of weather and voyage and many of them died en route.60

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57 Papers Respecting the East Indian Labourers Bill 1838, Report of Mr. JP Woodcock, dt. 19 November 1836.
58 ibid, p. 156.
59 Evidence of Capt. James Rapson, Appendix, pp. 1-5 ‘Out of 336 emigrants on board ship Sophia, only 140 embarked at the part and rest embarked while its passage towards sea; without any pass or permit from police’, Report of Dickens Committee.
60 Mortality on board ship William Wilson, 23 February, 26 passengers and 5 crew workers died. On Ship Indian Oak, 29 March, 6 passengers died, Papers Respecting the East Indian Labourers Bill, OIOC.
Instances of kidnapping, deceit and heavy mortality on ships carrying emigrants to Mauritius were widely reported by the anti indenture humanitarian groups, people and press in India as well as England. They used these abuses of recruitment to reinforce their demands for the abolition of the indenture system. Finally, committees were set up to enquire into the alleged malpractices in the indenture system, most of which were associated with the recruitment. Subsequently, the emigration of Indian labourers under the indenture system was completely prohibited by Government of India vide Act XIV on 29 May 1839, though to be resumed soon in Madras and Bombay. In its report dated 14 October 1840, Dickens Committee (also referred to as the Calcutta Committee) found every allegation against indenture system to be true. The report of Dickens Committee revealed that 'the coolies and other natives exported to Mauritius and elsewhere were (generally speaking) induced to come to Calcutta by gross misrepresentation and deceit practiced upon them by native crimps, styled duffadars and arkotties employed by European and Anglo Indian undertakers who were mostly cognizant of these frauds'.

It also noticed considerable occurrence of kidnapping in forcing recruits into emigration,

'Kidnapping prevailed to a very considerable extent and the coolies while kept in Calcutta itself and its neighbourhood were actually in a state of close imprisonment'.

Dickens Committee concluded that no system or regulation would ever, in practice, suffice to counteract the falsehoods and secure a just performance of system

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62 ibid, p. 3.
and therefore it recommended that it would be better to abandon the indenture ‘trade’.\textsuperscript{63}

However, the real motive behind this recommendation was something else than the genuine concern for the plight of poor recruits. They (committee members) were concerned more in protecting the paternalistic, humane image of the empire, which was very meticulously painted through emancipation of slaves empire wide, from the damaging attacks of anti indenture liberal lobby in England and Indian public opinion. The Dickens Committee emphasized that, ‘permission to renew this traffic would weaken the moral influence of the British government throughout the world and deaden or utterly destroy the effect of all future remonstrances and negotiations respecting slave trade’\textsuperscript{64}.

In the wake of heavy losses to colonial revenues because of the labour crisis on plantations, the exigencies for resumption of emigration of Indian labourers under indenture system were gradually being felt across the administrative and commercial spheres. Mauritian planters formed a Free Labour Association (FLA) to collectively lobby for reopening of emigration. FLA submitted an all-inclusive and comprehensive plan to Governor of Mauritius for conducting the emigration process under the government supervision and setting up a fair system of labour mobilization. Among others, the two most important provisions of this plan which worked as quintessential elements for all the future legislations of Government of India to regulate the indenture recruitment were:

i. Appointment of agents at the ports to conduct the recruitment and embarkation under government control.

\textsuperscript{63} ibid, pp. 10-12.
\textsuperscript{64} ibid, p. 11.
ii. Proper information about the working conditions, wages and other allowances to the intending emigrants by the agent.\textsuperscript{65}

Finally emigration was resumed and to put proper safeguards, Government of India enacted Act XV of 1842, heavily in accordance with the provisions of plan of Free Labour Association which the Governor of Mauritius, Smith had forwarded to the Indian government. Act XV of 1842 established direct control of Indian government on the recruitment process as it abolished recruitment through private enterprise. To supervise the recruitment and emigration process, it provided for appointment of Emigration Agents at each port (Calcutta, Madras and Bombay) at fixed salaries instead of a commission according to the numbers dispatched. Indian government was determined to remove the malpractices associated with the recruitment. Therefore, to give teeth to these regulatory means, and to ensure their effective implementation, it provided for stringent punitive measures for any violation, especially for kidnapping.

‘Every person who shall attempt, by means of intoxication or by false imprisonment, or other means of crimping to export any native on board contrary to the provisions of this Act, shall be liable to be punished in a fine not exceeding Rs. 500 or imprisonment not exceeding six months\textsuperscript{66}.

Under this newly introduced government controlled recruitment, emigration agencies were set up at the ports of embarkation – Calcutta, Madras and Bombay to replace commercial agencies. Captains T.E. Rogers and Bidon were appointed as Emigration Agents at Calcutta and Madras ports respectively and the overall

\textsuperscript{65} Free Labour Association’s plan of immigration from Indian, Madagascar, Muscat and others, PP, Vol. xxx, No. 26, 1842.

\textsuperscript{66} PP, Vol. xxxv, No. 530, 1844.
supervision of the recruitment and embarkation process was placed under the control of Emigration Agents who was responsible to the government. However, in procuring labourers, Emigration Agent had to take services of middlemen (arkatis) who were remunerated according to the number of recruits brought into the depot. As the emigration was opened to different locations, Emigration Agents employed recruiters in localities who would recruit people in villages and towns and then dispatch these recruits to Calcutta for transportation to colonies.

This reformed system, however failed to eliminate the abuses in the recruitment as it intended to do because the mode of recruitment was very similar to the first experiment except a control mechanism put from the above. Complaints about abuses in recruitment began to appear. Bengal Harkaru, a Calcutta based weekly newspaper sympathetic to Indian cause, noted the deceit and forced emigration,

‘cases have been brought to light of coolies inveigled under false pretences from the interior, of their illegal detention in Calcutta and even of an attempt to force them on the public wharf to embark against their will for the Mauritius’

Commenting upon the vainness of any regulatory measure in effectively removing the abuses associated with the recruitment, John Scobie, Secretary of the British and Foreign Anti Slavery Society, described the system as ‘incurably vicious’ in light of the numerous reporting of abuses. He wrote to the Governor of India,

‘Already the result (of second experiment) appears to have been most melancholy. If the statements in the public papers are to be believed – and there seems to be no ground for discrediting them – the very same evils which before existed have broken out again. Persons were

67 Bengal Harkaru, dt. 20 October 1843, NL.
inveigled from the interior under false pretences, held in a kind of
imprisonment in Calcutta, and smuggled onboard ship; the whole
business being conducted by the duffadars, or crimps, and being
nothing short of systematic kidnapping. 68

Colonial authorities held the recruiters (duffadars) responsible not only for
most of the abuses related to the recruitment but also for the high costs of introduction
of emigrant labour force and its inferior physical quality. Following this opinion,
when Charles Anderson, Protector of Immigrants in Mauritius, visited India for
inspection of emigration system, his most important recommendation was uprooting
of the whole duffadars and crimping machinery 69 because he had, on earlier occasion,
noted the frequent occurrences of frauds and kidnapping,

‘many of them have been actually kidnapped from their own country,
which they have all been induced to leave under circumstances of
gross fraud and by false and deceitful representation’. 70

However, the real motive of this determination of Government of Mauritius
for removing the middlemen was to reduce the cost of introduction of labour in
Mauritius by saving the bounty paid to duffadar for each recruit, and not any genuine
concern for the protection of emigrants’ interests. 71

Following the recommendations of the Governor of Mauritius, Anderson*,
Government of India passed Act XXI of 1843 which restricted the emigration to
Mauritius from port of Calcutta only and as a measure to place direct control over the

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70 Anderson cited in the petition submitted by the British and Foreign Anti Slavery Society,
Emigration from India: The Export of Coolies and Other Labourers to Mauritius, OIOC.
71 Select Documents, Vol. II, Doc. 2.5, p. 86.
* in 1843, the name of the Mauritian Governor was C. Anderson and the name of Protector of
Immigrants was also Charles Anderson.
recruitment and embarkation, and a cross check to the Emigration Agent, who was an appointee of Government of Mauritius, it provided for the appointment of Protector of Emigrants at the port of embarkation who was to be appointed by the Government of India. Subsequently Captain Rogers (who was Emigration Agent till then) was appointed as Protector of Emigrants at Calcutta and Thomas Caird (a former Civil Servant from United Provinces) became the Emigration Agent. Act XXI also fixed the quota of emigration to Mauritius for 500 per month.

