Though the indentured labour system was in place in many empire colonies, the abominable conditions prevailed in Fiji caused almost revolting tendencies amongst the Indian nationalists. The Press run by nationalists highlighted pitiable plight of Indian labourers in Empire Colonies only citing instances in Fiji. The exposure made by the press was effectively used by Indian legislators, prominently Gokhale and Malavia. This chapter has two sections, one dwelling on the role played by the media and the other on the crusade carried on by the Indian legislators, in the precincts and outside of the imperial Assembly.

I

Press Campaign

The findings of the enquiry held by two Christian gentlemen, C.F. Andrews and W.W. Pearson helped to set the ball rolling. The Hindu while appreciating the independent enquiry held by C.F. Andrews and W.W. Pearson, and the results of their labour of love, a report fittingly dedicated to the memory of the late Gopal Krishna Gokhale, provided the frightful figures regarding suicide rate. Reckoning that one in every twenty thousand committed suicides in India, The Hindu pointed out that among the indentured Indians one in every 950 has committed suicide in a year. Taking the average for the past eight years, The Hindu consulted that suicide rate was 20 times as great as that of India. Highlighting the incidence of suicide in Fiji, The Desa Matha observed that: ‘The rate of suicide among Indian labourers in the Fiji Islands is twenty times what is in India, and that of death sentences, eight times… Moreover, it is being established that in Fiji Islands a criminal only means an Indian; for ninety per cent of the crimes in the island are committed by Indian colliers. It is said that two respectable brothers had to deliberately kill their sister to save her from the hardship of indentured labour in the island, and preserved the honour and traditions of their family.’

In spite of the assurances of Lord Hardinge that indentured labour would be abolished soon, the Home Government, after his leaving decided to continue it in Fiji for

another five years. *The West Coast Spectator* burst out: 'Indentured labour in Fiji is a legalized prostitution. It is a shame and a scandal to civilization, to quote the words of the Lord Salisbury, that this legalized slavery should be tolerated in the British Empire in spite of the boasted dictum that 'slaves cannot breathe in England. Is the united and indignant voice of India to be disregarded: are all those finer instincts which raise men above the beasts of the field to be ignored to satisfy the Fiji planters? Are hundreds of Indian women to be sacrificed annually at the shrine of Moloch, aided and abetted by unrighteous legislation?... We must act prompt and without fear, fortified by the righteousness of our cause, and call the attention of the great English nation to our wrongness, to gross immorality and crimes that go on unchecked.'

The *Wednesday Review*, for its part remarked: 'The much talked dominations of the Dominions over Indian polity has naturally aroused considerable feeling in India, but there is already existing one kind of domination which we have not yet succeeded in removing. In the matter of the supply of indentured labour to work the plantations of the coolies, the voice of the Dominions has been supreme and in spite of the protest of the Government of India, supported by the unanimous voice of the articulate section of the Indian Community, not only nothing has been done to remove it, but everything is being done to support the Dominions.'

The *Wednesday Review* regretted that the colonial Government should have such poor notions of humanity and the ethical code that should prevail among the coolies. It wanted the Government of India’s intervention to put their foot down upon a system which is so inhuman and so revolting to all sense of decency.

Lauding the presence and support of the Bishop of Madras, who lent the movement the highest moral support, *The Indian Patriot* wrote: 'Indians are not degraded animals... cannot the Government stop it today and at this hour? Can anyone stand by

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5 Ibid.
and see the house-wife lured to the depot and forced to be the common wife of four?... It is well that popular indignation pours forth as it does, and we sincerely hope that in Lord Chelmsford we shall have a viceroy who with the same generous response to popular opinion as Lord Hardinge did on a similar occasion. The Viceroy should take the very earliest opportunity to make a pronouncement on the subject.  

*Andhra Patrika* specifically highlighted the plight of the women immigrants: 'Villagers are sent out close packed in crowded steamers at the rate of one female for every three males. They have to live in miserable barracks which are very uncomfortable and dirty. They relax into immoral and improper sexual relations. There is another form of polygamy more honourable than this. The kind hearted land lords distribute a certain number of males to every female... these females are the selfsame Indian females who have been well known for their chastity from time immemorial, to whom devotion to one husband is the highest duty, and who have Sita and Savitri as their ideals from their Childhood.... Leaving their home, and in the midst of foreigners, men are becoming fallen wretches with nothing to divert them except gambling and adultery. Females become mere breeding soils.... An overseer that forcibly outraged a widow, who could not be bribed to forego her chastity, was mangled to pieces by nineteen persons who triumphantly admitted their act.... A young women duly married was abducted by a man who married her according to the law for civil marriages, which was honoured, while the Hindu Marriage Act did not. Her two brothers shot her and cheerfully proceeded to the gallows expressing their satisfaction for having preserved the traditions of their family.'

