INDIAN INDENTURE HISTORIOGRAPHY: A NOTE ON PROBLEMS, SOURCES AND METHODS[1]

by Brij V. Lal

Scattered throughout the remains of the British and to a lesser extent the French empires in Africa, Southeast Asia, the West Indies and the Pacific, are today found long-settled people of Indian origin. Most of them are descendants of Indian indentured laborers who were exported continually from India beginning in 1834 to meet the shortage of labor on European plantations caused by the abolition of slavery. Altogether, some one million Indians were thus transplanted.[2] The laborers left India under an apparently voluntarily accepted contract which stipulated, among other things, the condition of employment, remuneration for labor, and an optional free return passage to India at the end of ten years "industrial residence" in the colonies. They had departed, moreover, under the firm belief that they would return soon, after they had acquired the fortune they were told awaited them in the colonies. Many did return; but for the majority, the intended sojourn was, in the course of time, transformed into permanent displacement. The life and struggle of these laborers in the colonies has bequeathed a legacy whose full implications have yet to be grasped.

The story of indentured emigration--"those floating caravans of barbarian tourists,"[3] as someone remarked uncharitably--is no longer treated as a stepchild of either British colonial or modem Indian historiography. In recent years, a number of historical monographs have appeared on Indian indenture experience in several countries which, taken together with the works of anthropologists, have made the study of overseas Indians an autonomous and rewarding field of scholarly enquiry.[4] These individual studies have on several occasions been supplemented admirably by general comparative surveys.[5]

Many themes have been emphasized in the literature, and a range of ideological and moral postures adopted. This is not surprising given that indenture, as a system of coercive labor, was a complex social and moral phenomenon, riddled with contradictions. Yet, certain distinct lines of interpretation of Indian indenture experience can already be discerned. First, there have been those who have argued that indenture was, simply, slavery--the only difference between the two being that while one

was a permanent institution, the other (indenture) was a passing, temporary evil, though this transience by itself was of little significance. This line of argument has a long history, going back to the very beginnings of indentured emigration. Since the 1970s, however, it has flourished with renewed vigor,[6] partly, one suspects, because of the opening up of the great debate in the 1960s on the nature of the experience of slavery in the United States. Others have taken quite the contrary view and have argued that whatever the disadvantages--and they concede there were some--the benefits of migration invariably outweighed the costs. The indentured laborers, and certainly their descendants, were exposed to unsurpassed opportunities, besides being permanently released from irksome and oppressive customs of Indian society.[7] And finally there have been those scholars who have combined objective scholarship with deep sympathy and have suggested that the welcome escape from the constantly haunting specter of famine, or drought, or feudal oppression, was also accompanied by many lasting negative effects. In the process of migration, the emigrants lost the sense of belonging and attachment, without in their own lifetimes finding acceptance and recognition in their new adopted home.[8]

Much of the writing and debate on the nature of Indian indenture experience, it should be noted, has been done at a very general level. This, perhaps, is not surprising in view of the relative infancy of overseas Indian studies as a distinct and coherent field of scholarly endeavor; most of the serious writings on overseas Indians appeared in print only in the early sixties. Another trend evident in the literature is the preponderant emphasis on the experience of the indentured laborers in the colonies, an understandable bias which has unfortunately often resulted in marginal attention being given to the other half of the process: the origins, background, and motivation of the indentured laborers in India and the dynamics of the process of migration itself. And finally there has been the tendency towards almost exclusive reliance on conventional archival sources: government correspondence, private papers, published reports, Royal Commission enquiries, newspaper accounts, and so on. In this respect, overseas Indian historiography is unexceptional from any other. Undoubtedly impressionistic sources have yielded valuable results in the past, and may even do so in the future as new material is unearthed; but, perhaps, we may have now reached the point of diminishing return.

Given the nature and level of the debate in the literature, it is necessary now to extend and deepen the scope of the “macro” studies referred to above. This would involve, among other things, exploring new themes and areas with the aid, where possible, of new sources. In the process, there will be a need to shift from the general to the more specific prob-

lems, forsaking the traditional "top-down" for what may be called the "bottom-up" approach. New sources will have to be exploited which might provide the researcher with deeper insights into the perspectives of the indentured laborers themselves. In short, and without sounding extravagant, it may be necessary, given the existence of widely divergent interpretations of Indian indenture experience, to look afresh at the most fundamental of all historical questions: what actually happened, in contrast to what is usually accepted or assumed to have happened.

To answer this question, as well as to break out of "the hard capsule of a literary monopoly on the study of the past,"[9] historians (like social scientists) have turned to two "relatively" new techniques of scholarly enquiry: oral traditions and quantification. The overseas Indianist, too, will have to follow suit to enlarge the scope of his work; and, indeed, some have already done so. In Fiji, Ahmed Ah, the University of the South Pacific historian, interviewed in the 1970s some still-surviving Indian indentured laborers to record their own perspectives on their experiences in the plantations.[10] The indentured laborers, obviously, were very old and in indifferent health, yet they had keen memories of their ordeals under indenture. There was anger in their voices as they related their stories, and bitterness that their sacrifices had not been fully appreciated. But on balance their recollections portray a complex and varied picture of their time on the plantations. It was a harsh and dehumanizing world, they tell us, but it was significantly limited to five years or slightly more if they had their indentures extended for breaches of labor regulations; there were harsh overseers, and worse still, collaborating *sirdars* who were rewarded on the basis of the amount of work they were able to coerce out of the less fortunate laborers, but others on smaller plantations were caring and sympathetic; there was the relentless, debilitating pace of work, but a condition of total institutional isolation did not exist as the indentured and the free frequently exchanged goods and gossip.