Apart from the high costs of introduction, another reason of concern for the colonial authorities, especially in Mauritius within the existing system of recruitment was the recruitment of unable, unfit labourers which not only adversely affected the efficiency of indentured work force but also responsible for high mortality rate during voyage. Figures of high mortality rate caused a lot of discomfort among the administrators of indenture as it was constantly used by the anti indenture lobby to discredit the system. Governor Anderson wrote to Colonial Secretary:

‘The person hitherto employed in procuring emigrants, and whose profits increased with the numbers procured, would be very scrupulous about the condition of the notice presented by them... hundreds of natives have been passed,... whose infirm, decrepit, and diseased appearance could not have escaped the most inattentive observer... Can it then be a matter of surprise that numerous deaths have occurred on the passage, or that so many should have reached the colony in a state of infirmity or disease’.

The growing demand from Mauritius led to a strong resistance from Mauritian planters to the system of restricting emigration to a fixed quota and only to Calcutta port, and emigration for Mauritius was resumed in 1849 from other ports as well. The

72 Anderson to Colonial Secretary, dt. 6 January 1844, PP, Vol. xxxv, No. 356, 1844.
plantation lobby demanded the extension of recruitment operations and appointment of 'auxiliary agents in principal recruiting districts and establishment of sub depots to facilitate the recruitment'.

After securing the augmentation of labour supply, the next aim of planters was to reduce the cost of introduction. And to achieve both these goals, they resorted to employ returnee emigrants for recruitment as they were expected not only to attract more recruits but also to push down the increasing fees demanded by the local recruiters and the coercive methods used by them which were earning bad repute for the system.

Governor Anderson noted that,

'It would perhaps be found of much advantage if some of the most intelligent of the immigrants who return were attached as 'peon' in the office of the Emigrant Agent, and employed in pointing out to the other natives the advantages which emigration to the Mauritius holds out to both sexes of the population of India.'

Despite these efforts to control the abuses associated with the recruitment, fraudulent methods and violation of regulations continued to prevail throughout as reported by the various enquiries instituted to investigate the working of recruitment. H.N.D. Beyts visited India in 1861 to investigate the recruitment system and suggest possible improvements, noted the continuing prevalence of unscrupulous tactics used by the recruiters and many other irregularities in recruitment. He also accentuated the limitation of Protector of Emigrants in preventing these abuses. He described the

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74 Carter, Marina, Servants, p. 46. Marina Carter has very suggestively explored and emphasized the crucial role played by returnee emigrants in labour mobilization and recruitment. However my research limits the utility of returnees in recruitment and raises questions and doubts to the extent which these returnees contributed in recruitment. I have discussed this in much detail in next section of this chapter.
method of recruitment 'radically defective' and urged the Government of India to take necessary steps to check the evils.\textsuperscript{76}

In 1870s, evidence before Geoghegan, who was preparing a comprehensive report on emigration from India, described the recruitment as 'a regularly organized system of kidnapping'\textsuperscript{77}. Similarly in 1880s, two enquiries conducted by Major Pitcher in UP and Grierson in Bengal uncovered the pervasiveness of fraudulent methods in recruitment,\textsuperscript{78} Grierson, however, showed some reservation about false pretences. It would be interesting to note that despite recognising the abuses associated with the recruitment, they did not recommend the abolition of system.

The general concern over continuing abuses associated with the indentured recruitment is questioned by some revisionist scholars; most notably P.C. Emmer who argues that what distinguished indentured system from slavery was the process of recruitment and emigrants made deliberate choice to go overseas, without any fraudulent method being used by recruiters. To quote Emmer,

'Little evidence exists indicating that fraud, deception and even kidnapping were widely used in order to meet the yearly demand for indentured labours overseas. On the contrary, many precautions were taken, both by the Indian authorities as well by the recruiting agencies in order to prevent irregular recruiting practices.'\textsuperscript{79}

This revisionist portrayal of recruitment system as free from evil is based on rather ahistoric approach and overlooks the plethora of historical evidence which establishes beyond doubt the rampant practice of unlawful recruitment methods.

\textsuperscript{76} Report of H.N.D. Beyts, MA.
\textsuperscript{77} Geoghegan Report, 1873, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{78} Report of Major Pitcher, 1882; Report of George Grierson, 1883.
\textsuperscript{79} Emmer, P.C., Meek Hindu, p. 187.
These abuses were recognized from time to time not only by the anti indenture collective but by the colonial administration and recruiters as well.

The continued reporting of abuses associated with recruitment of Indian labourers necessitated the structural improvement in the system of recruitment. After some impromptu legislative experiments, Government of India introduced Act XIII of 1864 which continued to govern the recruitment process till the abolition of system in 1915-16, with certain modifications through Act XXI of 1883. Under Act XIII of 1864, all recruiters had to be licensed issued by Protector of Emigrants (appointed by Government of India) and countersigned by the District Magistrates of recruiting district and they had to wear their identifying badges. For recruitment job, agents were to be paid fixed salaries instead of commissions upon the numbers of emigrants despatched. To ascertain that recruits fully understood the terms of service and were going of their own wish and not under any force, all recruits had to be taken before a magistrate in the district of recruitment. It also legally defined the duties of Protector of Emigrants and introduced penal provisions in terms of cash fines, imprisonment or cancellation of license for any violation of the prescribed pattern of recruitment. Protector had the rights to refuse the embarkation of any emigrant who, in his opinion, did not understand the terms of engagement or had been introduced in through misrepresentation or fraud.\(^{80}\)

On the basis of the above narrative we can draw a descriptive map of the indentured recruitment operations and its different structural layers. (See Illustration) On top of this structure was the Emigration Agent of a particular labour importing colony. He would seldom recruit himself and his main job was also to manage the emigration depot established at the ports of embarkation. Emigration Agents

\(^{80}\) *Geoghegan Report*, pp. 39-66.
employed head recruiters or sub agents who were supposed to look after the sub depots in regions. These head recruiters were paid a fixed salary and commission on the number of actually embarked emigrants, which varied according to the distance between the recruiting area and port of embarkation. To conduct actual recruiting in localities, head recruiters employed ordinary recruiters who were both licensed and unlicensed. There ordinary recruiters either received salary or commission, though the practice of paying commission was more common. According to Grierson they received Rs. 5 to 10 for each male and Rs. 7 to 14 for each female who would go to Calcutta.\(^{81}\) Therefore, despite all the deliberation to weed out arkatis, the actual recruitment was still conducted by the ordinary recruiters (arkatis) in localities and Saha had very rightly underlined their inevitable significance, ‘It is beyond doubt, therefore, that the ordinary recruiter or arkati was the backbone of the whole recruiting operation, throughout the whole period of emigration...’\(^{82}\)

Prevalence of unlicensed recruiters was noted as late as in 1871 by the District Magistrate of Ghazipur, which was one of the most prominent recruiting grounds for indentured emigration,

‘The licensed recruiter has in his employ a number of unlicensed men called arkatias and while the licensed recruiter sits leisurely in some district these creatures of his go out into all the neighbouring districts and collect emigrants. The arkatias entice the villagers with a wonderful account of the place for which the emigrants are wanted and bring in their victims for long distances to the neighbourhood of the headquarters of the licensed recruiter (sub depots)\(^ {83}\).

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\(^{81}\) Grierson Report, pp. 11-13.

\(^{82}\) Saha, Panchanan, Emigration of Indian Labour, p.86.

\(^{83}\) DM Ghazipur to the Governor of North-Western Provinces, dt. 10 Nov. 1871. cited in Tinker, Hugh, New System of Slavery, p. 123.
These ordinary recruiters (often unlicensed arkatis) approached people in villages, markets, fairs, road side, pilgrims, temples etc. and mobilize them to emigrate by luring about the benefits of working in the said place of which distance and location was more than often misrepresented. Then he would take all these potential emigrants to the licensed recruiter or the head recruiter. Licensed recruiter or head recruiter housed these recruits in sub depots, where their names and other details would be registered. The recruits were housed in sub depots for several days without being allowed to go out. They got uncooked rations and blankets (in winters).

