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Towards an Exercise in Unravelling the Hidden Sides of Commonalities and Differences: Black Atlantic Slave Trade and the Indentured Labour Migration

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As a historian who has been engaged in the recent years on the study of indentured labour migration to the erstwhile British colonies, more particularly to Fiji in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there seems to be a never ending encounter with the terminologies popularized by the influential works related to diaspora studies. The term diaspora itself is part of a popular parlance in the sphere of critical and public discourses, a terminology which vies on equal terms with narratives of globalization and transnationalism. The terminology tries to contest the old settled identities of nation and the race and even of class and gender and brings to light the energies of multiple subjectivities.[1] However, moving beyond the evocative imagery of slavery, symbolized by a space of social death, diaspora is now being increasing invested with new possibilities as the harbinger of globalized future.[2] But then the historians of contemporary times in their studies on diasporic agency and originality, have also been drawn to Paul Gilroy's The Black Atlantic which has been a Bible for the academia in the West. More importantly, the theoretical frameworks employed in these new researches tries to takes the readership away from the oft repeated stories of discrimination and erasure of one's own cultural identity, which had been the main base of the arguments of the researches in the most distant past. I have been tempted to read a little on African diaspora because alongside Jewish diaspora it seems to occupy a special place in the platform of migration studies. But then the definition of African diaspora is not something which is simple but one which is complicated by a plethora of conceptions and constructions which all seem to find a place in its nomenclature. For many scholars, the global African diaspora was influenced by the components of migration within intra-African Indian Ocean Mediterranean and Atlantic diaspora. The engagements between Africa and these various diaspora will definitely broaden the area of studies since it would also contestations and interactions with the spaces occupied by Indian and Chinese migration to both Africa and the Caribbean. Nonetheless, the reason why I find the black Atlantic to be an influential work is its very attempt to be trans- continental in terms of its intellectual orbit, one which tries to build up a narrative on the political,social cultural and economic relations which had pervaded the triangular system of networks between Africa, the Americas and Europe. However, this intellectual pursuit was also one which was characterized by omissions perhaps due to its anti-nationalist, theoretical and ideological politics and for its singular focus on the African American diaspora. What the work really upholds for any person widely interested in issues of

migration, is an encounter between posts of all kinds, whether it post modernism, post structuralism and post colonialism. In fact, as has been argued by some scholars the central premise of Gilroy was to divorce the blacks in America from their African past and to bring back the new dimensions of black Atlantic cultural identities which emerged in the transnational and inter cultural spaces of the diasporic experience itself. What has been argued is that in all such initiatives which were born out of the encounters with racism and trans- oceanic exchanges all of which shaped black modernity, the birth of Creolized and hybridized identities, ideas and cultural artifacts, like music should not be eliminated.

I would argue that over simplifying the African American experience is also one which is seen in studies on indentured labour migration from India to the British Colonies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The critiques on the Black Atlantic have made me aware of the links between India and the other colonies which were conditioned in terms of collective memory imagination and thought. It made me aware of the dangers of universalizing the racialized minority experience of all indentured migrants, especially in Fiji where the sense of alienation of the Madrassilabourers was much more compared to the indentured labourers from Bihar or the United Provinces. At the same time the Punjabi migrants possibly enjoyed a much higher status compared to the other Indians.[3] The criticisms of the Black Atlantic are also in many ways valid for the study of indentured labour migration to the erstwhile European colonies in the nineteenth century. I believe that indentured labour migration to the colonies cannot simply be studied on the basis of local sources and seen as isolated phenomena, but there should be more attempts to explore the relationships and connections between the place of the origin of migration and the place of settlement. However the relationships were never just a two way traffic and the final journey of the migrant did not end with either Fiji Mauritius or the Caribbean. In fact, there was a larger sphere of interactions and this often led to mixed or a realized status and became part of a larger migratory experience, where the Indo-Fijian or the Indo-Guyanese or the Indo-Surinamese nomenclatures lost their relevance.[4] However, as a historian, I would argue that without getting deeper into the waves of diasporas studies which in most cases are replete with most post -modernist phobias against essentialisms, real and imaginary, or simply to see the indentured labour migration in terms of the bigger debate on multi culturalism, there should be more emphasis on issues which could only be studied on the basis of the linkages of imperialism and capitalism.

I would argue that as a historian trying to compare the Black African slave migration to the Americas in the seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries with the indentured labour migration from British India with the later centuries, there will be a greater interest on my part to move beyond the entire issues of Indo-Fijian, Indo-Guyanese and Indo-Surinamese modernities. I would be more inclined to examine in details the long and complex historiesof Indian migration and dispersals to various parts of the world, perhaps moving beyond the stereo typical imageries too often connected with coolitude. In this paper there will be efforts to examinethe strategies through which an almost captive labour force was transported by force or sometimes through projected 'Legal means' from their place of birth to a colony, which was more than sometimes ten thousand miles apart. In the case of slave trade originating from Africa there was blatant use of force and misuse of political