These and other insights one gets from the oral evidence help to correct some of the simple explanations which have been offered as to the nature of indenture experience. At the same time, the interviews have the ability to communicate, through words and images, a feeling of what it meant to live and work on the plantations in a way that other sources cannot. Oral evidence "supplies a voice to the normally voiceless in history," P. M. Mercer has written, enabling historians to "transcend European ethnocentrism, not only for the direct historical and indirect sociopsychological evidence supplied but also for the understanding created or deepened, in the process, of the society under study."[11] Oral evidence clearly has its uses, but there are some acute problems also, quite apart

from the obvious one, in the case of indenture historiography, of its evanescence; today, only a handful of those who served indenture are still alive. One important problem in the context of Ahmed Ali's work referred to above, for example, is that much of the evidence comes from indentured laborers who came to Fiji after the turn of the century; those who came before 1900 have long since died. By then, because of improving economic conditions in Fiji, pressure from enlightened officials, and a gradual rise in the moral consciousness of mankind, many improvements had taken place in the working and living conditions on the plantations and in the so-called "coolie" lines. There is thus the potential danger of extrapolating from limited data conclusions about the nature of the "total" experience under indenture. One way to obviate the problems of the range, quality, and representativeness of oral evidence may be for indenture historians to turn more towards oral traditions, folksongs, legends, and anecdotes than has thus far been the case. These are generally more representative of the human condition they portray, not least because they have to be remembered and transmitted from one generation to the next, thus keeping oral traditions closely in tune with the changing feelings of the people.[12] Indeed, it is somewhat surprising that so little attention has been paid to this rich source of information.[13]

Quantification offers another alternative to go beyond the traditional reliance on literary sources in trying to analyze and understand, perhaps more fully, the experiences of the unlettered masses who could not record their impressions and perspectives in memoirs, diaries, and letters. Glimpses of the vicissitudes of their lives are to be found, instead, in "serial" sources such as census reports, statistics on rainfall, crop production, prices and wages, vital statistics, and so on. A careful and comprehensive analysis of these, the quantifiers argue, will provide the researcher with an accurate picture of the subaltern strata of society.[14] This argument elicited a violent response from the conventional historians, and the controversy over the use of quantification has continued more or less unabated. Carl Bridenbaugh warned his colleagues in the early sixties: "The finest historians will not be those who succumb to the dehumanizing methods of the social sciences, whatever their uses and values, which I hasten to acknowledge. Nor will the historian worship at the shrine of that Bitch-goddess, QUANTIFICATION."[15] Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., dismissed quantification as being incapable of solving the profound problems of history because "almost all important questions are important precisely because they are not susceptible to quantitative answers."[16] The attack has recently been renewed by Lawrence Stone, who has remarked upon "the decaying corpse of analytical, structural, quantitative history."[17] The

advocates of quantification have been no less strident in defense of their position. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, the distinguished French historian, for example, stated confidently in 1968 that by the 1980s, "the historian will be a programmer or he will be nothing."[18] And in 1972 he wrote that "Present-day historiography, with its preference for the quantifiable, the statistical and the structural, has been obliged to suppress in order to survive. In the last decades it has virtually condemned to death the narrative history of events and individual biography."[19]

Emotions aside, the main criticism of quantification rests on the nature and reliability of the sources which are subjected to rigorous mathematical manipulation to construct sophisticated models, the tendency towards articulating explicit hypotheses and making systematic comparisons across time and place, the probable bias in favor of tangible, quantifiable factors, and the failure to reach out to the eager but generally innumerate audience at large. The quantitative historians justify their methodology and concepts by invoking the name of "scientific history." The differences between the two perspectives and approaches are real, and are bound to continue arousing strong feeling among historians. But, perhaps, the differences have been exaggerated, and the situation exacerbated by polemics. Quantification, for all its undoubted merits, can answer only certain types of questions, in the same way that traditional methods of historical research have their own limitations. Thus, making unqualified assertions about the nature of the experience of slavery or indenture, which is essentially a moral question, on the basis of purely statistical sources"[20] is as dangerous and ahistorical as making generalizations about historical processes on the basis of exclusive reliance on oral evidence. It is not really a question of either-or as much as it is of degree. This may appear to be stating the obvious, yet it is a point that seems to be lost in the current debate, despite casual disclaimers to the contrary. Quantitative and conventional approaches do not necessarily need to compete with, but rather complement each other in sharpening the focus of analysis and interpretation, To illustrate this--and to turn to the subject of this note--I want to discuss my own excursion into quantification with respect to a neglected aspect of overseas Indian history. I will describe the nature and content of one document--which other historians had either ignored or were ignorant of--and the method that I have used to analyze it. It is necessary, however, to put this exercise in a broader context to understand the necessity for computation.

The question that I investigated was the origin and background of Fiji's North Indian indentured migrants as a case study of Indian indentured migration to various parts of the world.[21] A systematic exam-

ination of this question is important because it fills a serious gap in the existing literature and also helps correct some false perceptions of the background of the migrants.