In sub depot, they were examined by a Magistrate to ascertain that they had decided to emigrate by their free will. After Magistrate’s examination, recruits were transported to the port of embarkation and handed over to the Emigration Agent. At the port of embarkation they were housed in an emigration depot where they were examined by a medical officer to check their physical condition and Protector of Emigrants to ascertain that they are fully aware of the terms of the contract and going without any pressure. After Protector’s examination and consent, recruits were allowed to embark.

Recruitment process was not a smooth sail for recruiters either, who had to procure required numbers of emigrants despite several problems in their working such as the hostility they had to face in localities and competition and clashes between rival recruiters of different colonies. In recruiting regions or zones, recruiters had to face hostility not only from the public but also from the administrators and police who would harass them and prevent recruiting operations. Major Pitcher who made a comprehensive enquiry into the recruitment of indentured labourers in UP noted that,

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84 Report of Dickens Committee.
that the recruiter, though occasionally guilty of malpractices in the
exercise of what is looked upon by a number of people as not a very
reputable calling, has to contend with many unnecessary difficulties,
that he is frequently impeded in most objectionable ways by the police
and the underlings of the court.  

Major Pitcher further reported that ‘Perhaps the feeling most general to rich
and poor, in which even native Deputy Collectors and Inspectors of Police share, is
that the coolies are made to eat pork or beef, are deprived of caste..., and forcibly
converted to Christianity’. These prejudices provoked the local administrators to
obstruct the recruitment in order to pacify the popular discontent against indenture.
This popular discontent and hostility against recruiters aggravated at the turn of the
century when a strong anti indenture movement was launched by the Indian
nationalists in localities, as the following pamphlet, circulated in Eastern Uttar
Pradesh & Bihar, warns,

‘Save yourself from depot-wallahs.
Don’t get enmeshed in their meshes, you will repent.
They spoil your religion under the pretence of service.
Don’t hear sweet talks, they are your enemies.

District Magistrates would refuse to allow the recruiters to conduct
recruitment in districts by refusing to countersign their licenses, ordering the closure
of sub depots or by just delaying the registration proceedings. Local police would also
interfere; frighten the recruits by telling stories about losing their religion, and of

86 Pitcher Report, pp.9-10.
88 This has been discussed at length in Chapter 1 of this work.
89 Enclosure to Prog. No. 29, File No. 463/1914, Industries Dept., UP, March 1915, Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow. (hereafter UPSA)
harsh working conditions. However Grierson revealed that the obstructions placed by the local police were less attributed to their prejudices against indentured emigration than their greed. Local policemen would often demand graft and at Howrah Bridge in Calcutta, they refused to pass the bands of recruits unless they were paid a bribe of Rs. 2 or Rs. 3.

The other problematic factor for recruiters was the rivalry and jealousy from recruiters of other labour importing colonies. Beyts who came to India from Mauritius in 1861, reported frequent clashes between different recruiters in Raniganj, an important sub depot for recruits coming from districts of Bihar. Beyts quoted the magistrate of Raniganj, 'there were a great many different duffadars, arcotties (crimps) at Raneegunge... quarrels frequently occur amongst them'.

On innumerable occasions, the basic issue for the clash between the recruiters was one recruiter enticing away the recruits whom some other colony's recruiter had recruited. In stiff competition for procuring emigrants, recruiters often indulged in appropriation of emigrants from sub depots of other colonies. To lure potential emigrants and distract them from going to another depot, recruiters would often spread rumours about the harsh working conditions in rival colonies, ill treatment etc. In 1856, Emigration Agent for West Indies at Madras, Mr. Thomson, blamed Mauritian recruiters for difficulties in procuring labourers for West Indies. He complained that the Mauritian recruiters... 'are spreading such reports about the West Indies, saying that it they go their arms and legs will be cut off, and that they will

92 Grierson Report, p. 15.
never see their country again...’94 On another occasion, Emigration Agent for British Guiana complained that the two batches of coolies collected for this agency at Benares were decoyed by the recruiters of Mauritian agency.95 A similar case was reported again, through this time recruiters of Mauritius were at the receiving end, when recruiters for French colonies tried to take away the coolies recruited by the agents of the Mauritian depot.96

Whenever these incidents got reported, authorities in-charge of emigration and magistrate in localities and Protectors at the ports interfered and tried to restore the recruits to the agents who appeared to be the genuine recruiters.

ii. Recruiters

While describing the recruiting staff for overseas emigration and discussing what was their socio-economic background, contemporary observers and sources have made completely contradictory observations. Towards the end of the indenture system, J.A. Brown, in his deposition before the Sanderson Committee, noted that the job of recruiter is considered to be very disgraceful because ‘...the recruiting staff is very bad, the recruiters are the worst kind of men they could possibly have. They are generally very low class men’.97

Similar contempt could be traced during the earlier period as well: ‘the recruiters employed for the purpose were said to be low caste, who had no motives in mind other than to make fortunes’98.

Because of the nefarious methods used by recruiters, there was strong antagonism against them among the general public, local administrators and the

94 PP, Vol. xvi, No. 2542, 1859.
95 Prog. Nos. 16-18, Gen.(Emi.), March 1862, WBSA.
96 ibid., Prog. No. 43-47, WBSA.
98 Grierson Report, p. 12.
police, which could be seen as the possible reason for non-involvement of respectable section of native society in the recruitment process. As Major Pitcher had pointed out:

'the amount of ridicule and abuse which recruiters stand from the bazaar, the undoubted fact that their occupation is much looked down upon by the well to do classes, and the strong antagonism with which they frequently have to cope with both in the police and in the district offices. These, together with the absence of any sort of controlling authority to promptly punish or give support, made it difficult to attract the right type of persons to serve as recruiters'.

Contrary to the above observation which describes the recruiters as being of low caste and class, lets look at the following evidence which shows that the recruiters came from a high social strata. Deputy Magistrate of Shahabad noted in Grierson’s report that ‘They are generally Brahmins, Rajputs or Mohammedens’, who do not act generally in a criminal or dishonest way to procure the labourers they want.

These contradictory observations make it difficult to determine their background. However, collating all the observations leads to two conclusions. First, recruiters came from all sections of the native society and second, there were two tiers of recruiters. We should discuss the hierarchical order of recruiters first as it would help us understand their cross section representation. There were two types of recruiters functional in localities – head recruiters who were licensed and recognized by the law and ordinary or subordinate recruiters who were unlicensed and mostly employed by the head recruiter. Head recruiters were ‘superior class of men who have

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some capital\textsuperscript{101} because of the resources needed for procuring the license. They belonged to ‘high castes’ and traditionally affluent class of society – money lenders, petty landlords, traders, etc. Only these people were given licenses and authorized to conduct recruitment because the authorities perceived that only people with some influence in society and enough resources of their own would effectively mobilize people to emigrate and these people would not indulge in fraudulent methods because of the fear of losing their reputation. Obtaining recruits in localities and their dispatch was a tedious task, making it difficult for the recruiters of superior class who were already involved in various other activities and who had taken up the job of recruiter only for prospects of adding to their fortunes. As Hobsbawm has observed,

'... a variety of intermediary entrepreneur has had a financial interest in doing so. Where there is a large demand for labour (or land) on one side, a population ignorant of conditions in the receiving country on the other and a long distance between, the agent or contractor will flourish'.\textsuperscript{102}

Actual recruitment in localities was often conducted by unlicensed arkatis who formed the second strata of recruiters. They came predominantly from the lower sections of society. Major Pitcher observed that arakatis were from the class ‘which supplies sepoys, cutchery chaprasis and domestic servants... who had previously been employed as bearers, khitmatgars, cavalry sawars, infantry and police sepoys, cutchery chaprasis and so on...’\textsuperscript{103}

On their caste affiliation, Grierson noted that they could be Brahmins (highest in caste order) and Chamars (lowest) but he too emphasised the relatively poor

\textsuperscript{101} Grierson Report, p. 10-11.
\textsuperscript{103} Pitcher Report, pp. 9-10.
economic background of arkatis, who came from class of men of chaprasis or domestic servants, cloth sellers, and were not much better than the class of people they try to mobilise.\footnote{Grierson Report, p. 12.} There is a derogatory contempt in official descriptions of these recruiters who, as colonial officials perceived, were in a condition of economic distress because of debt, gambling, loss of job etc. In official narratives, this strata of unrecognized recruiters (arkatis) were held responsible for all the abuses associated with indentured recruitment as these arkatis would turn in troublesome characters, shift from one agency to other and resort to fraudulent methods, even kidnapping, in procuring recruits so they can earn a few rupees.\footnote{ibid.}