authority, the effect of which was widely witnessed in the incidence of slave revolts. Economic historians specializing on the African slave trade in the Atlantic have frequently drawn our attention towards the costs of coercing labour. In fact their narratives have placed a great deal of importance on the geography of revolts, the slave revolts in the vessels and the people who were actively involved in these so called subversive activities. More importantly voyages rather than slaves were often taken to be the units of analysis, since voyages were the basic units of business decision making at the time. All these revealed a striking geographical pattern with revolts being much more likely among slaves coming from some African regions, compared to theothers. For instance the Upper Guinea region, Senegambia, Sierra Leone, and the windward coast, together with the Gabon region in the Southern Bight of Biafra, accounted for just ten percent of the slaves leaving Africa, but over 40 percent of the voyages with slave revolts came from these regions. In fact the other African regions might have also had the same share of slave revolts as slave exports, yet possibly there fewer revolts than their share of slave exports would make us believe. It has been asserted that there would hardly be any change in the conclusions, even if allowance is made for the absence of information on revolts on Portuguese and Spanish vessels. The Spanish slave trade was less dependent on West Central Africa. The Portuguese were heavily dependent on west central Africa, but their slave trade involved much less slaves from the region than the English, French and Dutch together between 1660 and 1807. However, it was argued that even if the number of revolts on vessels leaving this region doubled, West Central Africa would have 'lower revolt ratio' than all other regions except for South East Africa.[5] Furthermore, slave revolts on voyage were higher in larger vessels than those which were smaller in terms of size and carried fewer slaves per tonne. Thus the analysis is that the bigger ships lost more of their crew of the African Coast and during the middle passage than those which did not experience the revolts.[6] However, while revolts in vessels were frequent the fact remained that Europeans overwhelmingly wanted to buy male slaves, though they also took a large proportion of women and put them to work in the plantation fields in gangs driven with whips. The planters usually kept the non-domestic skill task for men alone.[7]

Incidentally, the narrative on revolts and violence also high lights one piece of history, 'where popular preconceptions fit the facts'.[8] The most obvious reason behind the revolts were related to the strategy of the European slave traders in separating the captives from their communities, which in most cases made them aware of a fearful future. In fact, the highly exploitative aspect of the Atlantic slave trade was revealed in the real situation, prevailing in the ships, where about a dozen men armed with primitive weapons guarded hundreds of unwilling people in the decks. Indeed, this was a task which was much riskier for the captors than overseeing a plantation in the Americas or guarding hardened criminals. In this context, the question which could be raised primary relates to the strategies which were adopted by the slave traders to capture the black African population and transport them to Americas. Interestingly, while the story of capture of slaves finds little place in the researches, the emphasis on Atlantic slave trade seems to have shifted towards the review of cost and benefits of slavery as practiced in Americas. It has often been argued than output revenues and profits would be greater using slaves instead of free labour. In fact, there seemed to be an assumption that slave participation in the work force would be much higher than that of an individual

whose decision to enter the work force was voluntary. However, this entire distinction between coerced and free labour was not only important in the context of the Atlantic slave trade, but rather was one which also acquired very much importance in the debate on indentured labour in the nineteenth century. In this paper I would like to compare the element of coercion, inherent and somewhat similar in the case of both Atlantic slave trade and the indenturedlabour migration in the later period. The main emphasis would be on exploring whether a direct link can be established between the Atlantic slave trade of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries alongside the indentured migration across the Atlantic in the same period with the international flows of labour between the north and the south during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The paper would be divided in several sections possibly to understand the diverse set of labour forms ranging from slavery, indenture and to other forms of unfree labour over a period of several centuries. The sections would be dealing with the broader issues of Atlantic slave trade, indenture migration to the Americas in the same period and the indenture system which was devised by the British in the nineteenth century to facilitate the flow of labour from India to their colonies as well those under the other European powers. Finally, the discussion would focus on the debate as to whether indentured system was one which resembled slavery and had all the characteristics of a system whichfavoured the running of the capitalist plantation enterprises through a captive labour force.The question which would be raised is whether the labourers were bound to the planters like the slaves and whether they were exposed to the same sort of exploitation like their African slaves. In fact, my conclusions in this respect would largely be based on my present study dealing with indenture labour migration to Fiji in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In fact, before getting into the narratives on the Atlantic slave trade of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the indentured labour migration in the following centuries, I would premise my argument on the assumption that International labour transfer between the north and the south in these centuries were characterized by a diverse set of labour forms ranging from slavery indenture to other forms of unfree labour. It would a bit imprudent to assume that labour under any capitalist system would essentially be free wage labour. In that sense indentured labour system could also be seen as something which was similar to a disguised form of slavery.[9] However, this sort of logic based on some form of continuum was heavily influenced by two distinct lines of interpretations. There were some who stressed on deception, drudgery and dehumanization that characterized the indentured system thereby leading to its nomenclatures as neo slavery. For historians like Hugh Tinker there was only one factor, in which the indenture migrants enjoyed an advantage over the slaves. He argued that indenture was a temporary institution while slavery was a life- long bondage. To him what mattered most "in the balance of benefit and affliction was the Indians had exchanged a society and a living community (though unequal and degrading of many, tiresome and tedious to most) for a lifeless system, in which human values always mattered less than the drive for production for exploitation."[10] On the other hand, there were those who took a more holistic view of the indentured experience emphasizing the freedom that emigration and settlement in the colonies provided to the migrants from the social and economic hardships of their own society. As I.M. Cumpston had once stated that indenture "meant care in sickness, free medical attendance, free

hospital accommodation, rations in some cases, sanitary dwellings, a guaranteed minimum daily wage, and general supervision by Government officials."[11] However, more recently some studies have tried to show how the processes of commodification of labour, visible to a large extent in the Atlantic slave trade and in the colonial plantation form of slavery in the Americas, remained largely uninterrupted by the abolition of slave trade and slavery in Mauritius the Cape Colony and the British Caribbeans.Madhavi Kale has pointed out that free labour for capitalists was mostly a form of mobile labour. In other words, it has been argued that the empire made labour accessible to suitably situated employers by initiating reformist interventions aimed at eliminating the customary or juridical ties of the captive populace to masters or land and financially through subsidies and loans to cover the costs of transferring labourers located in one part of the world to enterprises located in another. Consequently, all these were secured through technologies or imperial rule , which stretched frompromises of profit to the rising prospects of social unrest and to the imposition of Imperial duties, taxes and laws and the authority exercised by the armies.[12]