At the same time, a knowledge of the background of the indentured migrants should be of considerable interest to those interested in the social and cultural evolution and transformation of overseas Indian societies. And yet, despite the relevance and importance of the subject, the researcher is immediately confronted with the problem of sources. With few exceptions, unpublished archival documents are of little assistance since they frequently deal with matters of high policy, and with abuses of and irregularities in the system that were brought to the notice of officials. However important the indenture system was to the colonies that depended for their survival on Indian labor, it was a relatively minor concern to the government of India in the nineteenth century. This is amply illustrated by the fact that both internal and external migrations came under the jurisdiction of a number of government departments. The picture prior to 1870 is unclear, though papers relating to emigration are found in the proceedings of Home Public and Home Legislative Departments. After 1870, emigration matters were dealt with by various departments as follows: Department of Revenue, Agriculture and Commerce (1871-1879); Home, Revenue, and Agriculture (1879-1881); Revenue and Agriculture (1881-1905); and Commerce and Industry (1905-1920). Aside from the unpublished archival documents in the National Archives of India, some specially commissioned reports provide a very useful background to the problem and should serve as a starting point for any prospective student.[22]

One of these which throws valuable light on the subject and one that has been used widely by several scholars, is the Protector of Emigrants' *Annual Report on Emigration from the Port of Calcutta* [Madras] to British and foreign colonies (hereafter *PR*). It adequately illuminates the legal and administrative apparatus of the indenture system in India, as well as regional, district, class, and sex composition of the emigrating population. Using the *PR* to obtain insight into the origin and background of the indentured emigrants has several advantages, not the least of which is that it provides the researcher with a synoptic picture of emigration to all the colonies. However, there are some serious problems also. Although the *PRs* are available in several places, a full set of them at any one place is difficult to come by; hence, they can at best provide only snapshot pictures of a very complex process. But there is yet a more serious difficulty: because of demands for economy and the interest of the administration, some crucial information is presented in a processed, summarized form.

This is particularly the case with the data on the social and caste origins of the emigrants. Six categories are used in the *PRs:* Brahmans and high castes, agriculturalists, artisans, low castes, Musalmans, and Christians. The researcher knows nothing about which castes or groups were included in the various categories or about the basis of categorization which, as those familiar with the literature know, constitutes a major controversy in Indian social anthropology.[23] However, this data, such as it is, is not *always* available in the *PRs,* especially after the turn of the century. The 1914 *PRs,* for example, forced by a government directive towards economy in reporting, makes no reference to the social composition of the emigrating population. Furthermore, data on female migrants is presented in a confusing way, while nothing at all is said about family migration. Yet, these are questions of utmost significance in any systematic analysis of the origins and background of the indentured emigrants. Hence the *PRs* can, indeed should, be used only for general illustrative comparative purposes.

One document that contains the most comprehensive and accurate data on the demographic and regional profile of the indentured emigrants, and that seems to have been the source of the statistics presented in the *PRs,* is the *Emigration Pass.* As can be seen, it contains detailed information on the emigrants and their unindentured children and infants who embarked for Fiji from Calcutta: their depot number, name, caste, father's name, age, district of origin and registration, the name of his/her town and village and of next-of-kin, marital status, and records of any bodily marks for personal identification. It also gives the name of the ship on which the emigrant traveled to Fiji (or to other colonies) and his ship number, besides the certification of the Surgeon Superintendent, the Depot Surgeon, the Protector of Emigrants, and the Colonial Emigration Agent at Calcutta that the intending emigrant was physically and mentally fit for labor and that he/she was emigrating voluntarily.

The passes were filled out in Calcutta (or other ports of embarkation) on the basis of the Protector's or his deputy's interview with the emigrant. They were then sent in the custody of the Surgeon Superintendent of the immigrant vessel to the colonies. On arrival, the passes were handed over to the local authorities at the depot of disembarkation, who were required once again to examine the emigrants. Relevant information about the emigrants was entered into the *General Register of Immigrants* and the *Plantation Registers*[24] to keep a record of the progress and location of the migrants in the colony.

The passes were numbered sequentially as they arrived in the eighty-seven immigrant ships. For each ship, however, they were arranged al-

COLONIAL EMIGRATION FORM No. 44.

MAN'S
EMIGRATION PASS.

HEALTH CLASS.

DEPÔT No. 133.

For Ship S.S. "SANGOLA" PROCEEDING TO FIJI.

No. 97

Fiji Government Emigration Agency.
21, GARDEN REACH,

CALCUTTA, *the* 1 190

PARTICULARS OF REGISTRATION, { Place, Fairybad
Date, 13. 1. 08
No. in Register, 137

NAME Bhagrey

Father's Name Ghuran

Age, 26

Caste Kore

Name of Next-of-kin, Bhuee, Brother

If married, name of Wife, —

District, Baharich

Thana, Fayzpur

Village or Town & Mahalla, Ghelwara

Bodily Marks, Ten on belly

Occupation in India, Cultivator

Height, 5'- Feet 5½ Inches.

CERTIFIED that we have examined and passed the above-named Man as fit to emigrate; that he is free from all bodily and mental disease; and that he has been vaccinated since engaging to emigrate.

DATED
The 190 .

M.D., F.R.C.P.,
LIEUT-COLONEL, I.M.S.
Depôt Surgeon.

Surgeon Superintendent.

CERTIFIED that the Man above described has appeared before me and has been engaged by me on behalf of the Government of FIJI as willing to proceed to that country to work for hire; and that I have explained to him all matters concerning his engagement and duties. This has also been done at the time of registration by the Registering Officer appointed by the Indian Government.

DATED
The 20 / 190 8.