*The New India* for its part blasted: 'Men and women alike sink to the most hopeless degradation; self respect lost, every bond of social life destroyed, far away from home in alien surroundings, with no amusements save gambling and women, the men go to pieces, the women become mere 'females'. They became a criminal population, desperate, hopeless, helpless, and degraded beyond all words.'

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The Swadesamitran's outburst was Hardinge then stated that no one could remain quiet when the septum was allowed to continue for five years more.\(^9\) The Karnataka voiced its opinion against the hated system as follows: 'Mr. C.F. Andrews who has made an imperishable name of himself by his loving services to India, has unfolded a truly heart-rendering tale of colonial barbarism in his lecture reproduced elsewhere. He allows facts to speak for themselves, and they are enough to put every self respecting white man to shame.... The question is, indeed, not one of states or nations. It touches our common humanity; and it is needful that our (the Mysore) Government apart from what others might do – should interest themselves in the matter and address the Government of India on the injustice and inhumanity of continuing the indenture system for any length of time and for any consideration whatever.'\(^10\)

The Wednesday Review observed that while pointing out that agitation was a genuine as it was widespread the agitation against the indentured system in the colonies was not engineered by professional agitators but called out by responsible Indians who did not care to embarrass the Government in any matter. The agitation was as genuine as it was widespread. The Wednesday Review was scathing in its remarks: 'It is sheer mockery to speak of Imperial federation with a place for India in it while her sons and daughters are condemned to such shameful lives in the colonies, where Indians have a right to the privileges which the British flag connotes. We trust the Government of India will take note of the significance and the widespread character of the agitation against the indenture system and keep their plighted word for its total abolition... The remedy is two fold, one is the abolition of the system under which Indian labour is recruited for the colonies and the other is for the committees concerned to discourage emigration as far as possible. It is notorious that agricultural labourers are one hand allowed to be tempted away to distant parts of the Empire by the agents of labour commissions and on the other they are forced by low wages paid in their own country to leave however unwillingly to foreign countries to earn a living wage... Much more liberal terms have to be offered to


the tenants to bind them to the soil which they have been cultivating for generations. What is known in America and in Europe as the profits sharing system may with necessary modifications be introduced to this country which will help in improving the lot of the agricultural labour and bring about more cordial relations between the landowner and the cultivating tenants. There is little use in the land owners complaining of the paucity of agricultural labour and wailing at emigration when they do practically nothing to improve the prospects of the labourers. We trust the leaders of the anti-indenture agitation will not fail to take note of this aspect of the question and educate the land owners in their responsibilities in the matter.\textsuperscript{11}

The Viceroy delivered a long speech on February 7, 1917 at the Imperial Legislative Council. The Viceroy dwelt at some length upon the question of indentured labour. He referred to the fact that Madan Mohan Malaviya gave notice toward the end of the last Session of the Council for leave to introduce a Bill to abolish the system of indentured labour. The Viceroy opinioned that Malaviya betrayed impatience in the action which he took. \textit{The Hindu} took exception and asserted that the whole country was deeply stirred over that matter: 'The indenture system, being an immoral and unjust one, and its undoubted evils, being as they are admitted by Lord Chelmsford to be, is out to be abolished without an instant's delay. The people of this country owe no obligation to the colonies in this matter. They must protest against any arrangement entered into in respect to prolonging it between the Secretary of State for India and the Secretary of State for the Colonies... This is a monstrous injustice to the people of India which Lord Chelmsford has tried to explain away by his plea for moderation and patience in his speech yesterday. The people of this country must agitate more strongly than ever to get the obnoxious indenture system done away with at once.'\textsuperscript{12}

Even the biased Anglo-Indian journals were disagreeing with the Viceroy in his statement on the indenture system. Expressing disappointment over the statement, \textit{New India} wrote: 'It is for us to consider, and not at all for any outsider, who ever he be,


a planter, or colonial Government agent, whether the emigration of Indian labourers is to be permitted for exploitation. Indian cannot, as a self respecting nation, consent to surrender that birthright. The fact that the Viceroy was only endeavouring, with the assistance of the Commerce Member, to amend the sex ratio prevailing among the emigrants angered the nationalists. It was proposed to send a further batch of Indian women to lead a wicked and criminal life there, without in any way putting down immorality. New India was of the view that the Viceroy possessed, the power to stop indenture at any moment by one stroke of his pen. The paper asserted that it was the time for the exercise of that power.