Interestingly, the scholarly investigations into the North-South relations, while revealing the implications of commodity and capital flow, bring to light the lack of initiative to comprehend the real meanings or connotations of labour force. Possibly, this explains the lack of interest over discussions centering on indentured labour, debt peonage, mandamientos or labour migration under various forms of apartheid.[13] Despite being employed by capital,labour under such regimes of unfreedom remained somewhat invisible.[14] This element of invisibility was often responsible for the distinctions made between slavery and the forms of free wage labour. All these are too often based on the assumptions that capitalist system of production and labour control favoured the provision of free wage labour. It is this invisibility which has been responsible for the lack of initiatives in exposing the 'unfreedom' prevailing in the indenturedlabour system alongside some other forms of labour recruitment and control. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya has argued that acquisition of labour began at a certain historical juncture with chattel slavery and there after underwent various transformations to the indentured system and to its other sophisticated versions of the modern period. Thus, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came to reflect a range of asymmetries which were so typical of imperialist domination, whereby supply was not only sustained by coercion but by means of direct and indirect political control. Subsequently, the loss of direct political control on the part of the western Imperialist powers by no means ended the asymmetries which had pervaded into the working of North-South relations.[15]

I would also argue that in the past few decades there have been a number of researches dealing with the migration of indentured labourers from India to different parts of the British Empire and some other European colonial settlements. The general theme of the discussion have revolved around standard questions as to what may have prompted the emigrants to leavetheir the homelands and decide on their migration to unknown parts of the world and what methods might have been employed to secure their laboring skills for the overseas plantations. Most of these researches have used a Marxian framework that approaches the theme of labour migration more as an outcome of capitalist development leading to Imperialism which in turn distorted the development of the colonized territories. In other words, the gradual development of the world economic system necessitated

the interdependence among nations, territories and regions. Undoubtedly, because of this global process a vast Indian population in the nineteenth century were displaced from their traditional economic and social ambience and were thereby transformed them into commodities available for transportation to the other parts of the world. In real economic parlance they became an important source of cheap labour for all European colonial settlements. Yet, it would be wrong to assume that this international migration, which was one directly connected to the European commercial and colonial expansion had very few precursors in the past in the sense that there very few moments in human history, when so many people were uprooted from their traditional homes and transported over the seas to strange distant lands. While there may be a numerical gap when one considers the figures of the African Atlantic Slave trade with the figures available for the years between 1821 and1920, the exploitation and suffering had a lot in common.

Possibly the indentured labour system, based on contract as devised by the British Government and followed by some other European colonial powers was a form of labour recruitment mechanism which ensured cheap labour for the European planter class on a temporary basis, usually for three to ten years (at least before 1873), later in most cases for a period of five years followed by the provision of permanent settlement in the colonies or repatriation to their places of original residence in India. However, the general assumption is that the growth of sophisticated form of Imperialism and labour control system might have encouraged the European colonial powers to favour Indian settlement schemes in the overseas to avoid the heavy financial expenses of meeting the repatriation costs and lastly for the retention of seasoned labourers in the colonies. Such schemes might have been structurally imperative for the survival of the planters, expansion of capital and the maintenance of Imperial system of domination and control.[16]

Sociological studies on the overseas Indian communities in the context of colonial and post colonial situations have relied on one or another variant of the theory of pluralism. M.G. Smith, who developed his theory ofpluralism was influenced by the works of Furnivall and Malinowski. The main plank of Smith's theory lay in his focus on the mode of incorporation of institutionally diverse collectivities and their unequal or differential status. Discussing about race and stratification in the Caribbean he observed that "In Guyana, Surinam and Trinidad, Negroes and East Indians were incorporated as mutually exclusive segments of equivalent status by their common but mutually distinct subordination to the ruling whites."[17] The argument being that incorporation was essentially a political act and that the society was held together by authority and regulation of one segment over others. In that sense from the pluralist perspective the question of inter group conflict was a matter of political dominance of one group over the others. Hilda Kuper hadargued that Asians in Africa were strangers in plural societies and that the racial distinctions were rigidly maintained at the level of political incorporation. The Asians in Africa were not a corporate group but such a status wasthrust upon them by the 'host'.[18] However, this study of the plural society approach does not come within the general argument of this paper because there will be no emphasis on race relations and understanding it from the point of view of political dominance at the expense of economic dominance and exploitation. The emphasis is more on understanding the diversities between two distinct waves of migrations in history and towards finding elements of commonality between

them.