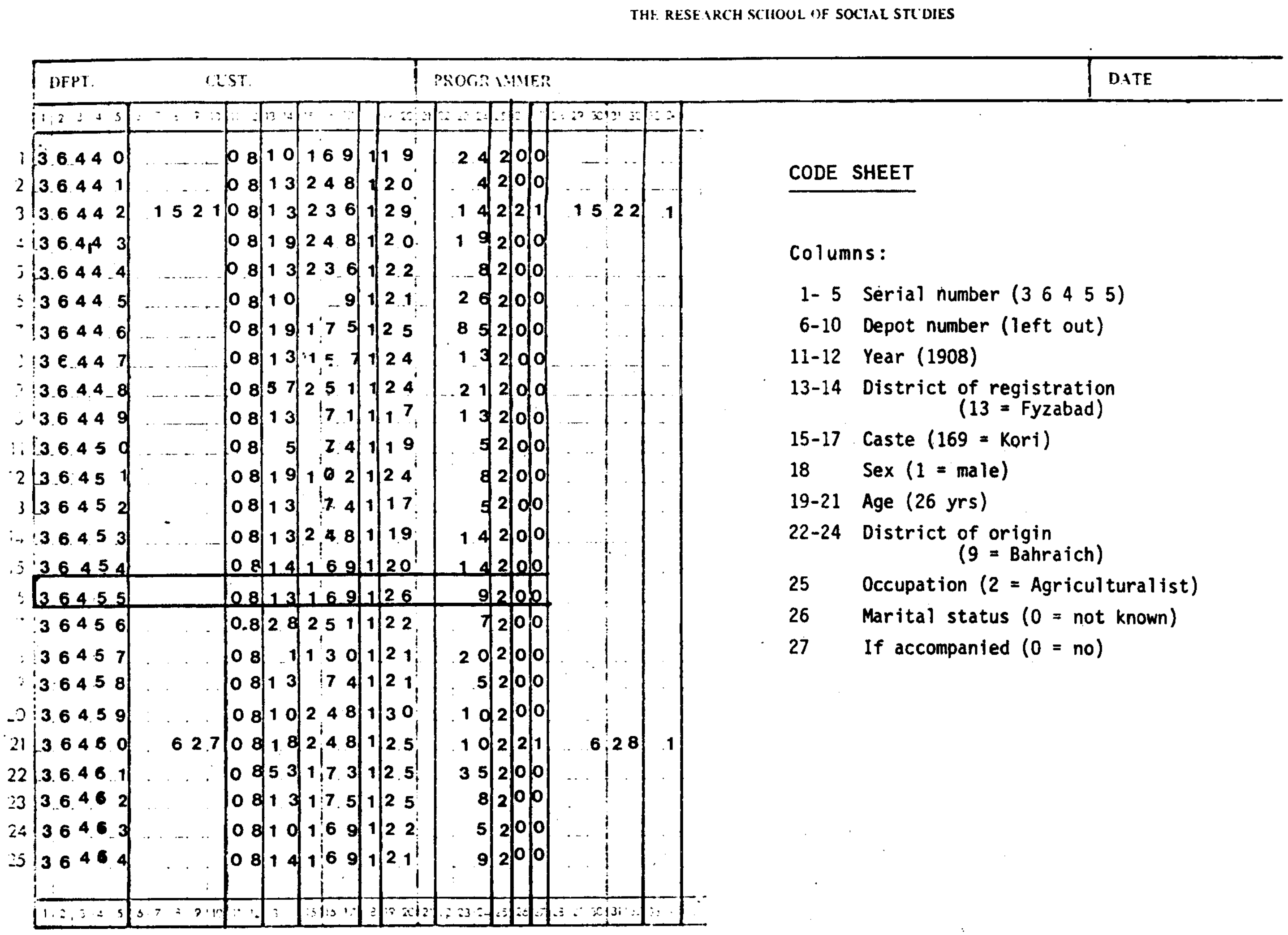
Offg. Government Emigration Agent for FIJI.

PERMITTED to proceed as in a fit state of health to undertake the voyage to FIJI.

DATED
The FEB 18 190

Protector of Emigrants.

J. B. Banerjee & Sons, Printers, Calcutta.—2,000-10-1907.



THE RESEARCH SCHOOL OF SOCIAL STUDIES

DEPT.	CUST.	PROGRAMMER	DATE

	1 2 3 4 5	6 7 8 9 10	11 12	13 14	15 16 17	18	19 20 21	22 23 24	25	26	27	28 29 30 31	32 33
1	3 6 4 4 0		0 8	1 0	1 6 9	1	1 9	2 4	2	0	0		
2	3 6 4 4 1		0 8	1 3	2 4 8	1	2 0	4	2	0	0		
3	3 6 4 4 2	1 5 2 1	0 8	1 3	2 3 6	1	2 9	1 4	2	2	1	1 5 2 2	1
4	3 6 4 4 3		0 8	1 9	2 4 8	1	2 0	1 9	2	0	0		
5	3 6 4 4 4		0 8	1 3	2 3 6	1	2 2	8	2	0	0		
6	3 6 4 4 5		0 8	1 0	9	1	2 1	2 6	2	0	0		
7	3 6 4 4 6		0 8	1 9	1 7 5	1	2 5	8 5	2	0	0		
8	3 6 4 4 7		0 8	1 3	1 5 7	1	2 4	1 3	2	0	0		
9	3 6 4 4 8		0 8	5 7	2 5 1	1	2 4	2 1	2	0	0		
10	3 6 4 4 9		0 8	1 3	7 1	1	1 7	1 3	2	0	0		
11	3 6 4 5 0		0 8	5	7 4	1	1 9	5	2	0	0		
12	3 6 4 5 1		0 8	1 9	1 0 2	1	2 4	8	2	0	0		
13	3 6 4 5 2		0 8	1 3	7 4	1	1 7	5	2	0	0		
14	3 6 4 5 3		0 8	1 3	2 4 8	1	1 9	1 4	2	0	0		
15	3 6 4 5 4		0 8	1 4	1 6 9	1	2 0	1 4	2	0	0		
16	3 6 4 5 5		0 8	1 3	1 6 9	1	2 6	9	2	0	0		
17	3 6 4 5 6		0.8	2 8	2 5 1	1	2 2	7	2	0	0		
18	3 6 4 5 7		0 8	1	1 3 0	1	2 1	2 0	2	0	0		
19	3 6 4 5 8		0 8	1 3	7 4	1	2 1	5	2	0	0		
20	3 6 4 5 9		0 8	1 0	2 4 8	1	3 0	1 0	2	0	0		
21	3 6 4 6 0	6 2 7	0 8	1 8	2 4 8	1	2 5	1 0	2	2	1	6 2 8	1
22	3 6 4 6 1		0 8	5 3	1 7 3	1	2 5	3 5	2	0	0		
23	3 6 4 6 2		0 8	1 3	1 7 5	1	2 5	8	2	0	0		
24	3 6 4 6 3		0 8	1 0	1 6 9	1	2 2	5	2	0	0		
25	3 6 4 6 4		0 8	1 4	1 6 9	1	2 1	9	2	0	0		