Recruiters came from all social categories – they were Hindus, Muslims, Brahmins, Rajputs, Pathans, Chamaras, Harijan and so on.\footnote{Reports of Major Pitcher and Grierson.} Brij Lal, a noted scholar of indenture Diaspora in Fiji, studied the recruiters’ origin in Banaras region and tried to question the view that recruiters were from lower strata of society. He has observed that the majority of recruiters were from the upper castes and Muslims and there were few from the lower castes.\footnote{Lal, Brij V., Chalo Jahaji, pp. 83-84.}

Brij Lal’s observation emanates from data compiled from, ‘Register of Recruiters for the Benaras district for the decade 1882-1892’. This was an official document and therefore it is possible that it listed only the licensed recruiters working in the region who obviously belonged to the upper strata of social structure for reasons already discussed above.\footnote{The arkati’s (unauthorized recruiters) recruitment network was so complex and unstructured that it was very difficult for administrators to actually count how many such recruiters were functioning in localities and to ascertain their social origins.}
Though at times emigration agencies desired to employ women recruiters 'in order to recruit more females labourers', recruitment primarily remained a male dominated job owing to its negative image in the minds of the people, rough working conditions and other practical difficulties. However, there were instances of women who worked as recruiters. Evidence of many coolies who returned to Madras from Mauritius revealed that a woman named Curpayee or Caroopayee was actively involved and her agency recruited a large number of emigrants for Mauritius.110

iii. Recruitment and Returnee* Emigrants

Parties involved with indentured emigration – planters and administrators both, were constantly trying to make the recruitment process effective, fair and economically viable. Among the various alternatives with which they experimented, one of the most important strategic experimentation was employing returnee emigrants in the recruitment process, who in official perception, would attract more people by their improved condition and wealth and by informing people about the enormous opportunities available in Mauritius. The official desire to involve returnees in recruitment process was first expressed by Charles Anderson during his visit to India. He stated that

'It would perhaps be found of much advantage if some of the most intelligent of the immigrants who return were attached as 'peons' in the office of the Emigration Agent, and employed in pointing out to the other natives the advantage which emigration to the Mauritius holds out to both sexes of the population of India'111.

110 Statement of Ramalingam, Veerapillay, Vencatchellum, *Examination of Coolies Returned from Mauritius to Madras*, 1842, OIOC.
* I have followed Marina Carter’s description of returnee emigrants. She describes the returnee emigrants as emigrants who returned from Mauritius and subsequently re-emigrated to Mauritius, usually bringing along many new emigrants.
111 PP, Vol. xxxv, No. 356, 1844,
He recommended for employing those returnees who come back with substantial savings as it had already stimulated the growth of emigration to Mauritius.\textsuperscript{112} Apart from inducing people in localities to follow their path of fortune through emigration, they were also the preferred choice because they were expected to bring down the cost of recruitment and to avoid many coercive methods of recruiting employed by the local recruiters.\textsuperscript{113} They could disseminate information about the destination better than local recruiters, who themselves had no clue of the location and working conditions of the destination which led to the alleged deception.

Role of returnee emigrants in labour mobilisation is one of most important findings of Marina Carter's research on Indian diaspora in Mauritius.\textsuperscript{114} She has examined this role of returnees in the larger context of labour mobilization and labour management, and production relations of plantation economy. According to Carter, use of returnees not only helped in maintaining the dynamism of labour mobilization and sustaining the inflow of Indian emigrants to Mauritius but also in managing the immigrant labourers on plantation. She argues,

'It (use of returnees) was also a means of maintaining a migrant stream to the colony in the face of rising competition between labour exporters. The study of returnee recruiting helps to explain the manner in which strategies for reproduction of the work force evolved over a period. Such recruiters, who often received sirdarships when they returned to Mauritius with a band of new immigrants, played an important role ...in the management of labour on sugar estates...’\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{112} ibid.
\textsuperscript{113} Carter, Marina, Servants, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{114} Carter, Marina, Strategies, p. 230.
\textsuperscript{115} ibid.
To substantiate her arguments, the evidence Carter has used is of figures of emigrants accompanying returnees. For example, she quotes the case of Mauderbuccuss and Chuttoo who brought 43 men from their home district of Azimgar (Azamgarh) in 1848, 141 immigrants who arrived in Mauritius on board Champion in 1850 had come with 17 returnees. She has very meticulously compiled a table of number of returnees arriving in Mauritius between 1849 and 1853 and the bands of emigrants collected by them.\(^\text{116}\)

However, a careful observation leads to the conclusion that the use of returnees in labour mobilization was not always a successful and effective venture for procuring emigrants and curtailing the abuses. It was definitely successful in initial decades but in later phase of indenture emigration the role of returnees had lost its instrumental position in labour mobilization. In 1883, Grierson observed,

‘Returned coolies as a rule are of little use as recruiters. A returned coolie either comes back successful or unsuccessful. If the former, he is too well off to undertake the unpopular duties of recruiter. If, the latter, he is for obvious reasons not suitable’.\(^\text{117}\)

Similarly returnees often failed to perform the second task expected from them by administration of indenture as well as by Marina Carter, i.e. to revamp the image of indenture system and provide efficient labour control in Mauritius by using their influence on the emigrants recruited by them. Instead they discredited the system by their activities as the Protector in Mauritius highlighted in his annual report of 1859,

‘The strategies and expedients these Sirdars (who used to go to India with a view of inducing newly recruited emigrants) used to resort to, for the purpose of acquiring their ascendancy over the recruits

\(^{117}\) Grierson Report, p. 12.
despatched from India, the disgraceful use they made of that influence... had reached to an extent which reflected discredit on our immigration.\textsuperscript{118}

The second aspect, which initially worked for the success of returnees in recruitment but paradoxically worked against them as well in later period, is their crucial role in shaping the popular perception of indenture. Many emigrants returned from Mauritius as paupers, without any saving and in infirm physical condition. In India, they disseminated information about harsh working conditions, exploitation, and loss of religious and cultural values in Mauritius. In complete contrast to the rosy picture of working in Mauritius portrayed by the rich returnees, these distraught returned immigrants portray Mauritius as a site of despair and people would lose everything if they go there. These tales of failure and loss of emigrants in Mauritius was widely propagated by the anti indenture lobby in India to dissuade people from emigrating to Mauritius. As a result, when returnees tried to mobilize people to go to Mauritius, they had to face enormous hostility in localities. Therefore, the stories of failed returned emigrants severely restricted the utility of returnees in labour mobilization.

The third limitation of the role of the returnees, which Marina Carter herself has admitted, was its failure in Madras and Bombay regions and in a competitive commercial recruitment. She admits,

'...both at Bombay and Madras local contractors continued to exercise overall control of the labour supply...' and 'Returnee recruiters certainly could not operate as effectively in a situation of competition for labour, when rival capitalist were recruiting in the

\textsuperscript{118} ARPI, 1859, MA.
proximity and offering financial inducements to attract indentured labour to other overseas destinations’.  

The strategy of labour recruitment through returnees succeeded more at informal levels of mobilization, like promoting family emigration – returnees generally took their family members – wives, children, brother, sister etc. while re-emigrating to Mauritius. Therefore, although on occasions returnees played an important role in indentured labour mobilization for Mauritius, it cannot be blown out of proportion.

**Migrants**

In the official lexicon ‘coolie’ was the word used as a category to denote all the Indian emigrants who went overseas during the colonial period, primarily to work on plantations. However this singular category was neither unitary nor monolithic in its composition and contemporary observers as well as scholars of indentured diaspora have different answers to the very essential question – who constituted this category and what were the socio-economic and regional origins, gender and family patterns, etc., of emigrants.

It is only through a careful and critical scrutiny of the material that we can put forth certain observations about the social origins of emigrants. In this section, I propose to explore five essentials of belonging in order to trace who the emigrants were. In the context of indentured emigrants these essentials were – caste, religion, region of origin, age, and gender.