Historians have premised more on the intricacies in the patterns of migration over a long historical period rather than always putting more emphasis on issues of race and gender which are now more of the part of post- colonial studies. The new indentured migrants from Asia and Africa, as have been argued differed from the earlier batches of migrants who had under taken voyages to the new world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The difference was not one related simply to their origins. The indentured Asians Africans and Pacific islanders in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries went to a variety of destinations in the Americas as well as to the islands located in the Indian and Pacific Oceans and to Australia and parts of Eastern and Southern Africa – thereby making them more global than their European predecessors. This new indentured labour as narratives on the girmitiya experience in Fiji have shown was not simply a successor to the institution of slavery but rather a disguised continuation of the abolished institution.[19]

Stanley Engerman has argued that the institution of indenture preceded that of slavery in the evolution of the plantation economy in America and also contrasted the dynamic of the pre slavery stream of contract labour (largely European) with that of the post slavery (largely Asian stream). In his opinion they differed not only in their racial aspect or in terms of the areas of out migration and in migration but also in respect to their contractual term and conditions of employment. He also tried to point out the differences in terms of numbers repatriating vis-à-vis those setting in the new world and also in terms of the opportunities for mobility after indenture but what was really glossed over was whether the processes which had pushed the contract migrants overseas could be possibly identified as earlier, or perhaps the later version of the same historical processes. Engerman chose to highlight the differences in terms of abstract wealth accrued from sending the laboring masses from different parts of Europe with that of the Indentured migration from Asia and Africa without elaborating much on the means and methods employed by him in coming to his own conclusions. In fact, there cannot be any understanding of the indentured migration of the later period by ignoring the historical processes which had been responsible for the growing economic divide between the richer states of the north and the impoverishment of the south, a divide which owed its origins to the global division of production and labour emerging out of the expanding western industrialization.[20]

Interestingly, the tomes of scholarship on slavery and slave trade seem to have left very little space for new or interesting analyses. Many historians have monopolized the field and have pursued their researches on the economic social and political implications on African slavery on Europe, Africa and the Americas. The older historical study tended to divide the African slave trade in terms of national participations and by indulging in compartmentalization of abolitionist thought. While the American scholars wrote about slavery in the United States, British scholars focused on slavery in Britain and her colonies. However, in this entire intellectual exercise the multi-national interconnectedness of movements for and against slavery and the slave trade went missing. The books by David Brion Davis and Christopher Leslie Brown provided a lot of details on Britain and Americas successive anti -slavery campaigns. Davis' writings sought to situate American slavery in the large contexts of Atlantic slave system. His analysis went far beyond the study of British slavery and there was little opportunity for him to investigate the subtleties of the first abolitionist

campaign. Brown's analysis provided a clear trajectory for the development of anti-slavery thought from the 'haphazard' to the moment when it coalesced. However this sort of reading was not always based on primary research findings.[21]

In fact, literary scholars have opened the field of slavery studies to a new set of enquiry which tried to determine the extent to which "slavery" provided powerful literary tropes. While romanticists like Peter Kitson and Debbie Lee were more concerned about British abolition and writings about slavery during the romantic period, studies by Markman Ellis, Dierdre Coleman,SuvirKaul and SrinivasaRavamudan examined the poetry and prose of the abolitionist movement in relation to sentimental or romantic literary trends of the later century. The other dynamic field of scholarship which has entered into the study of slavery is the study of rhetoric. In fact, this field is totally dominated by American scholars focusing on American slavery and pro-slavery to the exclusion of all other influences. Jacqueline Bacon's study of the relationship between rhetoric and empowerment of Americans in antebellum America recovers the marginalized voices in a movement that is ironically about marginalization itself.[22] However, such studies by exponents of cultural studies have only brought the debate on Atlantic slave trade in terms of opposition or support to such forms of economic activity. These studies failed to look into the more important dimensions of the slave trade, because of their undue premise on the construction of nationhood and national character vis-à-vis the slave trade. All these ideas played a pivotal role in the emerging discourse on British national identity and became linked to the public understanding of the relations between Great Britain and her empire.[23]

However, it has been pointed out by Kenneth Morgan that the connections between slavery, Atlantic trade and British economy between 1660 and1800 are part of a subject which incorporates within it the Americanization of overseas trade, which was particularly evident in the last years of pre industrial economy, prior to the birth of the first industrial nation. The British merchants, planters and politicians became enmeshed in an interest which involved the growth of empire and trans-oceanic trade in the course of the eighteenth century. Undoubtedly the existence of a strong commercial sector in the English economy by 1700 provided a strong platform for growth of commerce and inevitably towards settlement in farflung territories. In fact this overseas expansion was accompanied by the emergence and growth of plantation slave labour in North America and the Caribbean.[24] However, what seems evident in the researches of historians like Morgan is the quest to find answers to three broad questions. The first of these questions relate to what had been the financial rewards from slavery and the Atlantic trade in the British Empire in the period from the mid seventeenth century to the turn of the nineteenth century. The second, does relate to the extent to which these gains helped to stimulatethe early British industrialization. The third question, was as to how far the Atlantic trading complex provided an impetus for economic changes in Britain. All these seemingly straight forward questions really did not elicit easy answers.

It is well known that the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 paved the way for English colonization of the Americas and this actually let to the beginning of a new history. The English merchants who had benefited from the price rises of the sixteenth century formed joint stock trading companies in the hope of taping wealth from the overseas, notably from the Atlantic world.