CODE SHEET

Columns:

1- 5	Serial number (3 6 4 5 5)
6-10	Depot number (left out)
11-12	Year (1908)
13-14	District of registration (13 = Fyzabad)
15-17	Caste (169 = Kori)
18	Sex (1 = male)
19-21	Age (26 yrs)
22-24	District of origin (9 = Bahraich)
25	Occupation (2 = Agriculturalist)
26	Marital status (0 = not known)
27	If accompanied (0 = no)

phabetically by sex and age: the passes of adult males appeared first, followed by those of adult females, boys, girls, male infants, and female infants. Passes of the emigrants who died on the voyage appeared unnumbered at the end. Similarly, the passes of those coming on their own by paying their fares were listed separately.

In Fiji, the emigration passes were initially in the custody of the Department of Labor which had overall responsibility for the welfare of the emigrants. Subsequently, with the abolition of the indenture system, they were deposited with the National Archives, where a full set of 60,965 of the original passes, collected and bound in some 240 large folios, are still available. Along with some other institutions, the National Library of Australia has a complete copy of the passes on microfilm, and these were used for my research.

To investigate the demographic character of the North Indian indentured migrants leaving from Calcutta, each of their 45,439 passes were examined and coded. All important data, including the year of migration, depot number, caste, sex, age, marital status, districts of origin and registration, and occupation were put onto the computer codesheet. The inclusion of the depot number is important since it was the identity number given to each emigrant in the depot at the port of embarkation.

From then on, the emigrant appeared in the books as a number, as a statistic, or simply as a unit of labor. It was an important symbolic transformation in the identities of the emigrants. But the depot number had more practical uses to them, such as in giving out rations, medical treatment, and so on. However, its most important relevance for us lies in the fact that it enables the researcher to find out if a particular emigrant was accompanied by anyone. Thus, if Emigrant X was accompanied by his brother Emigrant Y, with depot number Z1, it would be stated in the "Name of Next of Kin" column of X's pass: Emigrant Y, brother, depot number Z1. Similar data would be found on Y's pass. Or if Emigrant H was the husband of Emigrant W, it would be stated in the "If married, to whom" column of H's pass: Husband of Emigrant W, depot number Z2. Children accompanying their parents would be identified with reference to the depot numbers of either of their parents, though in the case of infants it would usually be mothers. Depot numbers, thus, help in the identification of the structure and pattern of family (group) migration. In cases where men and women migrated alone, without any accompanying relatives, the marital status column was usually left blank, while in the next-of-kin column, the name of a blood or fictive kin in the village of origin would be noted, usually for purposes of checking in case of suspicion or doubt about an emigrant's motive in wanting to migrate.

Coding such variables as sex, marital status, and even occupation, was a relatively uncomplicated procedure. It was more complicated, however, in the case of variables such as caste/tribal group of the emigrants, and their district of origin, given the very large number of units involved.

A quick perusal of the emigration passes showed that the officials did not use generalized (and vague) categories of caste hierarchy as they had done in the *PRs,* but instead had used specific names of the various castes in the migrating population. Similarly, all the districts of origin were listed, regardless of their overall significance. It soon became evident that the best way to proceed with respect to these variables would be to ascertain their name and total distribution in the United Provinces (from where the majority of the emigrants originated) and to code them accordingly.

In the case of caste, the best source of information was scholar-official William Crooke's four volumes, *Tribes and Castes of North-Western Provinces and Oudh,* published in 1897. This work contains the most detailed and reliable data on the origin of various castes, their peculiar customs and traditions, patterns of behavior, sources of livelihood, and regional location. It is perhaps worth noting that almost ninety years since Crooke wrote, no work of comparable ethnographic value on UP castes has appeared. The names of all castes and tribes listed in the four volumes were coded. Others which appeared in the emigration passes were added and coded sequentially. To obtain the names of districts, the census reports were used. These, too, were prepared alphabetically and coded sequentially.