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120 For an analysis of the etymology of word ‘coolie’, how it has been constructed as a category in the colonial literature to represent the most of Indian working classes and problems with perception of this singular identity, see Breman, Jan and E. Valentive Danial, ‘Conclusion: The Making of a Coolie’, *JPS* Vol. 19, Nos. 3-4, Special Issue, April-July 1992, pp. 268-295.
i. Caste

Tracing the caste affiliations of emigrants is a difficult task owing to the complex social order in India where hundreds of castes and sub castes existed. For Mauritius, Marina Carter has listed more than 70 castes and sub caste names while for Fiji, Brij Lal has identified 256 castes and sub castes only from North India. Second problem lies in the recording of caste names in the official documents. Ship Registers, classified in PE Series in Mahatma Gandhi Institute Archives in Mauritius, have records of caste and regional origins of each emigrant who arrived in Mauritius and therefore these registers provide the most valuable and finer details of the social, economic and regional belongings of the emigrants. However these details were entered by the emigration clerks, often non-Indian, who were generally unfamiliar with precise caste names. These clerks therefore, often entered very generalized and confusing caste names like Indoo, Maratha, Telinga, Telgu, Malabar, Muslim, Gentoo etc. which often represented the regional belonging more than the caste affiliation.

Reporting about the colonial emigration from Calcutta Port, George Grierson noted that only one third of emigrants could be identified as being from the lower social strata (low castes) but he was ‘assured by every native from whom I have enquired, and by most Europeans, that only the lowest castes emigrated’. Grierson’s observation very effectively illustrates the inherent contradiction between the popular perception as well as a dominant historiographical approach that only low caste, socially marginalized people migrated and the historical reality which reveals a mixed caste affiliation of the emigrants. This contradiction about the caste affiliation of emigrants has been balanced by a general consensus among the contemporary observers and historians that emigrants represented ‘an average sample of rural

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121 Grierson Report, p. 35.
population' — varying from lowest castes like Chamars and Dusads to intermediaries such as Ahirs, Kurmis to high castes such as Rajputs and Brahmans with a favoured tilt towards the agricultural, intermediary castes. Some scholars still argue in favour of the predominantly low caste origins of the indentured emigrants.

While in general agreement with the above consensus, in this section I shall try to argue that mixed caste composition of emigrants was not fixed and the relative representation of various castes varied according to social conditions in localities, preference of recruiters, political-economic reasons, etc.

During the initial years of emigration of indentured labourers to Mauritius, most of the emigrants were ‘hill coolies’ or ‘hill tribes’ or dhangars, who were tribals from the Chota Nagpur region. In 1837-38, dhangars and other hill tribes averaged between 20 per cent to 50 per cent with exceptionally high proportion of up to 90 per cent, on some ships, of the total emigration to Mauritius. Hugh Tinker estimates that their proportion in total emigrants was between 40 per cent to 50 per cent during 1840s and 1850s, which appears to be a little exaggerated for late 1850s. The main tribes clubbed in official literature as dhangars were mainly Santals, Oraons and Kols. Dhangars did not belong to the traditional caste order, came from an economically vulnerable situation and were considered to be ‘habitual migrants’, thus making them a favourite for the new recruiters. In his 'Memorandum on Indian Immigration' John Mckay noted that

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122 For contemporary observations see Geoghegan Report, Grierson Report, Pitcher Report. For historical analysis of caste of emigrants see Brij Lal’s Girmiyas; Hugh Tinker’s New System of Slavery; Marina Carter’s Servants; Surendra Bhana’s Indentured Immigrations to Natal, to quote a few.
124 Prog. No. 1, Gen. (Emi.), dt. 10 February 1836, WBSA.
125 Report of Dickens Committee, Appendix 2A.
126 Tinker, Hugh, New System of Slavery, p. 49.
‘dangas (dhangars)... entertain no prejudices of caste or religion, and are willing to turn their hands to any labour.... In their own country they have but little rice, and eat snakes, lizards, rats, mice etc. Their clothing is simple, and scanty and they eat only once, rarely twice, in twenty four hours'.

Despite this predominance of Dhangars in the early years of emigration, there were emigrants from traditional castes and from high castes as well. Robert Neave, of Bengal Civil Services, who visited Mauritius in 1844-45, observed that emigrants were not merely the lowest and most indigent class of people but a large number of people of high caste and respectability.

This Dhangar dominance among the emigrants to Mauritius gradually declined from late 1840s for which historians have generally listed two contributory factors. First, excessively high mortality rate among these emigrants during the voyage as well as on the estates; and second, growing demand for them from the Indian tea plantations. In addition, the figures of high mortality also attracted attention of the humanitarian organization and people who were opposing the indenture system for its resemblance with slavery and they used these figures in their anti-indenture propaganda.

Since high mortality rates during voyage was one of the most important reasons cited by the Indian authorities for the discontinuance of emigration to Mauritius in 1839, on its resumption in 1843, recruiters became more careful in the choice of recruits. The administrative rationale for choosing recruits was completely changed which was reflected in the choice of recruits. Since their main aim was to

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128 ibid.
procure labourers physically fit for plantation labour, the planters’ preference shifted to agrarian castes of settled agrarian regions who were accustomed to the agricultural work. The initial preference was for Hill coolies because their unsettled lives and distressed economic conditions made them vulnerable and more susceptible to migration. As a consequence of the changed preference of recruiters, the caste composition of emigration also changed ‘from an outpouring of the lowest castes’ to a greater representation of castes associated with agricultural order especially those from the intermediate strata.

Geoghegan had analysed 1,659 emigrants who left from Calcutta for Mauritius between April and July 1872. As per his analysis, emigrants from higher castes were 21 per cent, respectable agricultural castes 38 per cent, artisan castes 13 per cent, and low castes 27 per cent. For Madras, his observation was that most were Parias and Sudras.131 Between 1872 and 1874, the total Hindu emigrants who left from Calcutta were 35,199. Among these 5,672 (16%) were Brahmins and high castes, 11,533 (32%) were from agriculturist castes, 14,587 (41 per cent) were from low castes.132 Grierson’s analysis of 936 Hindu emigrants from Bihar reveals that 231 (25 per cent) were from higher castes (Brahmin, Rajput), 454 (48 per cent) from middle social order (Kahar, Gwala, Kurmi) and 277 (29 per cent) from lowest castes (Chamars, Dusad)133.

Marina Carter has very meticulously done a sampling of 10,966 emigrants who arrived in Mauritius from Calcutta, Madras and Bombay between 1843 and 1873. The following table showing the caste affiliations of emigrants embarking from Calcutta port has been made on the basis of her sampling:

131 Geoghegan Report, p. 68.  
132 Prog. No. 9, Rev., Ag. And Commerce, (Emi.), October 1873; Prog No. 1, Rev., Ag. and Commerce, (Emi.), December 1874 NAI.  
133 Grierson Report, p. 17.
Table 3.3

Caste of Immigrants Arriving from Calcutta Port

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From Calcutta</th>
<th>Male (2885)</th>
<th>Female (766)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chamar</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurmi</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwala + Ahir</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dosad</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koeri</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajput + Chuttree</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhangi</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bagdi</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*figures within bracket show the total number of samples.

The above survey of data pertaining to the caste affiliation of Indian emigrants in Mauritius very eloquently establishes that indenture emigration was not an entirely low caste affair and though the low caste like Chamar was the highest individual caste among the emigrants, there was a substantial representation from high and intermediary castes and on a combined proportionate representation, high and intermediary castes outweighed the lower castes. This relative dominance of high and intermediary castes had its attributes in the preference of planters and colonial administrators who considered the recruits belonging to agricultural castes (apart from intermediary castes like Kurmi, Koeri, Yadav etc., majority of Brahmins and Rajputs...
in regions of Bihar and United Provinces were small peasants or sustenance agriculturalists contrary to the popular perception of their being landlords).

As in the traditional social order and hierarchical caste strata, menial labour was considered to be derogatory for the people coming from high castes like Brahmins and Rajputs. On numerous occasions, recruiters lured these people by assuring that they would be offered the supervisory work (overseer or maistry) or peons and guards in the offices. However getting recruits from higher castes was relatively difficult and at times the recruiters had to face additional difficulties and hostility in localities when trying to procure recruits from higher castes.

ii. Religion

The religious background of emigrants and its proportionate representation in total number of emigrants largely reflect the population pattern of Hindus and Muslims in India at that time. In September 1858, out of 1193 emigrants who left from Calcutta to Mauritius, 971 were Hindus (81 per cent) and 222 emigrants were Muslims (19 per cent). Geoghegan has reported that among the total 323,877 emigrants from Calcutta port between years 1842 to 1870, Hindus were 218,973 (67 per cent) and Muslims were 49,860 (15 per cent). In Grierson’s Report, of 1226 emigrants from Calcutta, 962 (78 per cent) were Hindus and 264 (22 per cent) were Muslims.