A greater degree of social and geographical mobility in England, lack of good economic opportunities at home, the lure of new territories and serious religious chisms mainly within Protestantism, provided motives for English people to migrate to the colonies in the Stuart era. Thus began the movements of settlers from England to North America and the Caribbean, though colonization went through a decade of experimentation. Indeed by the end of the seventeenth century around 3,50,000 English people had crossed the Atlantics.

Bu when one examines the links between Britain and her American colonies, it is fairly evident that by the mid seventeen century the colonies were regarded as markets for manufactured goods and sources of raw material for the mother country. The colonies absorbed the labour and capital and were a source of profits for Britain. But for greater profits, the British planters had to organize agricultural plantations to maximize their output. Possibly this was the most efficient way of achieving gains from the land man ratio, where the advantages lay with the former. But the question which arose was from where the large labourforce would be recruited to work on the plantations. Initially there were attempts to make the native Americans work on them. The experiment failed because the Indians were poor workers and either resisted such regimes or died out before 1650 through contact with diseases imported from across the ocean. The workers mainly in the form of indentured servants formed the labour force for the plantation. However, they became independent at the end of their term of service, which was typically four, five or seven years and though they had legal rights to negotiate their contractual position in the local courts, their supply dwindled in the late seventeenth century when economic conditions improved in Britain. In this sort of a situation, English merchants followed the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and French in shipping a large number of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic and put them to work as a captive labour force on the plantations. It could be argued that enduring and firm trade links between Europe and Americas were not forged until slavery was introduced in the new world.[25] The traffic in slaves in the early decades of the eighteenth century operated as the famous triangular trade textiles, beads, fire arms and metal ware were shipped to West Africa and bartered or sold for Africans drawn from various groups in the interior. The slaves were packed tight into the holds of ships for the Atlantic crossing (the middle passage) and sold in the Americas and then staple commodities were loaded on ships for the voyage home and the prospects of sail in the ships' port of origin. The trade and shipping routes followed on each leg of the trade was complex. Nonetheless, the triangular model "proved helpful as a short hand way of representing commerce or diagrams on maps."[26]

Undoubtedly, the salve trade was an exploitative traffic in human beings in which exposure to disease and the possibility of mortality seemed to be ever present. Indeed every voyage involved intricate patterns of supply and demand, which shifted overtime. It is well known local and Atlantic wide factors were responsible for price changes of slaves and also determined the number of captives supplied by West Africa and the type and prices of goods sent to procure them. Moreover, it has been argued that African conditions rather than the Americandemand influenced the ethnicity, age and the sex of black slaves in the Atlantic slave trade. The majority of the slaves were sold in the Americas to the planters , who put them into agricultural work based on either the gang or the task system.[27]

The slave estate needed plenty of land and capital for planting staple crops, and for buildings including cooling and drying houses, water mills, distilleries, refineries and slave quarters. The plantations contained between 50 and 350 slaves, but sugar estates required a larger labour force than those catering for other staple crops. Nonetheless, the plantations seemed to function in accordance to the system of chattel slavery, based on racial discrimination and severe legal codes, which meant that the off spring of slaves were themselves born into slavery.[28] Because of a high death rate on many plantations, due to a combination of hard work, disease and poor diet, there was a constant demand for slaves in the West Indies. Thus the eighteenth century was the period when British slave trading was at peak, some three millions slaves were transported in British vessels to the Americas during that century, more than by any other European power. In other words, the period formed a part of the largest inter- continental forced migration of people in the early modern world, leaving the biggest impact on the social and cultural lives of the black people. The British did not abolish their slave trade until 1807 and emancipated slaves in their Empire only in 1834. After a short period of apprenticeship, African slaves became fully free in the British territories from August 1, 1838.

Economist historians have often argued that the expansion of trade and colonization was integral to the British economic development in eighteenth century. However, they seem to have disagreements over the precise interrelationship of the various factors which were involved. Indeed it is still difficult to offer a counter factual model of how the British economy would have benefited more if extra resources had been placed directly into the domestic market place rather than allocated to external trade, defense costs, trading posts and colonies. It has often been pointed out that the growing tides of under employment, buttressed by a Paris based. Poor Law was a central characteristic of eighteenth century Britain and it is difficult to offer an alternative model of how it would have progressed economically better based on the full utilization of resources at home. But what most main stream British economist historians have not considered is the implications of Empire and slavery on industrialization. Martin Daunton's*Progress and Poverty : A Economic and Social History of Britain 1700-1850* includes a lot of material on merchants and marketing but does not engage with the literature linking slavery and slave trade to British industrialization. Thus the economic significance of slavery and its significance in relation to British industrialization has remained ignored. However, the connection between slavery Atlantic trade and the eighteenth century British economy was revealed in Eric Williams Capitalism and slavery, where he opposed what one's scholar has termed as the colonizer's model of the world.[29] William's was an economic determinist influenced by Marxist ideas. Marx had linked the slave trade to industrial capitalism and had emphasized on the connections between the two, since it was as a crucial part of the global process that promoted capitalism. Such a view point influenced William's intuitively and intellectually. In other words, the integration of the Caribbean to a broader economic system based on international capitalism and the centrality of slavery and plantations as the fulcrum of that development were the twin focal points of his writings. In his book, Williams had strongly pointed out that slavery was not born of racism; rather racism was the consequence of slavery. He was in favour of perceiving slavery as an economic phenomenon and so he concentrated on the economics of slavery and the

slave trade.[30]