The statement wired to India by Austen Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for India, that the condition of indentured labourers had been greatly ameliorated by recent changes in colonial laws, revealed that Chamberlain did not appreciate the spirit underlying the opposition the practice. Taking exception to this, The Hindu described: 'It is the immorality of it, which is a blot on the civilization of the people who encourage it, that constitutes the chief objection against it. Moral issues involved are the determining factor. Mr. Chamberlain was also anxious that the interest of the Colonies should not be jeopardized. But what has Indian to do with the interest of the Colonies which have grown rich at the expense of Indian labourers? India is under no obligation to them; on the contrary, the coolies should be grateful that the vicious system was permitted so long... The question is whether the continuance of the hateful system should be permitted for a day longer than is necessary to promulgate the order of abolition... The demand of Indian public opinion is clear, and till that is accomplished, the agitation has to be kept up in all its vigour. There can be no place in the land till the Government, realizing the volume, strength and above all the justice of the demand, order its complete abolition. The Indian publics are eagerly expecting that, at least, by the 31st May next, the system will see its end, and it is well for the authorities to know that is not statesmanlike, just or

14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
even prudent that they should play with public opinion and postpone action which is urgently called for in the interests of common humanity."^{16}

The statement of the Viceroy to Desamatha was a thunderbolt. Desamatha conveyed its concern in a detailed manner: 'We are afraid that our Government show more concern for the welfare of the colonies than that of our country or at its people. Their fear is that if coolies do not go to the colonies, the work of the people there will be interrupted. Let it be interrupted! Let their plantations go to ruin! Let them lose their wealth! Why should Indians show any sympathy for them? What good have they been doing to the Indian? They refuse admission for our people into their country; they do not allow them to reside there; in some place they levy taxes from resident Indians. They take their thumb impressions. As to the plight of our coolies, it is heart-rending. It is said that there would be one female for three males. Consider the morality of this. Our hands fail when we have to write that the English nation that speaks with self complacency that they have civilized even cannibals that were eating men, that the English nation that feels pride in having put down slave trade, that the English nation that have devoted themselves to the protection of weak nations... that the English nation that is trying to sow seeds of morality in the hearts of all the men who are subject to their rule, should adopt measures calculated to root out the morality of the women of our country. Is it one female for three males? Horrible! Horrible! There is no protection for female morality and chastity. It may be said that scruples have perished both in the rules that have followed this policy and in the Indian action that consents to it. What a jealousy for females does this system breed among the males! What enmity, what a hate! What spite! What a rage! What venom! How many murders! How many disappointments! How many suicides! What a sin! What a sorrow! What an insult to the Indians! What shame to the Indian women! Alas, how many continents are there on the face of this earth, how many countries and how many races? Is there a law providing for the sending of labourers to foreign countries under such a system, to be found in any continent or country other than ours? If there is tear, then the plantations in the colonies will be ruined, it will be well to send female and male coolies from among the whitemen, and make those places rich...

Oh Hindus! Oh Muhammadans! The burden devolves upon us of saving the honour of India and wiping away this satir of insult. Even if Government enacts a law if we so manage that no coolie goes out, it will be a dead letter. Let the young men in the country band themselves into leagues, go to depots where coolies are gathered, acquaint intending emigrants of the privations and hardships they have to undergo, and dissuade them from their attempt… Arise! Arise! Save the coolies from the snares of the deceivers. Save them.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Justice}, an organ of the pro-British Non-Brahmin Movement in the Madras Presidency observed: 'The indenture system of emigration has been condemned alike by the people and the Government of India…. Both the Secretary of State and the Government of India have fully recognized the stigma laid on the Indian race by the existence of the indentured system. It is revolting to the Indian national sentiment. To wipe off that stigma and to restore the self-respect of Indian labourers as free British subjects, were; we take it, the main objects which Lord Hardinge had in view in proposing the abolition of the indentured system. You cannot play with such national sentiment and with the self-respect of free British subjects by postponing the final decision on the subject for five years, as if it were the construction of a type-design building by the Public Works Department…. The situation is intolerable. If the Government of India will not stop indentured emigration and the recruiters, let us start a campaign for recruiting for Indian Defense Force and stop recruiting for colonial emigration.'\textsuperscript{18}

The Government of India admitted in its despatch, dated the October 1915, that the women who go out as coolies to the plantations in foreign countries had to place themselves at the entire disposal of the male coolies. Attributing it to either lust for gold or by the coercive acts of the officers that made these women lead immoral lives, the system of indentured labour, which is the cause of all the demoralization, came under


attack. Coolies in the proportion of one female to three males were sent out in large number to work on the plantations and this evil system therefore was publicly protested.\textsuperscript{19} 