For religious division of emigrants from Madras to Mauritius, Marina Carter’s study shows that the proportion of Muslim emigrants was much less. In her sampling of a total of 3861 emigrants from Madras between 1843 and 1873, Muslims were only

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134 Statement of Munno Missir, a Brahmin, dt. 30 September 1842, Examination of Coolies Returned from Mauritius to Madras, OIOC.
135 Lal, Brij V. Girmitiyas, p. 25.
136 Prog. No. 66, Home, (Public), dt. 26 November 1858, NAI.
137 Geoghegan Report, p. 64.
158 (4.17 per cent).\textsuperscript{138} Geoghegan had also reported that few Muslims emigrated from Madras.\textsuperscript{139}

For emigrants from Bombay, Carter’s sampling shows that out of 2089 emigrants, only 169 (8 per cent) were Muslims.\textsuperscript{140}

iii. Region

When colonial recruiters began their hunt for labourers, their first and obvious catch in Calcutta were hill coolies or dhangar tribals from Chota Nagpur region – from Hazaribagh, Singhbum, and Manbhum districts. According to Geoghegan’s estimates, among the 7000 Indian emigrants who went to Mauritius between 1837 and 1838, approximately one third were of tribal origin.\textsuperscript{141} Recruiters’ preference for the emigrants from tribal regions was influenced by their perceptions about these people and limitations of recruitment network. Colonial official perceived those tribals as ‘willing to do any kind of menial labour’\textsuperscript{142} as they were in heavily distressed situation where they ‘either perish or emigrate en masse’\textsuperscript{143}. Recruiters had to resort to the recruits from tribals regions because of certain practical limitations of the recruitment system which had not yet expanded in the localities. Therefore, it was much easier to mobilize these tribals for emigration who had already made the initial break from their habitat and come to cities and towns in search of means of survival.

When emigration was resumed in 1842, not only for Mauritius but for several other colonies, it created a huge demand for Indian emigrants in those destinations and to fulfil this heavy demand, the recruiters had to explore new regions in search of

\textsuperscript{138} Carter, Marina, \textit{Servants}, Appendix Two, p. 303.
\textsuperscript{139} ibid, p. 304.
\textsuperscript{140} ibid, p. 304.
\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Geoghegan Report}, p. 5
\textsuperscript{142} PP, Vol. xxii, No. 669, 1837-38.
\textsuperscript{143} Saha, \textit{Emigration of Indian Labour}, p. 42.
additional recruits. Another factor which forced the recruiters to divert from tribal regions and explore new regions was the physical vulnerability of the tribal emigrants. Tribals were considered to be less immune for Cholera\textsuperscript{144} and other adversarives of voyage and tropical climate which resulted in heavy mortality among them during voyage and their stay on plantations. Heavy mortality and emigrants arriving in infirm physical condition resulted in heavy losses for the parties involved in the introduction of indentured labourers.

Owing to these circumstantial necessities, recruiters gradually shifted the focus of recruitment to the ‘settled’ regions of Bihar, United Provinces and Southern India which was facilitated by the establishment of a structured recruitment mechanism in these regions. Subsequently the emigrants from the eastern region, Bihar, UP and Southern India gradually became the dominant regional groups. However, tribal region’s proportion was not wiped out completely and it continued to supply emigrants in considerable proportion. Geoghegan’s, figures suggests that among the total emigration from Calcutta to Mauritius between 1842 and 1870 (323,877) the tribal emigrants (listed as aboriginals) were 54,956 or about 17 per cent.\textsuperscript{145}

Indentured emigration to Mauritius took place from three principal ports of India – Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. Calcutta port provided 60%, Madras 33% and Bombay 7% of emigrants (emigration from Bombay was very irregular and ultimately ceased in 1865).

For emigrants from Calcutta port, the regions of origin gradually shifted westwards – from hill areas and Bengal to Bihar and then towards the districts of United Provinces. Geoghegan had also traced this westward shift,


\textsuperscript{145} Geoghegan Report, p. 64.
recruiting operations seem to have been pushed further westward into the North West Provinces below Cownpore.... The tracts which now figure most largely in the lists are Arrah, Gyah, Patna, Allahabad, Ghazipur and Oudh\textsuperscript{146}.

Out of 1193 emigrants who went to Mauritius from Calcutta in September 1858, 790 emigrants came from regions in Bihar while only 251 came from districts of United Provinces.\textsuperscript{147} But by 1870s, emigrants from United Provinces dominated the emigration from Calcutta. In 1872-73, emigrants from United Provinces numbered 12,263 in comparison to 3360 from Bihar.\textsuperscript{148} For emigrants from Calcutta port between 1842 and 1871, Geoghegan has traced their regions of origin as follows:

Table 3.4

Regional origin of Emigrants from Calcutta Port, 1842-71

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional Origin</th>
<th>Number of Emigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>108,156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>33,131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>8,951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>1,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWP, Oudh and Central Provinces (Later United Provinces)</td>
<td>47,286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>3,116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3,619</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Geoghegan Report

\textsuperscript{146} Geoghegan Report, p. 67.
\textsuperscript{147} Prog. No. 66, Home (Public), dt. 26 November 1858, NAI.
\textsuperscript{148} Prog. No. 9, Rev., Ag. and Com., (Emi.), October 1873, NAI.
Regional Origin of Emigrants

Main Districts of Recruitment

Note: each group is listed in order of concentration of recruitment

SOUTH INDIA

The Tamil Districts
A. Trichinopoly
B. Madura
C. Bassin
D. Salem
E. Tanjore
F. Chingleput
G. North Arcot
H. South Arcot
I. Malabar
J. Tinnevelly

Telugu Districts
K. Visagapatam
L. Ganjam
M. East Godavari
N. West Godavari
O. Chittoor

P. Nellore

Bombay Presidency
Q. Ahmadnagar District

NORTH INDIA

Hill Coolie Districts
1. Santal Parganas
2. Hazaribagh
3. Ranchi
4. Manbhum
5. Birbhum
6. Singhbhum
7. Palamu

 Bihar Districts
8. Shatbad
9. Pams
10. Gaya

11. Champaran
12. Saran
13. Darbhanga
14. Monghyr

Districts of the United Provinces
15. Ballia
16. Ghazipur
17. Azamgarh
18. Fyzabad
19. Basti
20. Gonda
21. Gorakhpur
22. Jarnia
23. Barena
24. Mirzapur
25. Jaunpur

Calcutta Metropolitan Area
26. Twenty-Four
For Calcutta bound emigration to Mauritius, the main districts of emigrants' origin were Bankura, Bardwan, 24 Parganas, Hoogly, Nadia, Purulia in Bengal; Gaya, Arrah, Chapra, Shahabad, Saran, Hazaribagh, Patna, Munger in Bihar and Azamgarh, Benaras, Ghazipur, Jaunpur, Lucknow, Allhabad etc. in United Provinces.\(^{149}\)

For emigrants from Madras port who were generally called 'Malabars' in official documents, main districts of origin were primarily coastal districts of Tamil and Telegu regions of Madras Presidency. The main Tamil districts were Trichinopoly, Tanjore, North and South Arcot, Madurai, Chingleput, Salem and the main Telegu districts were Vizagapatam, Rajahmundry, Nellore, East and West Godavari, Ganjam, Hyderabad, etc.\(^{150}\)

From Bombay port, least number of emigrants embarked for Mauritius (only 7 per cent) primarily because emigration from Bombay was often prohibited and finally ceased in 1865. The main regions of origin of emigrants from Bombay was Deccan coastal region – districts of Ratnagiri, Satara and Thane.\(^{151}\)

This dominance of emigrants from Calcutta port was attributed to a variety of factors – Mauritius was the more popular destination of emigration in this region till the competition came from Fiji. Planters preferred ‘coolies from Calcutta for being more docile and hard working,’\(^{152}\) and most importantly, Calcutta port was open for emigration throughout while emigration from Madras and Bombay was occasionally suspended by the Indian authorities (more often for Bombay).