The skeptical reader is bound to ask: how reliable is the data on caste? Was there not deliberate falsification, as oral evidence is alleged to suggest, on the part of the higher castes which were not favorably received in the colonies on account of their assumed inadequate training in agricultural work, but who nevertheless wanted to migrate? There is nothing in the records to sustain such skepticism. There are no clues in the emigration passes themselves--such as changes in caste names or comments by officials--which might suggest any deliberate falsification. The suggestion that high castes forged social data about themselves is interesting, for if it were true it would mean that more higher castes migrated than is usually believed to be the case. In point of fact, however, the higher castes, including Brahmans, had little reason to falsify information about themselves since in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the majority of them, like the menial, lower castes, derived their livelihood from cultivation.[25] One reliable indicator of manual labor that the registration officials looked for was thorns on the palms, and in this respect the higher castes were unexceptionable. As for the middling and lower castes, there

is no apparent reason to believe that they would have deliberately falsified their caste identity. From such an act they had nothing to lose or gain, at least during the early phases of migration. But even if, for the sake of argument, there were some inaccuracies, the basic picture that emerges from an analysis of the passes remains unchanged, given the scale of data used.

The above issue of skepticism opens up broader questions. Why, for example, were the officials so keen to keep such detailed and accurate data, and what purpose, if any, did the records serve? The surprise and even disbelief that some people in Fiji express when confronted with the knowledge of the existence of such data about the emigrants is understandable, but the officials had their own reasons. It has to be remembered that even the lowliest indentured laborer was a citizen of India and was, theoretically, migrating voluntarily under *contract* to another part of the British Empire. It was, therefore, necessary both for India and the colonies to keep an accurate record of the identity of the individuals and their movement in the colony. Furthermore, it should be remembered that despite the vague hopes on the part of the Government of India for a permanent settlement of Indians overseas, the indentured laborers left their homes with the desire of eventually returning after they had acquired sufficient wealth. It was thus necessary for the government to ensure that the emigrants keep in touch with their kinsmen back home through letters, and other communications. To facilitate this process, accurate data about the emigrants and their addresses in the village was necessary. It was necessary, as well, to enable those who could to transmit whatever sum they managed to save back to India. It can thus be seen that the maintenance of accurate records was a necessary condition of the whole process of indentured emigration.

Convinced that the emigration pass contained accurate data, I began the task of coding and transcription. From the outset I felt the need to process each of the passes of the Calcutta embarked emigrants, encouraged in my efforts by the inconclusive results of sampling that other scholars had done.[26] My purpose, unlike that of others who had worked on the records of overseas Indians, was to illuminate detailed aspects of the background of the indentured emigrants, and to identify every minute shift in trends, which had been of secondary importance to other researchers. To do this effectively required the examination of all the passes. It was, it must be admitted, an extremely tedious process, but the data that the analysis has yielded has not only opened up new areas for dis-

cussion but has also given me a solid base to pursue further research into the evolution of Fiji Indian society.

All the data was transcribed from the microfilms onto the computer codesheets, which were then transferred onto the magnetic tape by the Data Processing Unit of the Australian National University. It was then checked, edited, and processed using the *Statistical Package for Social Sciences.* The *SPSS,* as those familiar with computing social science data would know, is an integrated and comprehensive series of computer programs which enables the researcher to analyze any type of social science data simply and easily. For those interested in advanced analysis, there are provisions for multiple regression, factor analysis, Gutman Scaling, and so on. My interest, however, was restricted to basic descriptive statistics, frequency distribution, and cross-tabulations. The *Package* adequately catered for the range of data at hand and obviated, for the most part, the need to write a separate program. The problem of excessive mathematization which puts so many quantitative studies beyond the reach of many historians was thus avoided, as was also the much criticized process of model-building.

The data from the analysis of the emigration passes gives us a very detailed picture of the structure and dynamics of the process of indentured emigration from North India, a picture which, in fact, goes against many assumptions and assertions that have been made about the emigrants. This is not the place to present the results of the investigation. However, to give an indication, it is possible now to settle the question of exactly how many emigrants left Calcutta for Fiji, with precise breakdown for each year of migration. The analysis also tells us exactly how many and what castes were present in the emigrating population, the districts from which they came and where they were registered, the total number of males and females, the nature and extent of family migration, and the age distribution in the indentured population. This composite picture can be supplemented with more detailed two or three-way tables for any particular variable. Thus, for example, using any caste as the constant, we can easily show the exact number of males and females who migrated, together with their districts of origin in a certain year. Using a cross-tabulation of district of origin by district of registration by sex, for example, it can be seen how many numbers of the two sexes were recruited outside their homes, thus giving us a clear indication of the extent of mobility in rural India. In short, almost any combination of analysis is possible.

The availability of such detailed statistics, with enormous possibilities for further data analysis and manipulation, is interesting. We know now, for example, that of the 45,439 Calcutta embarked emigrants, 23,748 or

52.3 percent were of higher and middling castes, a figure that effectively demolishes the myth about the emigrants' invariably low social origins.[27] We know, too, that there were 13,696 females and 31,458 males in the emigrating population; a year by year analysis shows that the government stipulation that there be forty females to one hundred males was always adhered to, despite assertions to the contrary.[28] Cross-tabulation of district of origin by district of registration shows that despite popular belief about Hindu aversion to migration,[29] there was considerable spatial mobility in rural Indian society; in Basti and Gonda, two of the most important districts of migration, 59.4 percent and 69.4 percent of the recruits were registered after they had already left their homes. And finally, the analysis also reveals that from the 1880s on, the eastern districts of the United Provinces became the most important suppliers of indentured labor.