The Hindu remarked that: '... To get at the causes of this horrible state of affairs, we must take into consideration the fact that labourers are recruited at the rate of forty women for every hundred men. The life in the coolly lines, were no privacy is possible for women, where every regard for their modesty and gentility of women is flung to the winds, had undermined all ideas of the sanctity of marriage and the condition of the sexes in coolie lines is described as the 'moral of the poultry yard.' Over and above the suffering and hardship of the people, the very high death rate, the frightful immorality which is inseparable from the system, we have to consider how degrading it is to the people of India from a national point of view...'\textsuperscript{20} The Indian Patriot wrote: 'No one can read without indignation, the tale of misery, shame and immorality which Mr. Andrews and Mr. Pearson have written in the pages of the Modern Review about the life of Indian immigrants in Fiji. A severe condemnation of a system there could never be than that: it destroys all feelings in man and woman. The father selling the body of his daughter, the husband agreeing to part with his wife, so that she may be the wife of another, murder, suicide – there are the events of daily life in the Indian coolly lines in Fiji. The finer qualities distinguishing man from the brute are absent here. The beauty, the love, the harmony of the Indian home, sung by poets and admired by the world, are entirely unknown in the coolly lines. The very name of God is unaltered and the thoughts of a man never go beyond the food for the day and the satisfaction of the animal pleasures.'\textsuperscript{21} 

Justice, on 3 March 1917, remarked on establishing a recruiting system in India under due supervision and free from abuses. Adequate emphasis was made on women emigrants. The following is the statement of Justice: 'By stopping the emigration of all unmarried women and widows and married women who travel without their husbands, no injustice or injury will be done to the working class women in India.

\textsuperscript{19} Swadesamitra\textit{n, Report on Native News Papers, January 16, 1916, p. 149.}


\textsuperscript{21} The Indian Patriot, Report on Native News Papers, May 2, 1916, p. 759.
Similarly, unmarried men and widowers and husbands going without their wives ought to be prohibited from emigrating as recruited coolies. In other words, men without wives and women without husbands ought not be recruited for emigration. This is fixing the sex proportion equal. It does something more. It prevents the emigration of the undesirable class of women. Our proposal may appear to be a little drastic and at first it will diminish the labour supply, but things will adjust themselves in time and the degrading and immoral condition now existing will be completely removed... We are of opinion that it is not a very difficult matter to adopt safeguards to prevent the existing abuses, and there is no necessity for delaying the abolition of the indentured system because we have not already provided the safeguards for a system of recruitment which may follow. In a very short time the Government of India ought to be able to abolish the indentured system and establish agencies for the proper control of recruiting system, where there is a will there is a way.²²

There was a meeting held at the Gokhale Hall on 4 March 1917 under the Presidency of Polak to campaign for the abolition of the indentured system. *The Swadesamitran*, covering the proceedings of this meeting recalled the assurance given and the prolonged delay in fulfilling them.²³

**II**

**Movement by Nationalists**

The Indian National Congress was in the forefront of the agitation demanding the abolition of the ‘indenture system’.²⁴ Organizations were founded to fight to stop coolie emigration. These included the Indian Coolie Protection Society and the Anti-Indentured Emigration League of Bengal. The latter actually stopped coolies embarking, by obtaining warrants from the Magistrates of the Twenty Four Parganas, near Calcutta. In the districts of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh sadhus such as Swami Satyadev of Bihar were  


preaching opposition to indentured system. A pamphlet campaign was launched in the
districts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar from which the recruits for indenture came. One
pamphlet circulating in eastern Uttar Pradesh when translated real as follows:

'Save yourselves from depot Wallahs, It is not a service (nukurthi)
but pure deception; They take you overseas; they are not colonies
but jails; They spoil your religion under the pretence of service;
wherever you go, be careful of these arkatis; Circulate the news to
all villages.'