Williams pointed out that slave trade and sale of sugar in Britain led to a significant amount of capital and there was also the demand for the British manufactured goods in the later eighteenth century. The wealth generated by the slave trade and sugar slave nexus of the Caribbean, according to Williams were the major components of Britain's transition to an industrial nation. The West Indian merchants and planters were the main driving force behind this commerce and they also wielded an important influence on the economic and political affairs in Britain. Williams did not discount the accumulation of capital and investible funds from Britain's domestic economy in the eighteenth century. Nonetheless, he emphasized on the significance of the capital inflow from the West Indies as a crucial stimulus for the structural economic changes that occurred in the early phase of Britain's transition to industrialization. His motivations to understand the charging political economy of the Britishempire in the late eighteenth century, led to discussion on the supposed 'swing' to the east in the British colonial expansion. All this had assumed significance in view of the loss of the American colonies, the declining economy of the West Indies and the abolition of British slave trade and slavery. By attempting to explore the inter- related development of four continents, Williams encouraged historians to discuss British economic development in the eighteenth century with due importance to slavery and slave trade.

I find Williams really interesting when it comes to my research on the indentured labour migration to Fiji. He tried to understand the factors responsible for the shift away from mercantilism and slavery in Britain's imperial economy in the late eighteenth century and that of the emergence of industrial capitalism and the free wage labour system as its successors. As many historians have pointed out, this shift could be located within the onset of the American War of Independence when the Caribbean islands were exposed to a lot of economic hardships. In the new post war period, British economic order wassymbolized by manufacturers, factories and machines. The West Indian plantation system had a reduced significance for British capitalists. Williams linked this transition to the decline in the economic returns from sugar plantation in the British Caribbean after 1763 by stressing on the diminishing profits and the over production in the sugar estates. He also argued that the British perception of this decline was more responsible for the decision to abolish the slave trade. He attacked the prevailing the imperial school of British historians, whom he had encountered as a student of Oxford, particularly for their emphasis on abolitionism as stemming from the altruism of William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson and other members of the Clap ham sect.[31]

Williams' ideas were echoed a few years earlier by Wilson E. William in his Africa and the Rise of capitalism, which was a Master's thesis written at the Howard University. Wilson William had argued that African slave trade was a very important factor in the growth of capitalist economy in England, since it led to a considerable market for English manufactured goods. Consequently, the profits were eventually turned from commercial to industrial employment and it stimulated the ship building industry.[32]

The extent to which the wealth of the Caribbean was responsible for the consolidation of the British economy is a matter of historical controversy. In the 1920's Lowell Joseph Ragatz argued in *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833*that serious economic problems

had begun in the Caribbean plantations towards the end of the Seven Years War. He stated that the wealth of the West Indies was in one important sense a mirage, for it depended on a British monopoly of markets at home and in British America, where the consumer paid for the sugar and rum. Ragatz was the first modern historian to collect data supposedly showing the depression and declining profits in the British Caribbean sugar economy before the slave emancipation. However, the problems related to the disruption in the shipping lanes in the Caribbean waters, fluctuating sugar prices and declining profits were resolved by the last years of the eighteenth century. The population in the British West Indies grew by 40% between 1750 and 1790 and Sugar production in the British Caribbean increased by about 14% between the early 1770's and mid 1780's. And there was nearly 9% higher per capita constant value that had been in the 1760's and 1770's.[33]

The recent researches have opposed the ideas of general economic decline in the British Caribbeans, especially by the time the British slave trade was abolished. In fact, it has been pointed out that soil exhaustion was not a problem, since sugar growing inevitably depleted the fertility of the land, thereby increasing the demand for the new acreage to replace the old. At the same time, technical improvements were being made by a number of planters which included the adaption of steam engines in sugar mills, introduction of new methods for cutting sugar, installing the latest designs in grinding mills and cultivating a new type of sugar cane that yielded more juice and higher sugar content. The point was that the profits were still being made by the plantations during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. However, there were also planters with estates in Jamaica and Barbados who complained about poor profits. But there are economic historians who argue that despite the difficulties in some estates and a naturally declining slave population in most British West Indian islands,the Caribbean economy had hardly reached a state, where recovery was a distant reality. In other words, there was no whole sale liquidation of plantations before slavery came to an end.[34]

S. Drescher in his book *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* had argued that slavery had been expanding in the newer British possessions of the West Indies. Furthermore, the British Caribbean had been able to retain its share of world sugar production and that the West Indies trade continued to be an important sector of the total British overseas commerce.[35] The conclusion was that abolition of the British slave trade came at a time of profits, which were being accrued from West Indian slavery. So the debate reached a central point, where some historians were arguing that West Indian economic decline was pervasive in the late eighteenth century and that the abolition of the British slave trade was a move toward free trade, while the others argued against any overall case of serious economic decline in the British Caribbean by 1807. In some of the researches there seems to have been a more positive view of the economic wealth of the British West Indies, implying that substantial wealth was still generated in that sector of the British Empire by the turn of the eighteenth century. In fact, it was argued this did not necessarily mean that the British economy as a whole benefitted and certain groups mostly merchants and planters may have reaped the profits.[36]