It should be clear from the above discussion that quantification has helped us to answer the "what" and "how" structural questions, and illuminated patterns of change over time; but it has left unanswered the crucial "why" (causal) questions so central to any historical analysis. To answer these, the researcher will have to leave his printouts to delve into what in common parlance is known as the "primary" sources. The task of explaining is not easy; indeed, it is frequently frustrating to move between the world of precise numbers and the world of elusive, impressionistic records. It is often a quantitative historian's nightmare to "find" explanations for trends which appear crystal-clear in the printouts, but go unremarked in the primary sources. In most cases, though, a careful collation of data from various sources--*District Gazetteers, Settlement Reports, Census Reports*--can provide a coherent and convincing explanation of the trends, such as why eastern UP and not western UP became the focus of recruitment, or why there was such a large, floating, uprooted mass of people in rural UP society from which many of the emigrants came. But there can be the odd situation, such as the migration of females. We know precisely the number of women who migrated and know, furthermore, that 63.9 percent of them went on their own, without an accompanying relative. This is surprising in view of the widespread belief about the spatial immobility and inherent conservatism of Indian women. There is no explanation of the reason for female migration in the literature, except for the assertion that most of the women were desperate, indigent destitutes of "loose" character, or widows.[30] This, needless to say, was unsatisfying. Hence, I turned to folksongs which provided a deeper and more sympathetic insight into the conditions which forced the women to leave their homes in search of livelihood elsewhere.[31] Ill-treatment of young brides, domestic disputes, simple drudgery, and frustration, loneliness and isola-

tion caused by the husband's prolonged absence in search of jobs elsewhere, poignantly raised in numerous songs, appear to have been among the factors which encouraged women to migrate.

Without much difficulty, this use of computers and folksongs forced upon me the conclusion that quantitative and humanist history are not necessarily incompatible, as the debate mentioned above would seem to suggest, but can instead be fruitfully complementary. "History has always had many mansions,"[32] Lawrence Stone has written. To survive and prosper in an age of growing emphasis on interdisciplinary studies throughout the world, it will need cooperation between the card-carrying, machine-minded quantitative historian and his humanist colleague adept at analyzing exotic, complicated oral traditions or deciphering barely legible longhand in ancient archives.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. This paper briefly describes some problems of sources and methods which I encountered in my research on the origins of the Fiji Indians. The reader wanting to know more about the results of the research is referred to my unpublished dissertation: "Leaves of the Banyan Tree: Origins and Background of Fiji's North Indian Indentured Migrants, 1879-1916," 2 Vols., Australian National University, 1980.

2. Excluded from consideration in this paper are Indian emigrants to the Southeast Asian countries, where there was continual, circular migration between India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Burma.

3. Quoted in I. M. Cumpston, *Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834-1854* (London, 1953), p. 174.

4. For Fiji: K. L. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants. A history to the end of indenture in 1920* (Melbourne, 1962); Ahmed Ali, *Plantation to Politics. Studies on Fiji Indians* (Suva, 1980); Guyana: Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in British Guiana* (London, 1950); Trinidad: Judith Weller, *The East Indian Indenture in Trinidad* (Rio Piedras, 1968); John La Guerre (ed.), *Calcutta to Caroni. The East Indians of Trinidad* (Port of Spain, 1974); K. O. Laurence, *Immigration into the West Indies in the Nineteenth Century* (Kingston, 1971); idem, "East Indian Indenture in Trinidad," *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 17, no. 1 (March, 1971), pp. 34-47; Mauritius: K. Hazareesingh, *A History of Indians in Mauritius*, 2nd ed. (London, 1975); South Africa: Hilda Kuper, *Indian People in Natal* (Cape Town, 1960); Maureen Tayal, "Indian Indentured Labour in Natal, 1890-1911," *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. XIV, no. 4 (1977), pp. 519-47. For a more detailed list, see S. Shigematsu, "Overseas Indians--Bibliography of Books and Articles, 1873-1971," *Asian Studies*, Vol. XXI, no. 4 (1975), pp. 25-49.

5. For general surveys, see C. Kondapi, *Indians Overseas, 1838-1949* (New Delhi, 1951); Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery. The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830-1920* (London, 1974), and Anirudh Gupta (ed.), *Indians Abroad: Asia and Africa* (New Delhi, 1976).

6. The best exposition of this thesis is found in Hugh Tinker's *A New System of Slavery*. See also Usha Mahajani, "Slavery, Indian Labour and British Colonialism: A Review Article," *Pacific Affairs,* Vol. L, no. 2 (Summer, 1977), pp. 263-71.

7. See Cumpston, *Indians Overseas* and her "A Survey of Indian Emigration to British Tropical Colonies to 1910," *Population Studies,* Vol. X, part II (1956-57), pp. 158-65.

8. See Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants.* This school of thought is supported in most anthropological studies. For an introduction to this literature, see Chandra Jayawardena, "Migration and Social Change: A Survey of Indian Communities Overseas," *Geographical Review,* Vol. LVIII (1968), pp. 426-49.

9. Edmund D. Bunksé, "Commoner Attitudes Towards Landscape and Nature," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers,* Vol. 68 (1978), p. 558.

10. Ahmed Ali (ed.), *Girmit: Indenture Experience in Fiji* (Suva, 1979).

11. P. M. Mercer, "Oral Tradition in the Pacific: Problems of Interpretation," *Journal of Pacific History,* Vol. XIV, no. 3 (1979), p. 153. This article is an excellent introduction to the debates and controversies in the use of oral literature. See also J. Vansina, "Oral tradition and its methodology," in J. Ki-Zerbo (ed.), *General History of Africa 1: Methodology and African Prehistory* (London, 1981), pp. 142-65.