On 25 February 1910, G.K. Gokhale moved a resolution in the Imperial
Legislative Council of India, demanding the prohibition of the recruitment of indentured
labour from British India to the Empire Colonies. Speaking on the resolution Gokhale
contended that though it was not actual slavery, in practice it could not be differentiated
from it much. To quote Gokhale: 'To take from this country helpless men and women to
a distant land, to assign them there to employers in whose choice they have no voice and
of whose language, customs, social usages and special civilization they are entirely
ignorant, and to make them work there under a law which they do not understand and
which treats their simplest and most natural attempts to escape ill-treatments as criminal
offences-such a system by whatever name it may be called, must really border on the
servile.' Advocating its abolition, Gokhale said 'this continued influx of indentured
labour into colonies and the consequent inevitable annual additions to the ranks of the ex-
indentured tends steadily to lower the whole position of the free Indian population... The
struggle of free Indians to maintain themselves becomes more and more acute by these
constant additions and the whole community feels an intolerable and continuously
increasing economic burden placed upon its shoulders.' Referring to the principal
grievance of the labourers namely ill-treatment by employers, Gokhale added: 'The
Protector of Immigrants, being an officer of the Colonies' Government, ...affords but
little real protection to the poor Indian labourers. He is ignorant of their language and


Ibid.
their way of life and is generally imbued with the prejudices of the Colony and it is not his fault if he is unable to enter into their feelings or understand their grievances.\textsuperscript{28}

Gokhale moved another resolution in the Indian Imperial Legislative Council on 4 March 1912 advocating the prohibition of the recruitment of Indian labourers under contract of indenture within India or in any British Colony. After describing the principal features of the indenture labour system Gokhale pointed out the unjust nature of the system. He told the council that mostly 'simple, ignorant, illiterate resource-less people belonging to the poorest classes of this country are induced to enter – or it would be more correct to say are entrapped into entering – into these agreements by the unscrupulous… wily professional recruiters, who are paid so much per head for the labour supply and whose interest in them ceases the moment they are handed to the emigration agents; no fair-minded man will, I think, hesitate to say that the system is a monstrous system, iniquitous in itself, based on fraud and maintained by force, …wholly opposed to modern sentiments of justice and humanity.'\textsuperscript{29} Citing the penal nature of the contract, Gokhale asserted that 'the terms that are explained to the emigrants, when they enter into indenture, never include a statement of the penal nature of the law under which they have to live.'\textsuperscript{30} Gokhale argued that it was not a fair contract: 'it is a contract between two parties that are absolutely unequally matched, a contract vitiated by the fact that most important facts in connection with it are kept from the knowledge of one party... I therefore say that this system is altogether iniquitous. The apologists of the system, however, urge that there are safeguards provided to prevent hardship and injustice to the emigrants when they go their respective colonies; two such safeguards are specially mentioned; one is that in ever colony there is an officer known as the Protector of Immigrants, specially to look after the interests of indentured immigrants. And secondly, there are the Magistrates to give the protection of the law to the immigrants against any cruelty that may be practiced on them by their employers. Sir, these safeguards look all right on paper; in actual practice, however, both are found to be more or less illusory.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., pp.617-643.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
These men the Protectors and Magistrates- are officers of the Colonial Governments. They belong to the same class to which the planter belongs. They are generally one in sympathy and in interests with the planters: and it is not in ordinary human nature that they should care to displease those with whom they have to live, with whom they have to mix socially—and all this for granting protection to the poor, ignorant people from a distant land, in whom their interest is purely official.\textsuperscript{31}

Gokhale then turn his attention on the arguments adduced in favour of the system. ‘First of all it is said that without this system of indentured labour, the sugar and other industries in many of the colonies will cease to exist; the second argument is that, under the system of indenture, a certain number of Indians make remittance to this country and thus a certain amount of money is received here; and thirdly, that a number of these men, after completing their indenture, settle down in the colonies, (become) prosperous and attain a status which they could never attain in this country.’\textsuperscript{32} Rejecting these arguments as false Gokhale explained the reality in the following words: ‘As regards the remittances made, or the amounts brought to this country by returned emigrants, considering that these people have been for five years under indenture, the savings are really very small. The average savings brought to India are about Rs.150 per head; in a few cases, the amount may be higher, Rs.200 or so, but the average is about Rs.150. Now Rs.150, saved in five years, means only Rs.30 a year or Rs.2-8 a month. This is not very much after all. The mill-hands in Bombay, for instance, can save much more than that. Again, what about those who save nothing, are broken down in health and spirits, and either perish in the colonies or else are sent back to this country, mere wrecks of their former selves? When these things are considered, it must be admitted that even if a few persons prosper under that system after the completion of their indenture, the price that has to be paid for such prosperity is far too great...’\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
Gandhi made emigration the substance of his first big political campaign in India. He attacked indentured system in his many journalistic writings. Gandhi began his crusade by recalling Gokhale's efforts and his 1912 resolution. 'However much a benign and sympathetic Viceroy wished to remove this abominable system of indenture from the Indian statutes book, there was a very serious difficulty in his way and that was the report by.... Messers MacNeil and Chimanlal.' The Commission consisting of McNeil and Chimanlal appointed to enquire into the condition of Indian immigrants in Fiji plantation and the system of indentured labour, presented their report which disclosed that 'harsh punishment was still prevalent, wages remained low' and the reported suicide rate was disturbingly high, although incidence of suicide was not adequately reported. The Government supervision was not adequate, management was rough and unsympathetic towards their labour force; there were many cases of assault proved against overseers and headmen, which divulged that the relation was not satisfied. The recruitment of females was unsatisfactory and the allegation against the women who were living in the lines were prostitutes was strongly denied. The evidence formed the basis for a recommendation that indenture system should be abolished form Fiji, but McNeil and Chimanlal in contrary recommended for the continuance of the system. Gandhi said that their report exposed all kind of abuses yet recommended in continuation of indenture.' Never could an indentured Indian rise to a higher post than that of a above. And... when he returned a broken vessel...