Immanuel Wallerstein revived the debate on a broader scale by looking at the Europeantrading connections with the outside world from the age of discovery until the era of enlightenment. From

a Marxist perspective, he depicted a world system of trade in the early modern era, whereby the wealth generated in the 'periphery' (meaning the colonies) became a vital source of capital accumulation in the core.[37] However, his ideas were opposed by Patrick O'Brien who argued that external trade was only a small proportion of European economic activity and that most industries did not depend upon imported raw materials. O'Brien tried to establish the point that for the economic growth of the core the share of the periphery had always been peripheral.[38] But this white washing of reality was also to be found in the writings of other scholars who also argued that sugar did not furnish a sufficiently big total output , so that it could be a major contributor to the savings that funded the industrial revolution.[39]

Anne C. Bailey brought back the issues of slavery and Atlantic slave trade in the academic circles of the West. She argued that there has been deafening silence on these issues though there are palpable sighs of regret, pain, sorrow andguilt and shame. She has very candidly argued that the story of the trade has almost been a narration of certain economic factors and very rarely been told from the perspective of those who suffered the most. She has stressed that the story of the trade needs to be written from the point of view of the African voices and not simply by using records of European traders and American planters which have only marginal references to oral history material.[40] But more importantly some other studies have pointed out that the Atlantic slave market which provided lucrative profits was based on a collaboration between a section of Africans and the European merchants. The small African groups like the Aros were also economically dependent on slaves as both merchandise and labourers. It has been pointed out those Aro political contests such as the civil wars and succession disputes, as well as social facts such as marriage tribute and incest prohibition were deeply entangled with slaving. The Aro tradition celebrated the ownership and proliferation of people and encouraged the sale of captives into Atlantic slavery. The decision regarding whom to be transported through slave ships and whom to retained were central to Aro political economy.[41]

Indeed, the importance of the Atlantic slave trade has been revived by such studies, the majority of which stress the point that Atlantic slave trade formed a part of the European commercial revolution. In fact, its modern form could be located in the growth of national states that replaced feudalism and through their support to trade, to the rise of town, the broadening of commerce, the development of the merchant classes and to the now outlooks regarding competition, profits and capital formation. Undoubtedly these researches sought to vindicate that while slave trade contributed to the industrialization of Britain and Western Europe, it gave West Africa its main export in exchange for European wares. It also furnished the labour necessary for staple agriculture in the Americas from the Chesapeake to the Rio-de-la-Plata, and expanded the market in the West Indies for the bread colonies of North America. Though one can debate over the point that the slave trade financed the industrial revolution, it is clear that the trade was of vast underlying importance to Europe, Africa and the Americas. It is difficult to picture the progress of economic development in the world if one takes away the trans- Atlantic system of slavery.[42]

I find it very interesting to compare the Atlantic slave trade with the indentured labour system involving the migration of Indians to British, French and Dutch colonies in the years between the

early nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As a historian I am aware that the historical period of these two waves of human migration do not match. But it is fairly evident that despite the differences in the geographical origins of the indentured migrants and the variety of destinations to which they went, the indentured labour system of the nineteenth and twentieth century was perceived simply not as a successor to the institution of slavery, it was rather seen as a disguised continuation of the abolished institution. For more than three hundred years, beginning from the mid sixteenth century, labour recruitment and control had been made in terms of a system which resembled slavery. The word "indenture" was possibly a new nomenclature in British India to provide respectability to the colonial bureaucracy, who claimed that they were no longer involved with the trafficking of slaves. J.H. Lalla who presented his BA thesis at the University of Durban – West Ville made a very interesting observation "slavery indenture and conscription are a few alternative techniques for incorporating foreigners (or locals) and organizing them in the service of a dominant political power."[43] The indenture system, which was linked to the emigration cum labourprogramme resembled slavery in many respects despite its abolition in the British Empire in 1834.[44] Hugh Tinker had strongly argued that the planters in the British Empire (on elsewhere) deprived of their slave labour "turned greedily to the millions of India, who they believed, could be induced to labour in the cane fields for a pittance no greater than that awarded to the slave."[45] He called the indenture system a new system of slavery.

Calcutta and Madras became the main centres dealing with the recruitment and transportation of indentured coolies to different parts of British Empire. Undoubtedly this migration was overtly and covertly linked with kidnapping, coercion and false promises which were made by unscrupulous recruiters mostly referred to asarkatis regarding their destinations, duties and economic entitlements. The stories of this migration bear a lot of similarity with the trafficking of population from coastal Ghana during the era of the slave trade, roughly between 1700 and 1807. Like the groups of Africans who manipulated the circumstances of the transatlantic trade to their own advantage raising themselves to an elite status, the arkatis also emerged as a comprador social category, who practised unscrupulous means to transport people in collusion with the colonial bureaucracy.[46] If in Africa, the captives had stripped off their freedom at the hands of African raiders and had been sold by several African merchants to European or European American slave ship captains, the situation was no means different in the case of the Indian indentured labourers in the nineteenth century. The feeling of agony and despair among the indentured labourers bear a close resemblance with the slave songs of the antebellum south of the United States. The sorrow of leaving one's own homeland under very strange circumstances is revealed in the suicides which were committed in the Hooghly, possibly because of their failure to escape from the ships which were transporting them to the distant colonies. Even in the 1880's, suicides in ships were a regular occurrence, more as an act of defiance to escape from the sufferings and exploitations of migration, which had denied the coolies of much of their self- esteem and freedom.[47]