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\(^{149}\) Note of Thomas Caird, Emigration Agent at Calcutta dt. 31 October 1857; Report of H.N.D. Beyts, p. 5; Geoghegan Report; Prog. No. 9, Rev. Ag. and Com., (Emi.), October 1873, NAI.

\(^{150}\) Report of HND Beyts, p. 13. Prog. No. 24-25, Home (Public), dt. 5 November 1858, NAI.

\(^{151}\) Prog. No. 5-7, Home (Public), dt. 26 November 1858, NAI; Report of HND Beyts, p. 13; Chandavarkar, Raj, The Origins of Industrial Capitalism, CUP, Delhi, 1994, p.124.

iv. Age

The essential purpose of exporting labourers from India was to obtain a labour force capable of intensive physical labour plantations. Therefore the obvious choice of planters was emigrants of young age and physical strength, 'it is therefore of much importance in every respect that only able bodied young men should be selected'.\textsuperscript{153} This was evident in the samplings of age group of Indian emigrants to Mauritius throughout the period. Saloni Deerpal Singh has studied the age structure of 1423 emigrants of Bihar origin who left for Mauritius from Calcutta port.\textsuperscript{154} (see table below).

Table 3.5
Age group of Bihari Emigrants Arriving in Mauritius, 1834-1843

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 40</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{153} Instructions to Emigration Agent, Calcutta by Charles Anderson, dt. 11 November 1843, PP, vol. xxxv, No. 356, 1844.

Above table clearly shows the planter’s preference for the age groups considered to be more suitable for physical work. Emigrants between the age between 16 and 30 years counted for a huge proportion – 69.4 per cent. This pattern continued much later as well. Among the 2039 emigrants embarked for Mauritius in the months of September-October 1858 from all the three ports, a total of 1201 or about 59 per cent emigrants were aged between 10 to 30 years.\footnote{Prog. No. 24-25, Home, (Public), dt. 5 November 1858 (for Madras); Prog. No. 5-7, Home, (Public), dt. 26 Nov. 1858 (for Bombay); Prog. No. 66, Home, (Public), dt. 26 Nov. 1858 (for Calcutta). I have considered age group 10-30 considered to be fit for physical work because the above reports use a 10 years band like 0-10, 10-20 for data sampling.}

Colonial authorities tried to regulate not only the age pattern of male emigrants but the female emigrants as well. Colonial secretary G.F. Dick wrote to Charles Anderson, Protector of Immigrants in Mauritius, ‘The women, when emigrating by themselves, should not exceed 30 years, at the utmost and those under 20 should be preferred’\footnote{Dick to C. Anderson, dt. 15 September 1843, PP, Vol. xxxv, No. 356, 1844.}.

However, the reason for this regulation was not to procure able bodied women work force because the women were not engaged in plantation work, but to provide enough women of young age who would form domestic ties in the colony and thus ensure a stable, always available working class. That was the reason why women of any age were allowed to emigrate when they belong to a family emigrating.\footnote{ibid.}

Another reason for the predominance of younger emigrants was planters’ interest in obtaining a work force which could serve for a longer duration by settling there and thus offer greater returns for their introduction costs. C. Anderson voiced this intent during his visit to India, ‘the object being to obtain persons of an age who,
by performing domestic ties in the colony, may be induced to remain there\textsuperscript{158}. However this intention to induce a settled and permanent work force promoted the family emigration as well which broadened the age spread\textsuperscript{159} because no preferential age was prescribed for the members of families emigrating.

**Women Emigrants**

Among the Indian indentured labourers who immigrated to Mauritius between 1834 and 1839, the total proportion of female emigrants was less than 5 per cent. This low presence of women among the emigrants was used by the anti-indenture lobby in their campaign. The British and Foreign Anti Slavery Society submitted a petition to the House of Commons in which it counted ‘the disparity of sexes between emigrants’ as one of the worst evils of the indenture system.\textsuperscript{160} For this ‘great disparity’, Dickens Committee, which was appointed to enquire into the alleged abuses of the indentured emigration system, put the blame on both the parties – private importers of labourers as well as to the general Asiatic character and prejudices of emigrants against emigrating with families and their women. For this Committee, there is no practical possibility of securing due proportion of women with any regulation.\textsuperscript{161}

The initial official approach towards the female emigration was negative. It was considered unrealistic, and would only augment the complexities of system and problems of the emigrant communities in their adopted lands. Contemporary observers found it against the prevalent emigration patterns. J.P. Grant in his minute on ‘the abuses alleged to exist in the export of Coolies’, noted that ‘for adult labouring

\textsuperscript{158} Instructions to Emigration Agent by Charles Anderson dt. 11 November 1843, PP, Vol. xxxv, No. 356, 1844.
\textsuperscript{159} Carter, Marina, Servants, p. 110-12.
\textsuperscript{160} Emigration from India: The Export of Coolies and Other Labourers to Mauritius, The British and Foreign Anti Slavery Society, London, 1842, OIOC.
men to leave their homes and families for years together to seek service at distance is a very common and a very beneficial custom'\textsuperscript{162}. It was reported that the emigrants did not want to take their wives because, as Woodcock Committee reported, ‘What should we do with our wives; they would soon ruin us; besides, if we had our wives we must have our whole house’\textsuperscript{163}.

Another reason for emigrants’ unwillingness to take women along was their extreme poverty which made it difficult for them to support the dependents (women were not supposed to work and therefore could not sustain themselves).\textsuperscript{164}

When emigration was resumed in 1842, the proportion of women emigrants continued to be minimal despite the recommendations of Dickens Committee for a mandatory one third of women emigrants to the total male emigrants and Mauritian planters’ lobbyist, the Free Labour Association’s proposal to provide free passage for women in proposed government controlled emigration system.\textsuperscript{165}

The initial humanitarian and moralistic rationale for promoting female emigration soon turned into practical necessities for the planters as well as the administrators. Promoting the emigration of women and family groups became a priority for the Mauritian administrators in order to encourage the settlement of the Indian emigrants and therefore secure a readily available settled labour force. ‘...object of regulations to secure for the colony a permanent rather than a temporary and unsettled immigration’\textsuperscript{166}. For this purpose they were also very particular about the preferred age of the women emigrants so they could form conjugal ties and

\textsuperscript{162}Minute of JP Grant, PP, Vol. xvi, No. 427, 1841.
\textsuperscript{163}Woodcock Report, dt. 1 Nov. 1838, Papers Respecting the East Indian Labourers Bill, 1838.
\textsuperscript{164}Report of Dickens Committee, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{165}ibid, p 12; Free Labour Association's Plan of Immigration from India, Madagascar, Muscat and Others, dt. 8 June 1840, PP, Vol. xxxx, No. 26, 1842.
\textsuperscript{166}PP, Vol. xxxv, No. 356, 1844.
therefore induce the labourers to settle down. When Charles Anderson visited India in 1843, he was instructed by the colonial secretary Dick that,

'The Women, who emigrating by themselves should not exceed 30 years, at the utmost, and those under 20 should be preferred, but where families emigrate, all the women belonging to them should be allowed to come, whatever may be their age.'

Anderson forwarded this instruction to the Emigration Agent for Mauritius at Calcutta with an explicit expression of the reason behind it. '..the object being to obtain persons of an age who, by forming domestic ties in the colony, may be induced to remain there.'

Similar was the concern of the Committee of Council on emigration in Mauritius in 1851 which urged for a radical change in the system of immigration in the form of encouraging the emigration of females and families, a change by which the emigrant from India will be encouraged to come and settle in the colony.

The Mauritian government took a two-fold initiative to promote the female emigration. First initiative was to offer monetary incentives to the recruiters for sending female emigrants in the form of bounties. The second initiative was to evolve a protective legislative structure for the emigrant women against abduction or assaults in Mauritius. T. Hugon of Bengal Civil Services had noted that the male emigrants' fear of their women being ill-treated or sexually assaulted in Mauritius worked as deterrent for the female emigration. To ensure the protection of women as per the native perceptions, a set of regulations were formulated – to provide separate

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168 Instructions to Emigration Agent, Calcutta dt. 11 November 1843, PP, Vol. xxxv, No. 356, 1844.
accommodation for women in emigration depots and on board and to curb the attempts to abduct lawful wives of emigrants through punitive measures.