Richard Piper of the Methodist Indian Mission in Fiji advocated the abolition of the indentured labour system from the Island country in his report published by The Madras Time. Richard had six years close acquaintance with the working of the immigration system in Fiji. He demanded that the system should be radically altered or entirely abolished without delay. The relevant portions of his report are quoted here.

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34 Hugh Tinker, New System of Slavery, p. 314.
35 Waiz, Indians Abroad Directory, p. 5.
37 Ibid., p. 314.
1. ‘The recruiting of emigrants is found on misrepresentation, notwithstanding all the government’s so called safeguards. Every imaginable subterfuge is used to decoy the simple country people into the Depots. Once inside the depot very few ever escape without five years of debasing servitude.

2. The system leads to the dissolution of family ties, the breeding of caste and its concomitant moral sanctions, resulting in the demoralization of all the better cases of emigrants and in many way.

3. I have seen, the most depressed tribes of India ‘the untouchables’. They can, however, claim respectability alongside some of the poor creatures in the coolie lines in Fiji. The Indian Government seeing that forty women are apportioned to one hundred men silently acquiesce in the moral degradation.

4. The system accentuates racial prejudice and complicated sociological problems. The relations between the employer and his labour have a bad influence upon both. There are plenty of British colonists who know no Indian but the debased products of this system and to whom all Indians are but coolies. The free Indians are despised because of his low standards of living. The subject servility to which he is reduced during his term of indenture only tends of heighten the repugnance.

5. The white man comes to look upon the Indians as fit for no other position nor capable of any improvement. Let it be noted that it is over twenty five years since Indians were first introduced to Fiji and there is not a single school supported or aided by the Government to which an Indian child may attend. The great mass of the Indian population are growing up in ignorance and neglect. 38

Reacting to the forthcoming resolution on the subject of indentured labour, to be moved by M. M. Malaviya, The New India of 4 March observed: ‘The system of indentured labour is bound to go, and real statesmanship lies in accepting the inevitable.... Its origin is vicious. The Parliament had ordered its discontinuance, but in

this House later on, the Capitalists carried the day. And lastly, it is a system which Negroes, accustomed throughout life to slavery, scorned to make use of. Such is the system which the Government of India have been permitting... The Indentured labourers are sentenced to hard labour for such petty offences as negligence, carelessness and even an impertinent word or gesture to the manager or his overseers. 'Can a contract signed between two unequal parties be more inequitable?,' asked the newspaper.

In 1916, March 26, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya moved a resolution in the Council of the Governor General of India on the subject: 'The aim of planters who had suffered so severely from the entire discontinuance of slave labour,' said the (Sanderson) Committee, 'was too often to acquire complete control over the labour market by means of regulations and administrative measures which aimed at compelling the coolie to re-engage himself on the expiry of his indenture rather than encouraging free settlers.' In consequence of this feeling, the laws relating to Indian immigrants, introduced into several colonies, were framed and administered in a spirit of substantial injustice to Indian immigrants.

Countering the opinion that the issue of indentured labour could be taken up after the war Malaviya observed: 'The Council will remember that, in 1910, our late lamented friend Mr. Gokhale, moved a resolution urging the prohibition of the recruitment of Indentured labour for the Colony of Natal... Two years later, he brought forward another resolution urging the total abolition of the system, the evils which he graphically described.... It was a matter of deep disappointment to the public that the Government of India were not convinced till then that the system was one which must be ended. They still hoped that it might be mended, and in that hope they appointed a Committee to visit the Colonies and to report on the actual working of the system. The report of Messrs. McNeill and Chimman Lal was submitted to Government more that a year ago, and I regret to say that the report was received by the public with great dissatisfaction and disappointment, as it unmistakably showed a tendency to underrate the