I am not qualified to be an economic historian who can debate over the various issues related to the political economy of the colonial plantation system in the different European colonies. I neither possess the skill or the qualifications which are needed to examine the statistics, so as to

arrive at definite conclusions as to how far this system of transporting human labour remained the back bone of the European industrialization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My present study on Fiji does convince me that it was not for the daily running of the colony that a commercial venture in sugar plantations was preferred, rather it was the profit motive of the Australian planters and the Colonial Sugar Refining Company which remained at the heart of the plantation system in the colony. I am more interested in actually coming up with certain ideas about very nature of the indenture system. In fact, much of these ideas emerge from the discussions on the indentured labour system in India in the early part of the twentieth century. In 1913, the Government of India had sent MessrsMc Neil and ChimanLal to investigate and report on the condition of Indian labourers in the British colonies.[48] Under the special instructions of the Viceroy Lord Hardinge, the report prepared by them did not plead for the abolition of the indentured system, rather put emphasis on the methods and ways through which the functioning of this system could be improved. Such opinions were opposed by C.F. Andrews and W.W. Pearson a few years later and was revealed in their book, entitled *Indian Indentured Labour in Fiji*, published in 1918.[49] Both Andrews and Pearson challenged much of the liberal pretentions of the colonial bureaucracy in improving the conditions of labour recruitment and the rules and regulations of labour management in the colonies. Taking the case of Fiji, they pointed out that in majority of cases migration of people was hardly voluntary, rather there was trickery and corruption behind the trafficking of human population, a handiwork of the colonial bureaucracy and its collaborators. Indeed this sort of opinion had a great deal of resemblance with an earlier assertion of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, where he had observed "Under the system, those who are recruited bind themselves first to go to a distant and unknown land, the language, usage, customs of which they do not know and where they have no friends or relatives. Secondly, they bind themselves to work there for any employer to whom they may be allotted, whom they do not know and who does not know them and in whose choice they have no voice. Thirdly they bind themselves to live there on the estate of the employer, must not go anywhere without a special permit and must do whatever task are assigned to them, no matter however irksome those tasks may be. Fourthly the binding is for a certain fixed period, usually five years, during which time they cannot voluntarily withdraw from the contract and have no means of escaping from the hardship, however, intolerable. Fifthly, they bind themselves to work during the period for a fixed wage which invariably is lower and in some cases very much lower than the wage paid to free labour around them. And sixthly, lastly, this is to my mind is the worst feature of the system. They are placed under a special law, never explained to them before they left the country, which is a language they do not understand and which imposes on them a criminal liability for the most trivial breaches of contracts, in places of civil liability which usually attaches to such breaches. Thus they are liable under this law to imprisonment with hard labour which may extend to two and in some cases to three months not only for fraud, not only for deception, but for negligence for carelessness and will the council believe it for even an imprisonment for a word or gesture to the manager or his overseers."[50]

In fact, many scholars with Marxist orientation have argued that unlike the European emigration to the new world, the system of recruiting immigrants for the colonies was something synonymous

with slavery, since it was accomplished by deception, force and abuse. Despite, the Government of India's attempts to bring some changes, for instance the switch over from assisted to unassisted emigration the defects were too large and were so inherent in the system that it was not possible for them to accomplish a radical reform of it.[51] In many of the researches on the Caribbeans, there are comparisons between slavery and indentureship. In fact two lines of interpretation can be noticed in the context of Fiji. For Hugh Tinker, "there was one factor and one only in which the indentured migrants enjoyed an advantage over the slaves; indenture was a temporary institution while slavery was life long bondage."[52] Tinker believed that Indian had exchanged a society and a living community for a life less system in which human values always mattered less than the drive for production or for exploitation.[53] I.M. Cumpston held very much different ideas and he believed that indenture meant better medical facilities, rations in same cases sanitary dwellings a guaranteed minimum daily wage and general supervision by Government officials.[54] I would end by arguing that though indenture labour migration is often seen as a dehumanizing experience, the relations between indenture system and slavery have very much remained unexplored. I would argue that in the case of Fiji indenture was not a single system which remained the same in the years between 1879 and 1917. David Dabydeen and BrisleySamaroo point out that to make a comparison between slavery and indentureship there has to be an analysis of the instrument of coercion which was employed by the state.[55] While whipping and other brutal forms of punishment were mainly absent during the days of indentureship, a series of criminal laws could force labourers to perform hard labour in chains. Dabydeen and Samaroowas perhaps less informed of the nature of punishment which was enforced on the indenturedlabourers in Fiji.[56] In Fiji, especially in the first two decades of indenture, corporal punishment resembled very closely the physical humiliation of the slaves in the plantations. The criminal legislations were not revised till 1910 and failure to accomplish the tasks were often met with harsh sentences. However, if one compares the Atlantic slave trade with the Indian indentured system then one has to admit that Fiji was spared the massive cultural dislocation that accompanied slavery in the Caribbean. By the nineteenth century the meaning of indenture was changing. The cases of physical assaults were coming down and at the same time a considerable section of the migrants freed from the bonds of indenture where willing to settle down in the colonies. I would argue in the case of Fiji the entire experience of familiarizing with the alien surroundings would not have come without the revival of popular religions and folk cultural traditions and this would not have happened if there had been a complete break with the past as had been reflected in the experiences of the slaves in North and South America.

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