After the initial silence over the gender imbalance among the emigrants, the Indian government finally woke up in 1850s. It decided to settle this imbalance by marking it mandatory to send a certain proportion of female emigrants which was subject to modification from time to time according to circumstantial necessities. It was reported by Charles Anderson that the proportion of women required by the Government of Bengal is 15 percent in 1843. However it was not a mandatory requirement at that time. Proportion of women was fixed as a mandatory requirement only in 1855 at the behest of British Government. It was fixed at 33 per cent (one woman to every three men). The proportion of female to male emigrants continued to be increased by the Indian government. In 1857 it was fixed at 35 per cent and subsequently it was increased to 50 per cent in 1859. In 1868, the proportion of female to the male emigrants was fixed at 40 female to 100 males for emigration from all the three ports- Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, and the Secretary of State was of opinion that it should not be less than 45 women. This was the proportion (40:100) which was approved by the Act VII of 1871 and it continued till the end of system with occasional modifications and relaxations.

The minimum required proportion of female emigrants was imposed by the colonial authorities from above and it was constantly contested by the recruiters and emigration agents. Their main objections were – first, it was very difficult to recruit women because of habits and cultural prejudices among the Indian population, second, it would lead to emigration of undesirable class of women, such as prostitutes.

171 Prog. No. 3, Gen, (Emi.), 13 February 1870, WBSA.
172 Prog. No. 1-5, Gen., (Emi.), October 1868, WBSA.
173 Rules relating to Emigration from the Port of Calcutta under the Provisions of Act VII of 1871, Calcutta, 1873, Rule 23, 25, Prog No. 1-2, Gen., (Emi.), December 1876, WBSA.
and non-productive female like children, and third, it had increased the cost of emigration to colonies and fourth, it would lead to use of fraud and kidnapping of women by recruiters to fulfil the required quota of female emigrants. In their response to governments’ enquiry about the recruiting agents’ opinion on the fixed proportion of female emigrants, recruiting agents for almost all the labour importing colonies – Mauritius, Trinidad, British Guiana etc. opined that such a high proportion of women was impossible to procure, it was very expensive and led to crimes associated with recruitment.\(^ {174}\) Emigration of ‘women of low character’ or prostitutes to meet the required quota appeared to be the foremost concern of the emigration agents, recruiter and on occasions the provincial governments as well. Emigration Agent of Mauritius at Madras demanded the reduction in the proportion of female emigrant on the grounds that the evils of sending women of bad character are greater than that of sending a small proportion.\(^ {175}\) Similar was the argument of the Lt. Governor of Bengal when he wrote to the Governor General in 1868 to reduce the proportion of female emigrants. He noted that ‘to meet this proportion, resort must be had to a class of women, who, both on physical and moral grounds, are highly undesirable as emigrants’\(^ {176}\).

Despite continued protests from the recruiters and emigration agents, the colonial government in India took a firm position on maintaining a certain proportion of female emigrants, though it did provide for relaxation in unfavourable situations. It remained unperturbed by the allegations of emigration of women of low character. In a complete juxtaposition of above opinion of the Emigration Agent at Madras, the Governor General asserted that ‘even if some prostitutes are recruited, it is not as

\(^ {174}\) Prog. Nos. 3, 13, Gen., (Emi.), February 1870, WBSA.
\(^ {175}\) Prog. No. 22-24, Gen., (Emi.), January 1870, WBSA.
\(^ {176}\) Prog. No. 15-21, Gen., (Emi.), May 1868, WBSA.
objectionable compared with the evils resulting form an undue disproportion of sexes, provided that all women are free from diseases.\textsuperscript{177}

Owing to the firm insistence of Indian government on maintaining the desired proportion of women, specific labour mobilization strategies\textsuperscript{178} and precautionary measures adopted by the Mauritian government, the proportion of female emigrants to Mauritius increased from 6-7 per cent in 1830s to above 40 per cent in late 1840s and it continued to vary between 40 to 50 per cent in subsequent years.

\textbf{i. Who were the Single Women Emigrants}

Who were the women who migrated not as part of emigrating families or other kinship groups but as individuals, is a mater of diverse opinion based on the different perceptions and prejudices regarding the position of single women in Indian society. The initial colonial perception was that the respectable classes of Indian women, because of caste prejudices and social stigma, would not emigrate except as part of a family emigrating or accompanied by husband or father.\textsuperscript{179} Therefore the obvious implication was that the single women emigrants were generally from an ease loving class of prostitutes,\textsuperscript{180} who were induced by money or some more powerful influences. The Emigration agent at Madras observed that of the 328 women who arrived in Mauritius in 1868-69, 138 women were single and 34 had venereal diseases and therefore he concluded that many of the single women were prostitutes.\textsuperscript{181}

\textsuperscript{177} Letter of Governor General dt. 26 November 1869, Prog. No. 22-24, Gen., (Emi.), January 1870, WBSA.

\textsuperscript{178} Marina Carter, as usual attributes the reasons for a higher proportion of women emigrants for Mauritius to the returnee emigrant based recruitment strategy. Carter, Marina, \textit{Lakshmi's Legacy: The Testimonies of Indian Women in 19th Century Mauritius}, Edition De L'Ocean Indien, Mauritius, 1994, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{179} Prog. No. 1-3,Gen., (Emi.), December 1869 and Prog. No. 22-24, January, 1870, WBSA.

\textsuperscript{180} Prog. No. 4, Rev., Ag,(Emi.) , December 1882, NAI.

\textsuperscript{181} Prog. No. 22-24, Gen., (Emi.) , January 1870, WBSA.
Later official narratives find these emigrant women coming from the vulnerable women of the society like widows, single destitute women or women who were abandoned by their husbands or families. They saw emigration of these women as a second chance away from ‘a land which had no place for the girl or women who had strayed from virtue or had suffered misfortune’.\textsuperscript{182} Two prominent colonial officials Major Pitcher and George Grierson who thoroughly enquired into the recruitment and process of emigration believed that emigration would benefit these women by providing an alternative to the oppressive and hostile social order where the only alternative they had was prostitution. The most appropriate description of the female emigrants came from J. McNeill and Chimman Lal:

‘The women who came out consist as to one third of married women who accompany their husbands, the remainder being mostly widows and women who have run away from their husbands or been put away by them. A small percentage are ordinary prostitutes. Of the women who emigrate otherwise than with their husbands or parents the great majority are not, as they are frequently represented to be shamelessly immoral. They are women who have got into trouble and apparently emigrate to escape from the life of promiscuous prostitution which seem to be the alternative to emigration. ... what appears to be true as regards a substantial number is that they ran away from home alone or accompanied by some one by whom they were abandoned... and after a time were picked up by the recruiter... (who) have pictured to them a condition under which they could, both earn good wages and begin domestic life afresh.’\textsuperscript{183}

On the basis of these contemporary official accounts, scholars of indentured diaspora who have studied its gender perspectives describe the indentured emigration

\textsuperscript{182} Tinker, Hugh, \textit{New System of Slavery}, p. 257.
as a ‘great escape’ or ‘site of liberation’ where single women choose to emigrate to improve their socio-economic condition.\textsuperscript{184} Emmer suggests that indentured emigration was a vehicle for female emancipation and an escape from a culture which was hostile to single women.\textsuperscript{185} Brij Lal argues that ‘migration was not a new or unknown phenomenon for Indian women’ and counts women’s own reasons to leave their homes: to escape from domestic quarrels, economic hardships, the social stigma attached to young widows and brides who had brought inadequate dowry, and the general dreariness of rural Indian life\textsuperscript{186}. Marina Carter, in her study of indentured women of Mauritius adds a new perspective to the emigration of single women. She argues that they were not escaping from an oppressive family life, nor were they social marginals, but were migrating to re-enter established family relationships.\textsuperscript{187}

What appears from a careful observation of above discussion is that historically it is not viable to brand all single female emigrants in one category, neither it would be appropriate to trace one underlying motive for their decisions to emigrate. Female emigrants, like their male counterparts, had a heterogeneous composition. They had varied belongings – prostitutes, widows, abandoned or separated from families, destitute and accordingly the reasons for their choice to emigrate varied as well.


\textsuperscript{187} Cater, Marina, Lakshmi’s Legacy, pp. 36-37.