evils of the system .... A system like that, my Lord, is an utterly unfair system. It ought not to be called by the name of a contract, as the word is known to legal minds and the legislative codes of the Government of India. Under this system these simple village people go out to distant lands, and are tied down to work there for five years. They cannot buy their freedom, because they have no means to do so.... My Lord, I have personal knowledge of several cases of deception practiced by recruiters, which have happened during the last few years in my Province. Many a time have I or some of my friends tried to get a woman rescued from the depots. None but a magistrate or a person who has obtained a permit from a magistrate can enter any such depots. When we enter them we ask for the woman who, we have been informed, has been induced by false pretence to go there. Either she is not produced, or she is produced after being tutored to say exactly what the recruiter wishes her to say. If she says anything different, she knows she will be dealt with harshly by the recruiters.... Malaviya pointed out that nothing was said in the agreement about the conditions under which the labourer had to travel, dine and the loss of money caused in the form of fines.

Then, Malaviya dilated on the nature of the tasks imposed and the hardships of the conditions under which these immigrants had to work. He cited the evidence before the Committees of 1909 and 1913 to the effect that Indians are very docile and law-abiding and very easy to manage. A large number of prosecutions against them, he argued, proved that overseers had too much powers. Malaviya summed up his views thus: 'My Lord, it has been shown that the indenture system is thoroughly indefensible. It begins, as Mr. Gokhale observed, in fraud and is maintained by force. It does not benefit the labourer. He can earn as much at home as abroad. On the contrary, it is a curse to him. And it lowers the status and wages of the free population and brings the name of India into contempt. It is a source of advantage to the capitalist only who uses the labourer as a tool, and the sooner a system like this, which permits of such heartless exploitation of human beings, is put an end to the better will it be for all concerned.'

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
As a response to Madan Mohan Malaviya's resolution, the President of the Council stated: ‘I feel that we all owe a deep debt of gratitude to the Secretary of State for India and to His Majesty's Government for their prompt and sympathetic response to the representations, which I and my Government placed before them, and it is fitting for me to take this opportunity of publicly acknowledging their action. Their attitude in the matter fills me with assurance that what has been promised, will be performed to the letter and that the end of the system, which has been productive of so much unhappiness and wickedness and has been, relatively speaking of so small an advantage to this country, is now in sight. No one, who knows anything of Indian sentiment, can remain ignorant of the deep and genuine disgust to which the continuance of the indentured system has given rise. Educated Indians look on it...as a badge of helotry. This is soon to be removed for ever; and it is a source of deep personal satisfaction to myself that one of the last official acts that I shall perform in this country is to tell you that I have been able to do something to ensure that Indians, who desire to work as labourers in the tropical Colonies may do so under happier conditions; and to obtain from His Majesty's Government the promise of the abolition in due course of a system which educated opinion in India has for long regarded as intolerable and as a stigma upon their race.'

Dadabhoy thanked the President for his positive statement and spoke as follows: ‘The announcement which your Excellency has just made will be received with feelings of genuine satisfaction all over the country and with a sense of great relief. The theory was long held that this indentured system benefited the Colonies, but the truth is now dawning upon the Colonial authorities also that the moral degradation inseparable from it may prove a serious offset to the temporary material gain. It is not necessary to quote the high authority of Lord Selborne, who, as High Commissioner of South Africa, stated that the system was even worse for the employers than for the employed. For the peace, security and good name of the Colonies and in the interests of colonial administration, therefore, the system should be abolished.'

\[43\] Ibid., pp. 409-410.

\[44\] Ibid., p. 410.
Council who spoke for the cause were Khan Bahadur Mian Muhammad Shafi, Madan Mohan Malaviya and C. Vizaraghavachariar.45

_The Hindu_ highlighted the proceedings of a public meeting held on January 30, 1917 at the Young Men’s Christian Association Hall to protest against the continuance of the system of indentured Indian coolies to Fiji:

‘Protests of this sort have been made time after time, in the public press, on the platform, and in the meetings of the Legislative Council. The evils of the system have been pointed out in unmistakable language by Indian leaders and patriots of the stamp of Mr. Gokhale and Mr. Gandhi and others, and enough facts have been laid bare to show that the system is a blot on civilization, and a reproach to a civilized Government. If the people of India or the more enlightened section of them had a potent voice in the administration of the affairs of their own country and in shaping the well being of their fellow countrymen and country women, the indenture system would never have been permitted, or if introduced, would have been swept off long ago as soon as its most glaring evils began to be apprehended. We have no hesitation in saying that the legitimate outcry of the people against this pernicious system is still a cry in the wilderness and is due to their present political subordination... If now, as is asserted from reliable information, the Secretary of State for India and the Secretary for Colonies have agreed or are about to agree to a continuance of the pernicious indentured system of Indian labour for five years more, it is not only the grossest injustice, by a definite breach of the promise given to the people of by the Viceroy of India on assurances of support; previously obtained from the Secretary of State.’46