12. For more detailed discussion, see Bunksé, "Commoner Attitudes Towards Landscape and Nature," Indra Deva, "Oral Tradition and the Study of Peasant Society," *Diogenes,* no. 85 (1974), pp. 112-27, and Ved Prakash Vatuk, *Thieves in My House: Four Studies in Indian Folklore of Protest and Change* (Varanasi, 1969).

13. Others who have shown the usefulness of oral tradition as a source of valuable data in the context of indenture historiography, include Ved Prakash Vatuk, "Protest Songs of East Indians in British Guiana," *Journal of American Folklore,* Vol. LXXVII (1964), pp. 220-35; J. S. Kanwal, *A Hundred Years of Hindi in Fiji* (Suva, 1980), and my own article, "Approaches to the Study of Indian Indentured Emigration with Special Reference to Fiji," *Journal of Pacific History,* Vol. XV, part 1 (Jan. 1980), pp. 52-70, especially pp. 66 ff.

14. For further discussion, see Bernard S. Cohn, "Notes for a Discussion on the Uses and Abuses of Quantification in the Study of Modern Indian History," *Bulletin of Quantitative and Computer Methods in South Asian History,* no. 1 (June 1973), pp. 3-7.

15. Carl Bridenbaugh, "The Great Mutation," *American Historical Review,* Vol. LXVIII (Jan. 1963), p. 326.

16. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Humanist Looks at Empirical Social Research," *American Sociological Review,* Vol. XXVI (Dec. 1961), p. 770.

17. Lawrence Stone, "The Renewal of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History," *Past and Present,* no. 85 (Nov. 1979), p. 23.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.* For other, less strident advocacy of quantification, see Robert William Fogel, "The Limits of Quantitative Methods in History," *American Historical Review,* Vol. LXXX, no. 2 (1975), pp. 329-50; Allan G. Bogue, "Numerical and Formal Analysis in United States

History," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* Vol. XII, no. 1 (Summer, 1981), pp. 137-75; David Herlihy, "Numerical and Formal Analysis in European History," *ibid.,* pp. 115-35; Charles M. Dollar and Richard J. Jensen, *Historians' Guide to Statistics: Quantitative Analysis and Historical Research* (New York, 1974), especially the Introductory chapter, and David S. Landes and Charles Tilly (eds.), *History as Social Science* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971).

20. A well-known quantitative work which has been subjected to such criticism is Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman's *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston, 1974), 2 Vols. Criticism of this work has generated its own historiography.

21. The Fiji case is typical of Indian indentured emigration, especially to the West Indies. For a reiteration of this view see Raymond T. Smith, "Some Social Characteristics of Indian Immigrants to British Guiana," *Population Studies,* Vol. XIII, no. 1 (1956), pp. 34-39, Tinker, *A New System of Slavery,* and Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants.*

22. For the pre-1870 period, the most comprehensive and accurate account is provided by J. Geoghegan, *Coolie Emigration from India* (Calcutta, 1874). Its value is enhanced by the fact that documentary evidence for that period has either been "weeded out" or difficult of access. For the period after 1870, the following are useful: C. L. Tupper's *A Note on Colonial Emigration During the Year 1878-79* (Simla, 1879); *Report of the Committee on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates* (Cmd. 5192/94, 1910), generally known as Sanderson Committee Report, named after the Chairman; James McNeill and Chiman Lal's *Report to the Government of India on the Conditions of Indian Immigrants in Four British Colonies and Surinam* (Cmd. 7744/5, 1914); and W. D. Comin's detailed reports on Indian immigration into certain selected West Indian Colonies, published in the 1890s. These reports are available in several places.

23. See, for example, Lucy Carroll, "Sanskritization, 'Westernization' and 'Social Mobility': A Reappraisal of the Relevance of Anthropological Concepts to the Social Historian of Modem India," in *Journal of Anthropological Research,* Vol. XXXIII, no. 4 (1977), pp. 355-71, and M. N. Srinivas, *Caste in India and Other Essays* (Berkeley, 1962).

24. These documents contain a mine of information waiting to be exploited by a student interested in the social and regional history of indenture.

25. For more discussion see Lal, "Leaves of the Banyan Tree," p. 218 ff.

26. See, for example, Smith, "Some Social Characteristics of Indian Immigrants to British Guiana," and Chandra Jayawardena, "Social Contours of an Indian Labour Force During the Indenture Period in Fiji," in Vijay Mishra (ed.), *Rama's Banishment: A Centenary Tribute to the Fiji Indians, 1879-1979.* (Auckland, 1979), pp. 40-65.

27. See Lal, "Leaves of the Banyan Tree," p. 204, and K. L. Gillion, *The Fiji Indians: Challenge to European Dominance, 1920-1946* (Canberra, 1977), p. 7.

28. See, for example, Jayawardena, "Social Contours of an Indian Labour Force," p. 46.

29. See William Crooke, *The North-Western Provinces of India: Their History, Ethnology and Administration* (London, 1897), p. 326; *Imperial Gazetteer of India,* Vol. 1 (1907), p. 467; *Census of India,* Vol. X (1911), p. 49.

30. For further discussion see Lal, "Leaves of the Banyan Tree," Chapter 7.

31. Two useful collections of folksongs and their analysis which bear on the question include Krishnadev Upadbyay, *Bhojpuri Ke Lok Geet* (Bhojpuri Folksongs) (Varanasi, n.d.), and Sankar Sen Gupta (ed.), *Women in Indian Folklore* (Calcutta, 1969).

32. Stone, "Revival of the Narrative," p. 4.