The Bishop of Madras, who presided over the meeting lent his support to the protest.47 Sarojini Naidu in a public meeting held at Allahabad made fiery speech on the issue: ‘The fire your wrath will burn ablaze when you hear indignities related. May that fire consume the system of indentured labour, I shed tears to think of the loss of shame to which my sisters are subjected. I must regard that loss of shame as affecting myself. You

45 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
are listening day and night to the accounts told to you of our brothers howling like dongs in Fiji Islands and our women are crying out in a worse condition than brutes. Are you patriots, who demand Swaraj without being able to stop that cry and loss of shame? For whom is Swaraj? What for is Swaraj? Is Swaraj for a people who do not see their mothers are subjected? Is Swaraj needed for a people who fold their hands and keep quite when the women tremble and who see the loss of their shame to a degree that is unworthy of humanity, and yet do nothing? If patriotism consists in your being full of mercy, honour, and love instead of listening to lectures and going away, or growing enthusiastic now and fading into inaction afterwards, all of you, from the Himalayas to Cape Camorin, should join to gather and prevent this loss of shame. This is your duty.\textsuperscript{48}

There were much heated debates and angry demonstrations at the Allahabad meeting to protest against the continuance of indentured labour. C.F. Andrews and Pearson spoke strongly against Chamberlain's resolve to carry on the system, throwing into winds the early solemn assurance for its abolition. It was resolved in a meeting held at Kasturiranga Ayyangar’s house to issue a leaflet to the public, containing the following: ‘O’ Villagers! The recruiters of coolies go to your in villages, fill you with hope, deceive you and send you to Trinidad, Fiji and other countries. We hereby warn you against falling into their snare. They tell you that you may earn Rs.129 an day but this is false. Wages are paid at that rate only for 5 ½ days in the week. Rice sells at 2 \textsuperscript{1}/2 seers per rupee. You will be compelled to wear neat dress and boots, which are very costly. After arriving there the coolies will find even in the matter of food, that they are worse there than here. Those who go to the Fiji Islands find their poverty and misery unbearable and some times commit suicide. The number of women there is very small and so the men there grow jealous, engage in quarrels and stab one another to death. Murder of women too there an ordinary thing.\textsuperscript{49}

In the meeting held at the residence of Kasturiranga Ayyangar, eight resolutions were passed unanimously, six of which relate to the formation of an

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.

association under the name of the “Anti-Indenture League” and to its constitution. Seventh to the report furnished by C.F. Andrews and Pearson on their inquiry into the indentured labour, while the eighth was for publishing and distributing widely notices in English and the Vernaculars warning the people in the villages against emigration to foreign countries.

There was a meeting held at Gokhale Hall in Chennai on 15 February, 1917, chaired by Subramania Ayyar, to protest against the indentured labour system. The Chairman in his speech mentioned the misery of the Coolies in the Fiji islands and said, in touching terms, that they were subjected to a worse indignity than slavery. He expressed the view that the main duty of the Government was to protect the Indian emigrants, but the Viceroy did not seem to take any interest in the matter. Several speakers followed him to condemn the system. Some of them remarked that they would not be deceived by the fact that an Indian was nominated a member of the Legislative Council of the Colonies. They expressed the view that the abolition of the system was not a difficult task of British people, who put an end to sati and slave trade. Referring to the anti-indentured labour law meeting held at the Gokhale Hall which was presided over by Sri Subrmanya Ayyar, on 15 February 1917, The Lokopakari wrote: ‘The Viceroy has been appointed to work for the welfare of India, and not of the British people in the colonies; and it is surprising that this is not understood by him and by the authorities. Instead of giving a sympathetic reply to the resolution moved by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya in the Imperial Legislative Council, the Viceroy stated that he was hasty, and set aside the resolution.’

C. Rajagopalachariar knew that any proposal to prohibit emigration of Indian labourers would be very unpopular in his province from where large numbers of Indian workers immigrated every year for overseas where they could earn substantially more


money than they could possibly earn in Madras and live under far better conditions. In
order, therefore, that the prohibitionists should not capture the Congress, C.
Rajagopalachariar proposed that a committee be appointed to examine the problem in all
its aspects and submit a report. The resolution was passed and the subject thus decently
pigeonholed. The Mail congratulated Rajagopalachariar for bringing the Congress to a
reasonable course.\textsuperscript{54}